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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Patrick Paul Christle entitled "The Beleaguered Individual: A Study of Twentieth-Century American War Novels." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Allen Dunn, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Interim Vice Provost and
Dean of The Graduate School

THE BELEAGUERED INDIVIDUAL: A STUDY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN WAR NOVELS

A Dissertation
Presented for the
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Degree
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Patrick Paul Christle
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the individuals who served in America's wars, especially those wounded in body and spirit and those who gave their lives.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines twentieth-century American war novels. Many American writers use the battlefield as the stage upon which to work out their explorations of what it means to be an individual in the twentieth century, an individual mired in the mass culture of the modern industrial world. Thus, I argue that for these authors war is a sort of intensified experience of and an allegory for the world at large. The novelists I have discussed all seem to believe that our modern technological society tends to diminish and reify individuals, thus alienating them from one another. To combat this tendency many of the authors are searching their materials for any signs that our society might be capable of achieving better communication between individuals, more cooperation, and a recognition of the interdependence that binds humanity together while affirming the value of the individual. I claim that their novels tend to reduce human aspirations to either naturalistic or existential dramas—naturalistic in that individuals are at the mercy of circumstance or existential in that isolated individuals accept the responsibility of their own freedom. Responses to the plight of the modern individual range from totally hopeless to cautiously optimistic. These novelists often obscure the role of community in the creation and maintenance of individual identity and posit an ambivalent freedom, at best. Some, though, do attempt to provide a model of what constitutes a genuine community. Ultimately, I argue that a significant amount of hope for the future of the individual can be found in twentieth-century American

war novels. Beleaguered individuals are portrayed holding positive values and taking positive action often enough to give the reader something to ponder and reason to hope.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The release of Steven Spielberg's World War II epic Saving Private Ryan was a major cultural event of the summer of 1998. Spielberg's film was a revelation to many Americans whose knowledge of the Second World War was limited to the sanitized portrayals found in the plethora of B-movies of the 1940s and '50s. Saving Private Ryan, with the full weight of Hollywood's technological magic behind it, graphically portrays the horror and bloodshed of the D-Day landings and the bitter fighting of the days and weeks that followed. The audience watches as a wounded man is dragged ashore by a comrade who ducks at an explosion then resumes dragging his buddy. The camera pulls back, and we see that the wounded man now has no body below his waist. This incident is surrounded by equally gruesome images and some that show the capricious nature of war. For example, a soldier has his helmet dented by a bullet. He removes it to look at the dent in wonder and seconds later receives a bullet in the middle of the forehead. The film's main plot revolves around the search for Private Ryan. His three brothers have already been killed in combat, and the plan is to preserve his life by sending him home. Of course, to find him the lives of eight other soldiers are put in mortal jeopardy. In the midst of war's horrors, Spielberg explores the value of the individual and the paradoxical place of the individual in a society at war. The main character, Captain Miller, attempting to explain why he follows orders that endanger himself and his patrol, declares that he is simply trying to "earn me the

right" to go home. For Miller, the individual must be subordinate to the needs of society as a whole, even to the extent of sacrificing his life.

Saving Private Ryan is rooted in a literary tradition that began with many of the novels that found print in the aftermath of the Great War and that continues to our day. In these novels authors use our modern technological wars as settings in which to work out their concerns about the plight of the individual caught up in and beleaguered by our twentieth-century industrial culture. As Paul Fussell argues, beginning with World War I, authors have used the battlefield experience to "stand as a virtual allegory of political and social cognition in our time" (35). The soldier becomes a twentieth-century Everyman, and the battlefield an allegorical representation of the world we inherit. Not surprisingly, such contemplations sanction dramatic conclusions. This drama is what this study will examine.

Of course, warfare has long been a major literary theme, going as far back as Homer's epic The Iliad. American literature is no stranger to this theme; it can be found in novels as early as those of James Fenimore Cooper and as recent as the hundreds of novels that are based on the Vietnam War. However, in contrast to the twentieth-century tradition that questions war and the modern world, many American war novels combine a celebration of patriotism and bravery with a lament over the pain and suffering that necessarily accompanies warfare. These patriotic novelists do not question the notions of honor and glory. They see war as a noble endeavor and the battlefield as an arena in which a man can establish his very manhood. Spielberg's film has little in common with these types of novels, though. His characters are certainly

brave, but their bravery falls short of being ennobling. Captain Miller's bravery, for example, earns him an uncontrollable shaking of the hand that embarrasses both himself and his troops. Furthermore, the soldiers begin to quarrel over their differing opinions about the requirements of "duty" versus the demands of a mission that they regard as "fucked up beyond all repair." Consequently, Spielberg's film presents its audience with a vision of war as an absurd and brutal, although sometimes necessary, evil that challenges individuals to balance their desire for autonomy with their obligations to others. This vision has its origins in the muddy fields of Verdun, where the absurdity of the modern world found its full and unmitigated expression in senseless slaughter.

Prior to World War I, considerable dissatisfaction with an increasingly materialistic America already existed. According to Stanley Cooperman, disenchanted young men were eager to embrace the war as a way to realize their ideals and add adventure, purpose, and meaning to their lives. They hoped to emulate Stephen Crane's Henry Fleming and achieve manhood on the battlefield.[1] Unfortunately, what the war gave them in return for their enthusiasm was mud, trenches, and indiscriminate carnage, which only served to deepen their disenchantment, rather than dissipating it as they had hoped (Novel 44-49). As Cooperman reports, "in 1916, after great engagements like Verdun had proven nothing except that a million men could die in a

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[1] Critics are divided over whether or not Fleming actually did achieve the "quiet manhood" he exults in at the conclusion of The Red Badge of Courage (135).

single battle without changing so much as the front line, Ambassador [Walter Hines] Page . . . could despair of 'a crazy world—a slaughterhouse where madness dwells'" (Novel 59-60).

We see this vision of a world gone mad broached initially by the literary modernists. The Hungarian critic, Georg Lukács, maintains that "there is a continuity from Naturalism to the Modernism of our day" (482). Lukács sees in naturalism a "dim anticipation of approaching catastrophe" which after 1914 develops into an "all-pervading obsession" for the modernists (482). The modernist version of the self arose primarily from the waste and slaughter of World War I. To many, civilization seemed to have died, and life was not only meaningless, but capricious as well. The sense of loss, despair, and separation from the past was often profound. Modernist "Lost Generation" writers began depicting the self as isolated, alienated, solitary, and fragmented. The inner being of the individual was seen to be somehow more real than the individual's social being. The inability of people to communicate with one another was a common modernist theme. T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, with his "hundred indecisions," (32) is a good example of a modernist self, as is Ernest Hemingway's Jake Barnes in The Sun Also Rises. To such characters, free will is impotent and freedom is frivolous. Furthermore, John Dewey and other thinkers were concerned about the fate of a society peopled by individuals who "drift without sure anchorage" in social relationships. Dewey labeled this alienated self "the lost individual" (52).

We will find that, as World War II and the Vietnam War came and went, others had similar concerns. The political and moral aims of World War II were

quite different from those of the Great War, and even of the Vietnam War, yet fundamental truths about war, the modern world, and the individual remain the same. In the view of many writers, the anomie, fragmentation, and isolation of the individual revealed by World War I has endured throughout the century and has been demonstrated anew with each successive war. Consequently, we find many twentieth-century authors following the lead of the novelists of World War I and using the battlefield as the stage upon which to work out their explorations of what it means to be an individual in the twentieth century, an individual ensnared in the mass culture of the modern industrial world. Thus, I shall argue that for the writers considered in this study war is a sort of intensified experience of and an allegory for capitalism and the modern world. I will claim that their works tend to reduce human aspirations to either naturalistic or existential dramas—naturalistic in that individuals are at the mercy of circumstance or existential in that isolated individuals accept the responsibility of their own freedom with little recourse to tradition or community values. In the process, these novelists often obscure the role of community in the creation and maintenance of individual identity and posit an ambivalent freedom, at best. To understand the disillusionment that is the legacy of the Great War experience, we must first understand the cultural changes taking place in early twentieth-century America.

The culture and society confronting the Great War authors stemmed from changes rooted in the nineteenth century. The latter half of that century saw the closing of the frontier and an increasing number of citizens becoming city-dwellers. Our formerly rural and agrarian nation rapidly became an urban and industrial nation. The

proliferation of intercontinental railroad lines and telegraph wires helped open new national markets for industry and agriculture. Small-scale farmers began to be squeezed out by increasingly mechanized agricultural processes, and many rural folk started to feel that they were being controlled by impersonal forces, such as bankers, commodities traders, and railroad barons. As small farms and the small towns they supported declined, displaced or ambitious rural people looking for a better life flocked to the cities to fill the many industrial jobs created by the new markets. This shift in the nation's cultural and economic focus was coincident with a shift in the intellectual atmosphere emanating from Europe—a shift from a faith in a universe controlled by a divine logic of pattern and progress to a despairing suspicion in some quarters that the world is ruled by an infernal logic of chance and circumstance.

The chief agent of intellectual ferment was the publication by Charles Darwin of The Origin of the Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871). The evolutionary theory advanced by Darwin shook the traditional religious faith of many—uncertainty and skepticism gained sway. Darwin's notion of the survival of the fittest was then applied to the social realm by Herbert Spencer, and others began seeing capitalism, in the light of Darwinism, as another manifestation of survival of the fittest. As the influence of biological and social Darwinism on American thought spread, a deterministic view of the world began to gain adherents in the general public (Mitchell 528). Modern social and biological determinism denies free will and posits a world of chance, of predictable laws or events combined in unpredictable ways. This is a world in which totally impersonal forces of scientific law, social and natural environment,

and economics are the controlling factors in people's lives. Publishing at the same time as Darwin and Spencer was Karl Marx. The Communist Manifesto (1848), with Friedrich Engels, and Das Kapital (1867) did not receive the immediate attention that Darwin's work did, but Marx's economic determinism was certainly influential by the turn of the century. In contrast to Marx's meliorist vision, a more pessimistic strain of determinism was presented by Sigmund Freud in the early part of the twentieth century. Freud sees the individual as a being ruled by psychic forces—generally beyond her or his control. Both Marx and Freud, though, consider conflict to be the natural state of society.

All these deterministic ideas contributed to the rise of a type of American literature we now call naturalism, which helped spread these concepts well beyond the intellectual community. In this naturalistic version of the individual, the autonomous self is illusory. People are nothing but the expression of their hungers, fears, and environment. Free choice is not possible; we choose based upon economic necessities, upon psychic drives, or upon the indoctrination of our social upbringing. While at first such notions were confined to the intelligentsia, these abstract deterministic ideas began to gain popularity after they seemed to be exemplified on the battlefields of the Great War, impressing soldiers with their own human powerlessness and, ultimately, helping to define the ethos of the century to come. Since then, American war novelists have proven themselves willing to explore the implications of these developments in apocalyptic terms, and in doing so, they have revealed the deep tensions present in twentieth-century American culture.

This study will examine the ways these disenchanted novelists have responded to the Great War's apocalyptic legacy. In particular it will look at the ways they portray the modern individual adrift in the wasteland of the battlefield, which they see as representative of twentieth-century industrial states. While other writers have seen twentieth-century wars as an indictment of society or as a vindication of political programs, the novelists I have chosen to consider have been concerned more with individuals facing the chaos of seemingly random horror than with the destiny of nations and the shape of history. Building on the tradition of naturalism, their novels detail the harsh realities of warfare—its unintelligibility and the soldier's helplessness—and portray various individuals reacting to its challenges. All envision a meaningless world, but some seem to focus solely on the naturalistic elements of individual experiences, seeing nothing but solitary, isolated individuals overwhelmed by circumstance. Others allow rare individuals to experience moments of self-awareness or of existential recognition—moments, often brief, of certainty amid the chaotic flux. Indeed, readers can discern that enlightening this generally stark vision of an oppressive and meaningless world is, occasionally, a ray of hope for humanity in the form of an isolated character's concern for others or his recognition of the value of cooperation and communication with his fellows.

Thus, at one end of the spectrum of responses to the legacy of the Great War, we find naturalistically inclined novelists portraying individuals who are irredeemably at the mercy of circumstances beyond their understanding or control. Unlike the rare self-aware person, most of these individuals believe they are already free; they have no

idea of the extent to which their lives are determined by an indifferent universe. Two Great War novels, Thomas Boyd's Through the Wheat and Three Soldiers by John Dos Passos, portray individual soldiers as mindless automatons, cogs in a machine. Writing about World War II, Norman Mailer and James Jones amplify this deterministic motif. Mailer's The Naked and the Dead envisions a meaningless, naturalistic world in which the so-called "rugged individual" is non-existent. Those who aspire to that state, such as Mailer's Sergeant Croft, are inevitably thwarted by circumstance, as Croft is by a hornets' nest. Futility and impotence are the common lot of Mailer's individuals. James Jones works the theme of social constraint and coercion to the full in The Thin Red Line. His characters Bell and Welsh see the individual as insignificant and of little interest or worth to anyone but himself, and his characters Doll and Fife are shown to be nothing but a reflection of the opinions of others. Some twenty years later we find Vietnam War novelists sounding similar themes. Meditations in Green by Stephen Wright presents selves that are under erasure and gradually disappearing. One of these is the main character, Griffin, who is futilely attempting to escape from his memories and his fate. Less pessimistically, John M. Del Vecchio's The 13th Valley sees the self as socially constructed. Each character is a product of his environment yet believes he is distinctly individual. They are all seen as parts of a well-functioning military machine, which fact is essential for their survival, and it is as a community working together that their greatest successes are achieved. Yet, their successes come with a price in an absurd world—central characters end up either dead or insane. And finally, Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato gives us

socially determined characters capable of limited free choice. One such character is Paul Berlin, for whom felt obligation to the social contract is primary to his decision-making process.

At the other end of the spectrum of literary responses to modern warfare, the individual is seen as a model of a person in what we would now call an existential dilemma—an isolated subject faced with the absurdity of action in a meaningless world. At best, a character in these novels manages moments of self-awareness or existential heroism—accepting existence and the responsibility of his own freedom while finding the power of will within himself that enables him to act without relying upon society. Characteristically, the results are Sisyphean. A good example of this is found in John Dos Passos's Three Soldiers. In this novel, Dos Passos sees the self as isolated and alienated by automaton conformity. His protagonist, John Andrews, makes a bid to stand free and alone, but ultimately, his solitary action proves futile. He is shown to be impotent without the cooperation of his community of friends. We find something similar in two other Great War novels. Joe Bonham in Dalton Trumbo's Johnny Got His Gun and Frederic Henry in Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms demonstrate acute awareness of their dilemmas and make stands for individual freedom that reveal them also to be impotent. If a novel depicts an existential hero and the character is not clearly impotent, he is at least quixotic. In Company K, World War I author William March gives us the unknown soldier who tries to make an antiwar statement—a quixotic gesture—with his dying act. World War II novelist Joseph Heller shows us another quixotic gesture in Catch-22, in which

Yossarian finally takes a stand for personal, existential freedom against impossible odds. Likewise, Norman Mailer's Lieutenant Hearn in The Naked and the Dead and James Jones's Private Prewitt in From Here to Eternity attempt to be free and responsible individuals by quixotically tilting with the windmills of the military monolith.

These war novels, then, condense life to a battlefield and reduce the battlefield experience to two stark possibilities for the individual. At least in part, these authors have been influenced by ideas about individualism and community that historically have been influential for American culture as a whole. We can trace this history of ideas from our Puritan ancestors, through John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, the Transcendentalists, and turn-of-the-century progressives to modern-day existentialists and the contemporary sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues. In examining this history, we will notice a precarious balance between the individual and his or her community. Some thinkers regard the community as oppressive to individuals, failing them and leaving them with nothing but an appeal to a Hobbesean self-interest. Others believe that the community sustains individuals, making them more responsive to other people and more aware of their obligations to the social contract. This tension between the one and the many that we will find in the historical overview of ideas that follows is the same tension we will discover in the twentieth-century American war novels that are the focus of this study, and many of these same ideas will resurface later in my discussion of the works.

The widespread employment in American war novels, from World War I

to Vietnam, of the theme of an alienated individual in an absurd world, a world gone mad, shows the pervasiveness of such a world-view and reflects the tension between the individual and his community that has historically permeated American life. This notion of the isolated individual seems in some ways contrary to American tradition and history and signals a certain bankruptcy of American social thought, a trend away from an awareness of one's place in a community. For the Puritans, individuality was a relational matter; the individual's identity was dependent upon his or her relationship to God and upon that person's position in the covenant community. According to the classic account of Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, "There was a strong element of individualism in the Puritan creed" (182), but at the same time, the Puritans had an organic conception of community. Society was hierarchical and all its "parts [were] subordinate to the whole" (183). The individualism of the Puritans put the onus squarely on individuals in their relationships with God. The Puritans saw the self negatively, as in conflict with God. Max Weber says this belief created "a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual" which ultimately led to an ascetic lifestyle that helped spur the emergence of modern capitalism (104). This Puritan notion of the lone individual was in constant tension with the Puritans' conviction that their community as a whole was in a covenant relationship with God—so much so that individual acts which threatened to disrupt community cohesion were dealt with severely.[2]

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[2] For example, Roger Williams was banished by the General Court in 1635 for, among other "offenses," challenging the civil magistrates' authority over matters of conscience (Harris 2982).

This same tension is evident in the next century when we find John Locke, a primary influence for America's founders, insisting upon free, equal, and independent individuals, yet he declares that voluntarily banding together to form political communities for the protection and continued well-being of all is in the best interest of those individuals. The notion of the isolated individual is anathema to Locke. Perhaps Locke's greatest influence on America and Americans derives from his Two Treatises of Civil Government (1690). America's founders drew heavily from these works in composing the Declaration of Independence and in structuring the new nation's governmental institutions. In his second Treatise, Locke responds to Thomas Hobbes's declaration that the natural state of human beings is to be at war with one another and that human life is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (89). Contrarily, Locke believes that

> The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions. (Treatises 271)

We will see that these opposing views of the true state of nature are often echoed in the works of the war novelists I will consider. For Locke, since the individual is

naturally free and independent, no one person has the right to constrain the freedom of another. Yet clearly, not all people will obey the natural law and respect natural rights, either out of ignorance or through self-interest. Therefore, the best interest of the individual is served by each person voluntarily consenting to join others in forming a political community based on the principle of majority rule (Treatises 330-32). Tim O'Brien's Vietnam novel, I will show, draws heavily on this Lockean notion of a voluntary social contract. The aspect of voluntary consent is key for Locke. He sees individuals as moral agents possessing "Reason" and capable of making free and responsible choices that will shape their lives and their environments. Locke's insistence upon natural law and natural rights struck a responsive chord in American thinkers, such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington. These founders of our nation then integrated Locke's ideas into the very structure of American governmental institutions, giving the free, independent individual primacy in the new nation—incorporating liberty of conscience within a framework of community and cooperation—thus, institutionalizing the very tension between the one and the many that has historically been felt by Americans.

Later, we see a more radical, yet quite influential, concept of the individual formulated by Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his 1836 essay, "Nature," Emerson proclaims a universal duality—"Nature and Soul." Everything that is "NOT ME," including "my own body," is Nature (I 8). For Emerson, the Soul is the self, and the self is "part or particle of God" (I 10). Harold Bloom sees Emerson's position as "his Gnosis" and considers that Emerson's "truest achievement was to invent the

American religion." This religion "was named 'self-reliance'" (145). The emphasis in Emerson's works is on the individual, and he is quite aware of the historical tension between the self and society that the war novelists I will discuss have written about. This is made clear in his 1841 essay, "Self-Reliance." Emerson sees society as in a "conspiracy" against the individual, urging him toward the "virtue" of "conformity." "Self-reliance is its aversion" (II 29). For Emerson, the gnosis of the self is the only worthwhile goal in life. As stated at the end of his 1837 address, "The American Scholar," he believes that the needs of society will be realized best when all recognize their own self and its union with God, the One, the "Over-Soul" (I 69-70). Emersonian independence leads to isolation from the community, but he cautions, "your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation" (II 41). His interpretation of isolation is just the opposite of the "mechanical" isolation the war novelists observe. Indeed, they often use that very metaphor to describe their individuals, likening them to automatons or machine-parts. Emerson sees personal identity in terms of the individual's realization that she or he is, in truth, not isolated at all but, rather, an expression of the Over-Soul, which is the one enduring identity we all possess. Emerson and his exalted vision of the individual had a vast influence upon his time, but even before he wrote, others were expressing their concerns about the American individual.

The tension between American individuals and their communities was a primary focus of the Frenchman Alexis De Tocqueville, who observed the antebellum era of Jacksonian democracy prior to writing his influential study Democracy in

America (1840). Tocqueville's treatise on America was intended to assist the emerging European democracies in their struggles for liberty. In an often quoted passage, he identifies "*Individualism*" as something novel and distinct from pure selfishness.

> Our fathers were only acquainted with *égoïsme* (selfishness). Selfishness is a passionate and exaggerated love of self, which leads a man to connect everything with himself and to prefer himself to everything in the world. Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself. (98)

Individualism, he says, "is of democratic origin" (98). Tocqueville fears that in a democracy the individual will become so isolated from others that he will in the end confine himself "entirely within the solitude of his own heart" (99). Such isolation, he feels, will make it easy for a despot to assume power. We will discover generals in Mailer's and Jones's novels heeding this point that Tocqueville makes and, in fact, counting on it to advance their own pursuit of power. Yet, Tocqueville believes that Americans have protected themselves through their free political institutions, which remind citizens that they are part of a community. Tocqueville also remarks favorably upon the thousands of voluntary public associations to which Americans belong. He sees these associations as further protection against isolation and, indeed, essential for the maintenance of civilization. Furthermore, Tocqueville says that Americans combat

the pernicious effects of individualism through their belief in the usefulness of virtue. For Americans, virtue, rather than being an abstract, noble concept, is intimately intertwined with an individual's own self-interest as it is reflected in her or his dealings with others. Tocqueville calls this the "principle of self-interest rightly understood" (123). Tocqueville, though, did not foresee the mass culture of the twentieth century.

As I have already mentioned, at the turn of the century, the social, cultural, and personal effects of capitalism and our increasingly industrial society were of great concern to many intellectuals. Thorstein Veblen's 1899 critique of American consumerism The Theory of the Leisure Class was widely read. In 1909 Herbert Croly, later the founding editor of The New Republic, published The Promise of American Life. Croly decries the "economic individualism" of Americans, proclaiming that Americans are in "bondage" to the cash value of their work (409-10). Ultimately, according to Croly, true individualism is a function of social value. True individuality is measured by and is achieved by the qualitative excellence of the individual's pursuit of "an exclusive interest," "a disinterested object" (411). Excellent, constructive work benefits the community as a whole while reuniting the individual with his peers (412). Therefore, Croly proposes economic reforms which he feels will abolish "selfish acquisitive motives" (415) and promote the emancipation of the individual (427-41). Prior to World War I, many progressive intellectuals shared Croly's concerns about the corporate, acquisitive nature of American culture and its effect on individuals and their communities, including John Dewey, Randolph Bourne, and Walter Lippmann. Dewey, for example, believes that "lost" individuals are vulnerable to pressures being

"brought to bear to effect conformity and standardization of American opinion" because they lack the spontaneity of thought that derives from a "communal life" (83). Such concerns were shared by many World War I novelists—John Dos Passos, in particular.

I have already discussed the disenchantment and alienation fostered by the Great War, and shortly before mid-century, we find that Erich Fromm fears the coercive power of the community in a world that alienates individuals. In this he is somewhat at odds with Tocqueville, who sees a certain conformity as "virtue," as America's saving grace. Fromm contends that modern individuals seek an escape from freedom. He believes that, generally, the "modern industrial system" and, particularly, "its monopolistic phase" contributes to the formation of individuals who feel "powerless and alone, anxious and insecure" (240). People who feel like this, he says, are susceptible to any means of relieving themselves of such feelings. According to Fromm, the primary socially acceptable ways to escape this feeling in the modern world are submission to authority and conformity (134-35). Writing immediately prior to World War II, his concern is that conditions in America are ripe for individuals to resort to the mechanism of escape that he calls "automaton conformity," a notion that twentieth-century war novels explore time and again (185). He warns that democracy cannot survive if individuals are content to be cogs in a huge machine—which is Tocqueville's concern writ large. This warning reverberates throughout the novels of Mailer and Jones.

During and since World War II, the anxious, alienated, isolated individual has frequently been discussed by existentialist philosophers, most notably by the French novelist-philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre. Existentialism has an important place in this study. When I refer to a specific thinker's particular formulation of existential ideas, I will identify that person in the text. Otherwise, when I speak of existentialism, it is in the following general sense. For the existentialist, the primary fact is existence—the individual exists. The world is meaningless and absurd. One might say that existentialism has a naturally Hobbesean framework in that it posits a world in which the individual is in constant strife with the universe and possesses only his or her own resources upon which to call. The people Fromm describes as automatons mindlessly "conforming to accepted patterns" are in bad faith with themselves, are not authentic (134-35). The authentic individual is the person who accepts the responsibility of her or his own freedom. As Sartre formulates it, "'to be free' does not mean 'to obtain what one has wished' but rather 'by oneself to determine oneself to wish' (in the broad sense of choosing). In other words success is not important to freedom" (621-22). For example, the prisoner is always free to try to escape; actually succeeding is irrelevant to his freedom to choose to try. The individual achieves authenticity by choosing to be engaged with and committed to her or his own project or, as Martin Heidegger conceives it, by having concern for her or his future (Bryant 61). The self creates itself and whatever meaning a meaningless world has for itself. For the existentialist, any salvation of society must begin with the self—a nation populated by individuals in bad faith is nothing but absurd.

American authors such as Edward Albee, Bernard Malamud, and William Styron have drawn on existentialist thought in their works. Also, Norman Mailer has remarked upon the bad faith he saw everywhere in America in the years following World War II. He observes that "One could hardly maintain the courage to be individual" in these "years of conformity and depression. A stench of fear has come out of every pore of American life, and we suffer from a collective failure of nerve. The only courage . . . has been the isolated courage of isolated people" (Advertisements 338-39). Mailer and several other war novelists have examined the isolating and alienating effects of war and have looked for the existential hero who possesses this "isolated courage." Their vision of community is negative in that they see society stifling the individual and fostering inauthenticity. For them, the always tenuous relationship between individuals and their communities has not produced Tocquevillean "virtue" but, rather, failed compromises and dark portents of the future.

As a new century dawns, many Americans look back to the post-war decade of the 1950s as America's golden age. It seems a less complicated, less contentious time. Indeed, historian Godfrey Hodgson contends that the decade was marked by a political and social consensus he has dubbed the "liberal ideology" (491). This "ideology" consisted of a commitment to anti-Communism and free enterprise (73), confidence in the country's ability to solve its social problems without conflict (74-75), a belief in America's classlessness (82), and faith in the constancy and efficacy of economic growth (89). Not only was there consensus in the 1950s, but many analysts,

such as Fromm, the existentialists, and David Riesman, saw a great deal of social conformity in American life as well. Riesman, in The Lonely Crowd, his widely-read 1950 study of the tension between individuals and their communities, sees one's "peer-group," reinforced by the mass media, as being a primary influence on one's behavior and identity formation (22). He calls modern individuals "other-directed," meaning that they take their behavioral cues from those around them and conform to the expectations of their contemporaries. According to Riesman, we moderns are controlled by "anxiety," which is the tool we use to read the cues from others (26). Furthermore, historian Loren Baritz argues that Americans have had a long-standing love affair with technology that reached full flower in the late 1950s and early 1960s and continues to today. Baritz contends that technology "demands rationality in place of individuality" and promotes the growth of impersonal bureaucracy (48). The result is the conformity that Riesman and others see and about which they are concerned.

The consensus Hodgson identifies could not last, though, as inflation, the catastrophe of the Vietnam War, and black Americans' demands for civil rights gave the lie to the "liberal ideology" and exposed the limits of American technology. Nor could complacent conformity go unchallenged any longer. It became as unpalatable to the youth of the 1960s as it had been to the young soldiers of the Great War. One Berkeley graduate student, Jack Weinberg, stated the students' position succinctly in 1964 when he said of their campus, "This is a knowledge factory. . . . This is mass production; no deviations from the norm are tolerated" (Hodgson 293). Baritz, I believe, reveals the source of the students' discontent when he argues that the

universities have become bureaucratic institutions designed for training technicians, rather than centers for teaching people to think critically (128-29). A precursor to the student unrest of the 1960s was the Beat movement of the 1950s, although hardly a "movement" at all. One of its foremost spokesmen, Allen Ginsberg, went on to be a major guru of the so-called "hippie" counter-culture of the '60s. When asked to identify the "heart of the movement," Ginsberg replied, "Well, there was the return to nature and the revolt against the machine" (Hodgson 324). We will find this very dynamic of the individual in conflict with the dehumanizing, technology-driven society in which he lives played out to some degree in each of the Vietnam novels I will consider, particularly Meditations in Green.

In America, much of the societal upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s was a reaction to the shattering of the "liberal ideology" and to the subtle demand for social conformity. Individuals began attempting to assert themselves in order to protest the assumptions of political consensus and to resist peer pressure and media influence. By the end of the decade of the1960s, polarization was complete and a counter-culture had arisen. Ironically, many of the distinguishing marks of the counter-culture—their clothes, their hair, their symbols—soon became the norm of the mainstream. Yet, despite the contentiousness between the cultural poles, disillusionment was widespread, and individuals in all walks of life began to lose faith and trust in America's institutions. Voter turnout has been in a steady decline in the last quarter of the century, for example. Many people became confused and disheartened by the clash between a Vietnam and Cold War rhetoric that painted Communism as the destroyer

of individual liberties and governmental actions which seemed expressly designed to squelch individual freedoms on the home front. The turbulent crosscurrents that this contradictory state of affairs created in the hearts and minds of soldiers, and by extension, in the very fabric of American life have been examined by many of the novels that have come out of the Vietnam War.

In the 1980s, perhaps exhausted and disillusioned by the preceding two decades of turmoil, Americans turned to Ronald Reagan and embraced his vision of traditional American economic individualism which focused on the "I" and shunned the "other." Still, in the midst of the Reagan and Bush administrations, sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues found many enthusiastic readers for their studies of American individualism, Habits of the Heart (1985) and The Good Society (1992). In response to the alienation and isolation of individuals, as observed by naturalists and existentialists alike, both studies offer proposals very much in the tradition of the Tocquevillean notion of "virtue," focusing on the interdependence and interconnectedness of individuals, in which, they contend, many Americans no longer believe (Habits 16). Bellah and his co-authors point out that America was founded on the Lockean paradigm of free individuals under a government limited to providing "a minimum of order for individuals to accumulate property" (Good 67). They feel that Americans have trouble understanding the roots of their disaffection because we "still have a Lockean political culture, emphasizing individual freedom and the pursuit of individual affluence . . . in a society with a most un-Lockean economy and government" (Good 79). Bellah and his associates maintain that

> A less constricted understanding of freedom and justice would enable us to see how they are connected with the common good. Freedom finds its fulfillment not merely in independence from but in active engagement with the society that creates us. Justice finds its fulfillment not simply in the formal rules that enable individuals to compete but in the commitments that members of a society make to ensure one another the minimum necessities of life. This view of freedom and justice morally embraces the reality of interdependence and does not hide from it. (Good 245)

According to Bellah and his colleagues, today's institutions tend to overwhelm the individual, who can no longer clearly see their relevance and who is inclined to try to ignore them. They feel that we need to be more trusting so that we can pay closer attention to what is happening—not just in our families and local communities, but in the world at large, the universal community. Then, we must act, with an awareness of both our social responsibility and our need to be accountable. John Del Vecchio echoes this call for community in his Vietnam novel that I will discuss.

A major assumption of the following study is that concern for others is a positive value, a moral good. This assumption is based upon and rooted in what Bellah and his collaborators call our biblical and republican traditions (Habits 333, 335). The influence of these traditions is pervasive in American culture, indeed in most Western societies. The concern for others is derived from the fact that both traditions

place the highest value on human life, which leads both traditions to counsel us to care for one another, to value one another's humanity.

This concern, however, is, as we have seen, in tension with the Hobbesean impulses of individuals, and the war novels analyzed in this study dramatize this tension. Warfare is waged by communities of men, military units, that consist of individuals. In Saving Private Ryan the members of one unit, one "community," sacrifice their lives to save a member of another "community" because it serves the interests of a still larger "community" to which both units belong. The members of each unit (community) are fiercely loyal to their own units, but ultimately their loyalty belongs to the larger community, the United States, which is in need of reinvigoration and renewal. Above all, we see that the needs of the community supersede the needs of the individuals, and this fact is acknowledged and acquiesced to by each individual soldier, if for no other reason than to maintain his self-esteem in the eyes of his peers. This study, then, will examine various war novelists' depictions of individuals, ranging from those totally unaware of their absurd dilemma to those keenly aware of their predicament. The central focus will be on the ways individual characters, individual soldiers, resolve or fail to resolve the tensions that arise between their insistence upon their own autonomous individuality and the needs of their communities.

Chapter Two: The Great War

Twentieth-century American war novels are founded on a bedrock of discontent. Grousing is a soldier's traditional right, and the massacres we call warfare in the twentieth century have been the impetus for turning that right of expression into expressive literature. Many war novelists have taken their experiences of America's wars (be they first-, second-, or third-hand) and constructed out of them indictments of the modern industrial state at large. I will argue that these writers have seen the regimentation and depersonalization of military life as an analogy for a culture, a society that pays lip-service to freedom but brooks no fundamental disagreements from its members. Soldiers are time and again referred to as "automatons" or "cogs in a machine," and the novelists appear to be fixated on the inability of humans to consummate meaningful acts. Nonetheless, the lives of individuals are central to any novel, and war novels are no different. Many critics agree that some of the best twentieth-century war novels paint their individual characters with the brush of naturalism's pathos or of existentialism's heroism, depicting isolated, alienated individuals struggling to make sense of an absurd world. I will begin by discussing novelists of the First World War that I have chosen because their works use the battlefield as an allegory for the world at large and examine the tensions between solitary individuals and their communities, as revealed by the experiences of soldiers at war. In this regard, as in others, the Great War, as a watershed event in American

history, and the novelists who wrote about it set the tone for the decades that followed.

Prior to World War I, Americans and people throughout the Western world viewed the dawning twentieth century as the beginning of a golden age of human progress. As many historians have noted, rapid technological advances in industrial techniques, energy sources, communications, and modes of travel, in particular, induced a state of awe in common people and fostered unbridled enthusiasm for the future. Still, underneath the enthusiasm ran a current of discontent, especially among the young. A certain nostalgia for old ways and traditional values brought about feelings of ennui, oddly mixed with fervid idealism, and kindled a desire for adventure, a desire to do something heroic and noble. Thus, we find aspiring writers such as E. E. Cummings, Ernest Hemingway, and John Dos Passos volunteering to serve in various ambulance corps in their haste to experience the adventure of the European conflagration that the United States had not yet entered. It did not take long for most of these men to realize the truth of the matter—that, as Paul Fussell contends, World War I "was a hideous embarrassment to the prevailing Meliorist myth which had dominated the public consciousness for a century. It reversed the Idea of Progress" (8). Fussell believes that the war put an end to the meliorist conception of a "seamless, purposeful 'history'" where values were static and abstractions such as Honor and Glory were "permanent and reliable" (21). Indeed, the war spelled the end of idealism for most of those caught up in it. Hemingway's oft-quoted lines from A

Farewell to Arms adequately sum up the disillusionment felt by so many of the Great War writers.

> 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, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. (185)

Nonetheless, before the disillusionment, enthusiasm for the war ran high. Laurence Stallings describes America's entry into the war in theatrical terms. He writes, "The Doughboys entered the tragedy at the beginning of the fifth act, with millions of men already dead, like off-stage soldiers in a play; and they entered singing." Their exuberance stemmed from the "simple theme" that Woodrow Wilson had supplied for them: "Kaiser Bill was a villain and they marched to make the world safe for democracy" (5). The British-American propaganda machine played many variations on this theme, and America's civilian-soldiers, by and large, believed every word of it. With his depiction in Three Soldiers of troops-in-training watching a movie one evening, John Dos Passos portrays the fervor with which average Americans embraced the propagandists' picture of the heathenish Hun.

> There were hisses and catcalls when a German flag was seen, and as the troops were pictured advancing, bayonetting the civilians in wide Dutch

> pants, the old women with starched caps, the soldiers packed into the stuffy Y.M.C.A. hut shouted oaths at them. Andrews felt blind hatred stirring like something that had a life of its own in the young men about him. He was lost in it, carried away in it, as in a stampede of wild cattle. The terror of it was like ferocious hands clutching his throat. (27)

The pervasiveness of the World War I propaganda effort conducted by George Creel and his Committee on Public Information has been well-documented (Cooperman, Novel 13-43; Schaffer 3-12), as has the vigilantism that the government-induced patriotic fever kindled on the home front (Kennedy 67-68, 73-75; Schaffer 13-30). Times of crisis are apt to inspire rituals of inclusion and exclusion—an "us" versus "them" mentality. Yet, such idealistic hatred ultimately fuels disillusionment in thoughtful individuals who come to realize that "they" are little different from "us." The irony of propaganda-fed enmity is not lost on Dos Passos. He writes of the dehumanizing effect of fomenting such hatred:

> As he was leaving the hut, pressed in a tight stream of soldiers moving towards the door, Andrews heard a man say:
>
> "I never raped a woman in my life, but by God, I'm going to. I'd give a lot to rape some of those goddam German women."
>
> "I hate 'em too," came another voice, "men, women, children and unborn children. They're either jackasses or full of the lust for power like their rulers are, to let themselves be governed by a bunch of warlords like that." (27)

And so, the haters become as inhumane as the hated are supposed to be, and all in the name of making the world safe for the American ideals of democracy and liberty.

Ironically, the very liberties so many Europeans had come to America to enjoy were repressed in the interests of fighting a European war. The Great War required Americans to curtail, to sacrifice some of their accustomed individual freedoms in order to achieve victory. The first thing to go was the very right to life itself as conscription, euphemistically called "selective service," was instituted from the outset of American participation in the war. Local boards were formed to implement the draft so that the role of "the government" in the resulting loss of liberty was disguised (Kennedy 151-52). Despite some resistance, the vast majority of American men who were required to register did so and did their duty when called, not in small part due to the tremendous social pressure that was a direct result of the government's propaganda campaign. Another key liberty that suffered restrictions due to American belligerency was the right of free speech. Censorship was accomplished largely through broad powers given to the director of the Post Office, Albert S. Burleson, under the Espionage Act of June 15, 1917 and the Trading with the Enemy Act of October 6, 1917 and also through the Sedition Act of May 16, 1918 (Kennedy 75-80). Furthermore, the application of propaganda-induced social pressures was usually enough to facilitate individual self-censorship. Careless talk, let alone deliberate opposition, could easily land one in jail or put one at the mercy of vigilantes and their violent forms of self-righteousness.

Not everyone was in favor of American involvement in a European war. The American Socialist Party declared its opposition and its intent to resist conscription and any curtailment of civil liberties on the day following the declaration of war. Yet, many of the Party's most outspoken and well-known members, Upton Sinclair for example, dissociated themselves from the Party's resolution and voiced support for the war (Schaffer 26-27). On the labor front, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), long an outspoken opponent of the war, in the face of "state-sponsored terrorism," prudently toned down their antiwar rhetoric after the American declaration of belligerency (Shor 80). The IWW also declined to take an official stand for or against conscription, declaring that it was a question for individual members to decide (Shor 83). Conversely, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and its leader, Samuel Gompers, saw the war as an opportunity for labor to enter into cooperation with the federal government, thereby winning federal support for labor's long-range goal of better working conditions. Gompers even served on the Council of National Defense for the administration and threw the weight of the AFL behind the government's battle against their radical rival, the IWW (Schaffer 67). Another constituency, black Americans, gave grudging support to a war that aimed to win democratic liberties for Europeans that were not extended to black Americans in their own homeland. Some held on to the hope that loyalty would be rewarded by improved racial conditions after the war, but most followed the admonition of the Baltimore Afro-American, "Everybody watch his tongue" (Schaffer 80). The Wilson administration was clearly racist, and Americans, as a whole, exported their racism to

the European war-zone. When all was said and done, their Great War experience roused many black Americans to believe more fully in their own worth and, thus, fostered a greater desire amongst them to stand up and fight for their rights. Nonetheless, little changed for black Americans on a day-to-day basis. On the other hand, white women parlayed their enthusiastic support for the war into the right to vote, although most other movement toward equality with men was modest and largely temporary. All in all, President Wilson enjoyed wide support for his war aims, particularly among progressive intellectuals.

Social progress and the relationship between individual liberties and societal needs had been subjects of lively debate in the intellectual community since the turn of the century. The onset of war gave impetus to the debate. John C. Farrell reports that progressive thinkers of the time believed that "man was social in nature, equipped with goodness, reason, and a disinterested concern for the commonweal, and thus fit to control his environment." The progressives maintained that applying the scientific method to social problems would give men the ability to be "masters of their fate, rather than passive instruments of divine will or natural processes, as conservatives and Social Darwinists contended" (300-01). John Dewey, a leading progressive spokesman, concluded that human progress, while not inevitable, is possible and dependent upon creative intelligence. Such progress, though, is not a function of isolated individuals but, rather, is a communal phenomenon. Dewey, as Beth J. Singer points out, asserted that "aims, beliefs, aspirations, and knowledge" held in common, while necessary, are not sufficient to bring about a "community." What is needed is

communication between the members of a social group, who must each "perceive the consequences of their joint behavior" and who must understand and care about "their own and one another's influence upon the ongoing process" (556-57). Dewey felt that Americans were far too individualistic and lacked the necessary inter-communication to form progressive communities.

According to David M. Kennedy, "Many progressives yearned for some experience that would heighten social consciousness and tighten social bonds" and saw the war as the perfect opportunity to implement their dream of a responsible citizenry. Others, though, feared a return to a European ethos of regimentation and discipline (44). Dewey was a leader of the progressives who looked to the war as a means of tempering America's individualistic tradition, turning the country toward accepting more communal purposes, and making the masses more socially responsible (Kennedy 50-53). Not all progressives were in agreement, though. Kennedy relates that Randolph Bourne, Dewey's chief critic, "countered with a famous question: 'If the war is too strong for you to prevent, how is it going to be weak enough for you to control and mould to your liberal purposes?'" (52). Indeed, the war was too strong to be controlled, and the only molding that took place was the molding of individuals into a sort of mass-mind by the propagandists and into a huge war machine by the military authorities. Social responsibility became equated with following orders and not making waves, and individual interest in and outspokenness about communal needs and concerns was discouraged, if not crushed outright. In his essay "The State" Bourne insightfully proclaimed, "War is the health of the State. It

automatically sets in motion throughout society those irresistible forces for uniformity, for passionate cooperation with the Government in coercing into obedience the minority groups and individuals which lack the larger herd instinct" (71). With the war's end and the implementation of the vindictive Treaty of Versailles, the progressives' disenchantment with the whole war experience was complete, and such a formerly hopeful voice as Walter Lippman's could describe most Americans as "mentally children or barbarians" lacking the intelligence to make decisions in the common interest (Kennedy 91-92). Out of this environment of thwarted dreams, repression, and contradictory values came the first twentieth-century American war novels, many of which clearly portray their author's loss of innocence and consequent disillusionment.

According to Peter Aichinger, with the exception of a few notable works, such as Henri Barbusse's Le feu (1917), Americans began writing literature about the war much sooner than their European counterparts (16). He argues that this happened because war is an accepted part of life for the Europeans and "the soldier is part of the social structure; in America he is an outsider" (22).Thus, we see that preeminent works such as Jaroslav Hašek's satirical look at militarism, The Good Soldier Švejk (1930), and the classic All Quiet on the Western Front (1928) by Erich Maria Remarque were published more than ten years after the war's end. By that time, American authors such as John Dos Passos, Thomas Boyd, and Ernest Hemingway had already produced noteworthy novels about the Great War. One of the first American novels of disenchantment to see print after the war was Dos Passos's largely

forgotten first novel, One Man's Initiation: 1917, published in 1920. Dos Passos's second novel, Three Soldiers, followed soon after, in 1921. His two war novels are disdainful of any notion that the war was a "Holy War" or a "Crusade," as so many preachers and Y-men proclaimed. As a Harvard student shortly before the war, Dos Passos was a "pacifist in theory," according to biographer Virginia Spencer Carr, who, like some progressives, "approved of military service from the point of view of sociability" in that it would allow men of all classes to mingle and democratically become acquainted. At the same time, he decried the snobbery of officers and pointed out that an army, if it exists, is likely to be used (71). Still, as I will argue, his war novels clearly contradict any progressive, Deweyan notion that the war would foster community and social-consciousness and reflect his wariness of all collective endeavors.

When war was declared, Dos Passos was attempting to land a position with the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps. He wrote his friend Rumsey Marvin, "Don't think that I've gone militarist or believe in conscription—far from it. I merely want to see a little of the war personally." He told Marvin that American intervention would hasten the war's end, yet at other times, he contradicted that statement, saying it could only prolong the conflict (Carr 117-19). In the spring of 1917, Dos Passos was twenty-one years old and fresh out of Harvard. In his memoirs, he writes, "Suddenly I believed I was a socialist. Even then I think I marveled a little at the suddenness with which passionate convictions develop in the youthful mind. It was a contagion. In the spring of 1917 some people caught socialism the way others caught the flu" (Best 46). He

was full of the conviction that "all young men were terribly decent" and that his elders had made a "God-damned mess" of society (Carr 130). Although Dos Passos downplays his radical thought in his memoirs, a probably more accurate assessment is given by Daniel Aaron.

> The radicalism of Dos Passos simmered in the early twenties, boiled furiously between 1927 and 1932, and began to cool thereafter. At no time did he consider joining the Communist Party, but he supported it during his fellow-traveling stage as the successor to the I.W.W. and as the "arch-enemy" of privilege. (348)

Undoubtedly, Dos Passos was sympathetic to and supportive of radical causes, but all-in-all, he was most concerned with the individual and the individual's personal liberty and with the ability of John Dos Passos to write about them. As Aaron points out, according to his contemporaries, Dos Passos "never found any form of collectivism congenial" (353).

Over the years, many critics have commented upon Dos Passos's depiction of the individual in modern industrial society. Melvin Landsberg finds that the young, just-out-of-college Dos Passos believed industrialism to be the greatest problem society faced because it threatened individuality (32-34). Likewise, Stanley Cooperman recognizes the industrial, machine-like nature of the military, as Dos Passos depicts it in Three Soldiers, which destroys the "traditional values of individual pride, individual aesthetic action, [and] individual success" (Aesthetics 23). The industrial model of "socio-political-military structures" was an object of distrust for Dos Passos

throughout his career, according to Cooperman. Equally enduring was his "insistence upon the ultimate validity of individuation" (Aesthetics 31). Alfred Kazin concurs and adds that Dos Passos's protest is a protest against all collectivities, be they capitalist, socialist, or other (Dos Passos 104-05). The artist is Dos Passos's representative individual, and as Kazin contends, the "army is the public self (Dos Passos can never accept the public self); the artist can only conceal himself in it or die by it" (108). A. S. Knowles, Jr. points to John Andrews' words in Three Soldiers as a statement that "could well stand as a motto over all of Dos Passos' work" (131)—"human society has been always that, . . . organizations growing and stifling individuals, and individuals revolting hopelessly against them" (421). Similarly, Richard Layman argues that Dos Passos "refused to accept a theory of social organization that subordinated the welfare of individuals to interests of the state" (187). Ellwood Johnson sees Dos Passos subscribing to a tradition of "elitist anarchism," which he contrasts to naturalism. He contends that Dos Passos "saw the sources of tyranny and inequity not in the institutions of society, nor in the villainy of its leaders, but in the common people who bring, often unconsciously to themselves, such institutions and despotism into being" (69). Johnson argues that for Dos Passos the best the isolated individual can hope for is the denial of "his collective self so that his sentient, creative self can be freed" (71). Finally, Michael Clark sees a certain duality in Dos Passos's war novels. He describes John Andrews, in Three Soldiers, as both a pragmatist and an idealist who "never fully integrates his self into the requirements of reality" (96). Basically, this

failed integration with reality is the reason I will end up calling Andrews' existential stand quixotic.

Although uneven in execution itself, Three Soldiers is a better novel than One Man's Initiation: 1917 and received largely positive critical attention at its publication, with a smattering of negative criticism from conservatives who disliked its antiwar tenor. The very chapter titles of the book are an accurate reflection of Dos Passos's theme: "Making the Mould," "The Metal Cools," "Machines," "Rust," "The World Outside," and "Under the Wheels." Men are the commodity being molded and turned into machines that eventually decay and crush any individual parts that fall away. The dehumanization of men by war and the military machine is pounded home by Dos Passos's repeated references to men as automatons (201, 331) or slaves (91,199). Men are also referred to as furniture (26), bales of hay, meat (44), calves (45), beasts (46), sheep (71), brutes, machinery (92), oxen, dogs (158), and goats (206). And the uniformity insisted upon by their military masters is emphatically stated. "Their steps were all the same length. Their arms swung in the same rhythm. Their faces were cowed into the same expression, their thoughts were the same" (272).

The title is Three Soldiers, but one soldier gets the majority of Dos Passos's attention. John Andrews is the Virginia-bred, Harvard-educated, New York sophisticate in a sea of countless common minnows, a musician and composer who is sick of his individuality and of his thoughts, who did not balk at being drafted because he wanted to lose himself in "the mud of common slavery" (26). The others are Dan Fuselli from San Francisco, the former clerk in R. C. Vicker Company's optical-goods

store who yearns to “move along” (48) in the army but ultimately feels “lost in the machine” (71), and “Chris” Chrisfield, the farm boy from “round Tallyville” in Indiana, who is filled with a barely-contained rage toward anyone he feels is “pickin’ on” him (28). Dos Passos uses the experiences of these three soldiers, all of whom are subject to feelings of isolation and alienation, to explore the crisis of individuality in a mass culture and to ponder the resulting implications for society. Modern society is a reflection of the military community in that the individual is and must be subservient to the group in order for the whole to function as it is designed to function. We have all heard that what is good for General Motors is good for the country—meaning, what is good for General Motors is good for you and me. In other words, putting it in a military context, the individual is not as important as the corporate (mass) entity. In Three Soldiers, then, Dos Passos compels readers to consider some questions raised by this state of affairs. Can one maintain one’s individuality in the face of regimentation? Can mindless automatons be of any use, of any help to one another? Is there such a thing as a community, or is life simply a series of meaningless hierarchical power structures? Is it possible for an individual to consummate a meaningful act, and is an act meaningful if it bears no relation to the needs of a community?

In Three Soldiers Dos Passos suggests answers to these questions by way of a comparison between the existential hero and the individual overwhelmed by life in the modern world, as represented by the military machine. Dan Fuselli falls into the latter category. He finds that his desire to “move along” and his willingness to work at it are not guarantees of success. In the process he shuns some people as detrimental to his

advancement and lets peer-pressure override his instinctual values. At times, like an inmate of a panopticon, he feels overwhelmed, "as if people were watching him from everywhere out of the darkness, as if some gigantic figure were driving him forward through the darkness, holding a fist over his head, ready to crush him" (94) (cf. Foucault 213-17). Fuselli is caught between two contradictory feelings—a sense of "importance" and a feeling of being "lost in the machine" (71). He needs to hang on to the former feeling and not "get in wrong" (48) with his superiors to realize his ambitions, but the latter feeling slowly and surely overtakes him. As a soldier fresh out of training camp, Fuselli can say, "It's great to be a soldier. . . . Ye kin do anything ye goddam please" (40). But soon, when he finds himself on a troop transport ship, his tune changes. "They had no right to treat a feller like that. He was a man, not a bale of hay to be bundled about as anybody liked" (44). Trying to do the right and honorable thing so as to not "get in wrong" with those who have power over him, he proposes marriage to the French girl, Yvonne, whom he has been seeing, only to have her laugh in his face and to discover that he has been cuckolded by his own top sergeant.

Dos Passos drops Fuselli's story at this point, and as if to emphasize his status as nonentity, we do not run into him again until Andrews has a very brief, chance encounter with him in Paris. Only then do we learn that not only was Fuselli cuckolded by Yvonne, but he contracted a venereal disease from her as well and suffered the harsh disciplinary fate that awaited all soldiers who fell victim to sexually-transmitted diseases, court martial and a sentence of confinement with hard labor. With all ambition gone, Fuselli is now on permanent K.P. with a labor battalion, simply

waiting out the interminable days until he can be discharged. And so, through Fuselli, soldier number one, Dos Passos illustrates the apparent futility of human intention and action. Fuselli intends to do right, to play by the rules of the community of which he is a member, the U.S. Army, and to be a model soldier. Yet, that community, in Dos Passos's eyes, is nothing more than a mindless machine ready to run over any individual who happens to misstep, regardless of that person's attitude toward the community. Ironically, in the end, Fuselli *is* a model soldier, totally assimilated into the Army, as he intended to be. Yet, he has become an unprotesting cipher occupying the position assigned to him, still striving to avoid getting in wrong, but no longer nurturing any feelings of importance. Fuselli's fate, then, suggests that regimentation produces feelings of apathy, anomie, and alienation in the individual.

"Chris" Chrisfield, the Indiana farm boy who left off his schooling at age twelve, is the second of Dos Passos's three soldiers. Like Fuselli, he is an isolated individual overwhelmed by circumstance. Chrisfield, in insisting that others grant him the respect he believes he deserves, falls prey to his own rage and becomes a murderer. As Stanley Cooperman sees it, Chrisfield "redeems his manhood by murdering an officer (an act made imperative by a deeply inbred code of the Intolerable Affront)" (Novel 154). After the murder, which he performs almost instinctively, without deliberation, Chrisfield finds a certain solace and an end to his isolation in returning to the ranks. "His feet beat the ground in time with the other feet. He would not have to think whether to go to the right or to the left. He would do as the others did" (190). For Chrisfield, the army supplies life with meaning. He

says, “Reckon a feller wouldn’t know what to do with himself if he did get out of the army” (267). Eventually, he becomes a deserter—an individual at odds with any of the traditional or mainstream communities—but not until he has shown himself to be a good soldier, rising to the rank of corporal on the strength of his abilities. He deserts because he feels that another man in his unit knows about the murder he has committed, and when he is reunited briefly with Andrews after his desertion, Chrisfield seems haunted by guilt. In the context of a conversation about revolution that ensues, we get a peek at his psyche when he says, “Fellers like us ain’t got it in ‘em to buck the system, Andy” (400). Even though he rails at the system, declaring he would shoot an M.P. without thinking about it because a “doughboy’s less’n a dawg to ‘em” (405), he is completely cowed and can do nothing but run away. He is impotent as an individual, reacting rather than acting out of any sense of existential authenticity and unable to exist in isolation. Chrisfield is simply one of the herd, and when we leave him, it is with a sense that it is only a matter of time before he is led to the slaughter.

Dos Passos’s theme of the individual overwhelmed by modern life was shared by other Great War authors, with varying degrees of pessimism. We should consider two significant examples of the use of the theme, in the nihilism of Thomas Boyd and the naturalism of William March, before we look at Andrews, Dos Passos’s third soldier. One of the earliest novels about World War I is Boyd’s Through the Wheat, published in 1923. Boyd, a newspaperman, novelist, biographer, and “Communist candidate for governor of Vermont in 1934” (Noverr 99), fought in the war as a

Marine and brought his personal experiences to his novel. According to Douglas A. Noverr, "Boyd's outlook was essentially deterministic, behavioralistic, and naturalistic" (99). Peter G. Jones sees Boyd's novel as a "classic example" of the fact that candid and blunt narrative is the best method for presenting war "in its proper light" (218). Although criticism of the novel is sparse, most critics seem to agree with Cooperman, who contends that Through the Wheat contains the intersection of "two major World War I literary reactions"—"rhetorical indictment" and "benumbed negation" (*Novel* 165). Noverr maintains that Boyd "intensely identified with" people he saw as victims of circumstance and had great admiration for "those who struggled against their fate and asserted their individualism" (100). Boyd's protagonist, struggling against his fate, is Private William Hicks, whom Cooperman calls an "antihero of total withdrawal" (Novel 95). Peter Aichinger argues, correctly I believe, that Hicks represents the individual whom the war has moved to "a new plane of comprehension [of the insignificance of the individual], but in the process it destroys him as a member of society" (14). Comprehending his situation, Hicks is simply numbed by it; isolated from his companions, he merely goes through the motions of living.

We meet "young Hicks" emerging from a French canteen, not yet overwhelmed but, nonetheless, feeling that life is "worth very little" because he has been in France for nine months and has yet to see combat (1). He really has no hatred for the Germans, but he desires combat because "in conflict, he felt, would arise a reason for his now unbearable existence" (4). In his first chapter, Boyd makes a point

of showing that individuals are basically isolated and self-interested. To Hicks it seems that most of the soldiers have "not entered the army to further the accomplishment of a common motive," but rather for the "purpose of aiding their personal ambitions" (5). Hicks is no different. When he goes looking for a missing man in no-man's-land and finds him dead, Hicks leaves the soldier on the field because he feels he would look like "a fool" carrying a dead man back to the trench. His motive for even searching in the first place is to be seen as a hero for saving the man, with an eye to exonerating himself for his previous lapse of sleeping on guard duty (35-36). A persistent theme throughout the novel is the common soldier's disdain for any authority that impinges upon his personal liberty. For example, as the platoon marches and some of the men discuss rumors, we read,

> "Pipe down, you men back there. Who gave you permission to talk?" Sergeant Harriman called.
>
> "Who the hell gave you permission to give us permission to talk?" some one indistinctly asked. (56)

Such exchanges call to mind the attitude toward authority held by Dos Passos's Chrisfield. Yet, as the platoon gains combat experience, while still insisting upon their individuality, "There was a sameness about the expressions on the men's faces" (126). The filth, stench, mud, death, and monotony of trench warfare has a leveling effect, in Boyd's vision. All men are helpless against the war and, by extension, against the universe. In time we find Hicks feeling "the fury of impotence" (159); nonetheless, Hicks has not yet reached bottom.

As the novel progresses, we encounter Hicks lying in a field of wheat contemplating insects that "waddled over the ground with as great a seriousness and importance as if they supported the burden of the world." The passage is reminiscent of Fuselli and his feelings of "importance." But this experience inspires Hicks, unlike the imperceptive Fuselli, to wonder whether the insects' "lives were not as important as the lives of men; whether they were not conscious of a feeling that, were they no longer to exist, the end of the world would come" (188). Boyd's protagonist is gradually sinking into a mire of nonentity. The impersonal war treats men as things, as cannon fodder, worth nothing aside from their use to the war machine. It gets worse. After a grueling engagement from which only one in five men return, the platoon is napping in a forest when a branch, previously weakened by bombardment, falls from a tree, striking a sleeping soldier in the head and killing him. This event has a profound effect on Hicks. Boyd writes, "The incident of the falling tree had broken him." He has come to realize that there is "no safety anywhere," and consequently, he ceases to care where he goes (213). Hicks sees the absurdity of it all, saying, "it seems so damned ridiculous" (215). Yet, feeling physically sick and totally depressed as the troops once more embark upon an attack, Hicks is advised by a newcomer to the platoon to go back to the aid station, to which he replies, "Yeh. And have every one of you birds think I'm yellow? I *will* not" (232). The irony is clear. No matter how much one insists upon one's individuality, self-esteem is still dependent upon the opinion of one's community, even at the risk of one's life. According to Boyd, "Their cowardice made them brave men, heroes" (247). Hicks's part in the battle "had been

brought about more by a great tiredness than by any courage." He was simply annoyed at having to lie there under fire, so he got up and acted without thinking, for it "all seemed so senseless" (252). As Boyd concludes his tale, we see Hicks on the field of battle, striding among the dead, and "Each body was alone, drawn apart from its companions by its separate and incommunicable misery" (265). The fate of humans is solitary, Boyd seems to say, and devoid of meaning. His last sentence describes the fate of modern man, in the person of Hicks. "The soul of Hicks was numb" (266). He has become an automaton, going through the motions of life without thought or care. Hicks makes no redeeming authenticating gesture. He no longer struggles against his fate. Only annihilation awaits him.[3]

Dos Passos's pessimism and Boyd's nihilism stand in contrast to the largely uncritical naturalism of William March. March's characters are not depicted as overwhelmed so much as they are as victims, or potential victims, of the vagaries of chance, which makes them, nonetheless, just as powerless as any character we find in Dos Passos's or Boyd's novels. Even though most reviewers had grown weary of war novels by that time, the 1933 publication of March's Company K was followed by a spate of largely enthusiastic reviews. The reviewers' descriptions ranged from "poignant and significant" to "sensational and morbid" (Simmonds 72-75). Subsequent criticism, though, has been scant. Like Boyd, March drew upon his own

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[3] Strangely enough, Hicks seems to have survived the war as he reappears as the protagonist of Boyd's 1935 novel, In Time of Peace.

battle experiences as a Marine in the war. The novel is modernistic in its style, consisting of 113 vignettes, each one an event seen through the eyes of a single member of Company K. According to Roy S. Simmonds, his biographer, March intended the 113 accounts to be unified by the "common theme of the triumph of stupidity over everything" (39). The sketches are ordered chronologically, so the reader can follow the thread of the company's history through the fragments of observation.

By not focusing on a particular protagonist, March is able to portray the absurdities and horrors of the Great War in a way that accents the isolation of the individuals involved. Alexander Medlicott, Jr. argues that, by revealing the reality of warfare, Company K helps us understand "the nation's transition from naive, romantic optimism to the cynicism and disillusionment of the fictional heroes of the novels of the postwar decades"—the so-called "lost generation" (223). Simmonds maintains that March's viewpoint is very much a "subjective one" (72), despite his professed intent to "present all sides of the picture" (62). Peter Aichinger contends that March's novel is too realistic to be as enduring as the works of Dos Passos and Hemingway, that it lacks their use of "the war as a metaphor for the ills besetting their generation" (15). Perhaps this explains the paucity of critical appraisals of the work, yet I think the novel's realism does convey significant philosophical and social commentary that still speaks to our age. For example, as Cooperman points out, March critiques the endorsement of war by religious entities (Novel 20, 110) and the dehumanizing nature of machine warfare (Novel 88-90), topics emblematic of the

hypocrisy and alienation of modern society. Jeffrey Walsh, like Aichinger, falls short of the mark when he calls Company K a "naturalistic" novel (195). March portrays a rather meaningless universe, but he does hold out for rare moments of existential freedom.

Like Dos Passos and Boyd, March examines humanity's relation to the universe in many of his sketches. In one vignette, March subtly shows the meaninglessness of the universe through his account of a wall with a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hanging upon it that is the only thing standing after a bombardment. A soldier, Al de Castro, wanders over to look at the wall in amazement, only to have it fall upon him, crushing him to death (27). This account contrasts with the "luck" of Private John McGill, who has frequent close calls but never is even slightly wounded (70-71). We also find the story of Private Martin Passy, who visits a fortune-teller before embarking for the war. She tells him he will neither die nor be wounded, and Passy believes her. He subsequently acts on his belief, saying, "I wasn't braver than anybody else and besides that I knew all the time that nothing could possibly happen to me, no matter what I did" (99). Passy's story is followed by Private Leo Hastings' account of how he frustrated a German sniper by pacing in full view of him, randomly varying his stride, making it impossible for the sniper to get an accurate bead on him. With these tales March invites us to ponder the workings of chance and agency in individual lives. The survival of McGill and death of de Castro seem to be the workings of pure chance, whereas Passy's and Hastings' survivals are matters of personal agency, Passy's as an act of faith and Hastings' as a rational and

logical deduction. Still, the agency of the latter two soldiers is an ephemeral thing, proving nothing more than that the vagaries of chance had not controverted them up to that point in time. Thus, we see that not all of the individuals portrayed in Great War novels are depicted as irredeemably overwhelmed victims of circumstance, yet victims they are, nonetheless. Still, Company K can serve as our entrance to a discussion of the possibilities for individual redemption that some authors hold out to their readers.

March's most poignant tale is that of "The Unknown Soldier." This man finds himself eviscerated and inextricably entangled in the barbed wire of no-man's-land. As he is dying, the soldier remembers his hometown mayor's annual address in praise of those who "died gloriously on the Field of Honor!" He remembers himself as a boy "listening enraptured to the speech and believing every word of it; and at that instant [he] understood clearly why [he] now lay dying on the wire." He realizes that the honor and glory of war is "all a lie that people tell each other, and nobody really believes" (120-21). The unknown soldier then manages to throw away every last bit of identification that he possesses so that his body can never be taken home to have the mayor's speech recited over it. He refuses to be used, saying, "I've beaten the orators and the wreath layers at their own game! . . . Nobody will ever use me as a symbol" (122). As he dies, he whispers, "I have broken the chain. . . . I have defeated the inherent stupidity of life" (123). Here is a form of agency in which March invites us to believe, using a rhetoric designed to defeat the dehumanizing rhetoric of the war machine. The unknown soldier has made a free choice on moral grounds. He has

chosen to be *not* a symbol of war's glory but, rather, a symbol of its destructive power, the power to even destroy the very identity of its victims. He has chosen to discard the identity imposed upon him by the group, the military machine, in order to embrace his own, internal sense of self. In doing so, he is true to his own sense of himself as a moral being and a member of a much wider collectivity, humankind.

March reinforces this point of view with the story of Private Walter Drury. Drury's rifle squad is assigned the task of executing prisoners. Rather than do so, Drury throws down his rifle and runs away, ultimately deciding to give himself up to be tried as a deserter in hopes he will not get more than twenty years in prison. He does not regret his moral choice, saying, "I'll only be forty-two, when I come out, and I can start life all over again" (84). Again, a free choice is made, an existential choice to be true to one's own vision of oneself as a moral being. Drury draws the line at the cold-blooded murder of prisoners, an attitude clearly founded in the biblical and republican tradition that values human life. Drury's act and attitude are in stark contrast to that of Private Everett Qualls, who goes along with the execution but has to live with it for the rest of his life. Eventually, Qualls commits suicide after years of hard luck that he considers God's retribution for his part in the murders (153-54). The interesting aspect of the existentially authenticating moral choices made by Drury and the unknown soldier is that both individuals realize that they are members of a larger community, the community of humankind, much like Dos Passos's Andrews, as we shall see. The demands of what is in the best interest of the larger community are the deciding factors in their choices, despite the fact that most of the members of the

community are unaware of their own best interests. The suggestion, then, is that freedom is found in asserting oneself as human, as an individual human above all, and to be true to one's humanity is to be true to oneself.

John Andrews is the character who receives most of Dos Passos's attention in Three Soldiers. Cooperman calls Andrews an "antihero" who "enlists because of a need for sacrificial gesture" (Novel 177). He wants to immerse himself in the mass in order to "take refuge from the horror of the world that had fallen upon him," because he is "sick of revolt, of thought, of carrying his individuality like a banner above the turmoil" (26). Andrews, for all his education, has found no meaning in life and wants to give up the search—temporarily. While shunning thought all day, he reserves the nights alone in his bunk for thoughtfulness, for "He must not let himself sink too deeply into the helpless mentality of the soldier. He must keep his will power" (31). And will power, we gradually come to realize, is what differentiates Andrews from his comrades, Fuselli and Chrisfield. None of the three take long to realize the deadeningly dull and depersonalized nature of the soldier's life. But only Andrews is able to apply reason to his plight and explain it to himself, thinking, "What a coward he had been anyway, to submit. . . . he had not been driven into the army by the force of public opinion" (207). He had freely allowed himself to be drafted for no particular reason, unlike the undertaker, his fellow patient in the hospital, who enlisted so that the people in his community would continue to do business with him. Furthermore, Andrews

> had not had the courage to move a muscle for his freedom, but he had been fairly cheerful about risking his life as a soldier, in a cause he believed useless. What right had a man to exist who was too cowardly to stand up for what he thought and felt, for his whole makeup, for everything that made him an individual apart from his fellows, and not a slave to stand cap in hand waiting for someone of stronger will to tell him to act? (207-08)

This realization of his cowardice is invigorating to him, and he feels emboldened, thinking that "He was ready to endure anything, to face any sort of death, for the sake of a few months of liberty in which to forget the degradation of this last year. . . . It seemed the first time in his life he had ever determined to act" (211). Before he can act, though, the armistice is declared, and after a brief fling AWOL in Paris, Andrews returns to his unit to don once more the blouse of servility.

Andrews eventually manages to get himself assigned to a Paris school battalion so that he can study composition at the Schola Cantorum, all the while chastising himself for the humiliating boot-licking and begging he had to do to accomplish it. The small taste of freedom this assignment affords him sets him to thinking again. He tries out his ideas on Jeanne, a French girl he has met. "'Now I have learnt that life is to be used, not just held in the hand like a box of bonbons that nobody eats.' . . . 'What do you mean?' she said slowly, 'One takes what life gives, that is all, there's no choice'" (321-22). Jeanne does not understand his point of view at all, saying, "But what's the good of freedom? What can you do with it? What one wants is to live well

and have a beautiful house and be respected by people" (327). Here we have laid bare the heart of Dos Passos's concern in this novel. According to Virginia Spencer Carr, Three Soldiers "was his document of the dehumanization of the individual. Personal liberty was one's most precious possession, and if [one] lacked that, the dehumanization process was irreversible" (171).

The novel continually calls upon its readers to ask, what is freedom? What is free will? Is individual choice even possible? Can an individual act freely? Should one even care about freedom, or as Jeanne says, should one simply concern oneself with the respect of other people, with fitting in to one's community? These are the questions Andrews struggles with through the rest of the novel with ever-increasing dread. He thinks, "Today everything was congestion, the scurrying of crowds; men had become ant-like. Perhaps it was inevitable that the crowds should sink deeper and deeper in slavery. Whichever won, tyranny from above, or spontaneous organization from below, there could be no individuals" (343). His despair at his lost individuality finds nearly its nadir when he realizes that "in index cards and piles of typewritten papers, his real self, which they had power to kill if they wanted to, was in his name and his number, on lists with millions of other names and other numbers" (347). However, worse is to come as he goes off on an outing with Geneviève Rod without a pass. He falls into the hands of the Military Police, is severely beaten, and put into a labor battalion without any sort of trial or attempt to establish his identity. The "slavery" Andrews knew prior to this was nothing by comparison, and he finally acts

to secure the freedom he so desires, abandoning even his uniform and embracing the role of deserter.

As a deserter, Andrews is clearly in a situation that we can call an existential dilemma, although Dos Passos would not have known the term at the time he wrote the novel. Andrews is an isolated individual, totally alienated from the society in which he moves. His desertion was not planned or prepared for in any way. Andrews himself says, ". . . I, by pure accident, have made a gesture, feeble as it is, towards human freedom" (423). A "gesture" is, indeed, all his act seems to be, certainly not an act of will power—initially. As far back as his stay in the hospital, Andrews had remarked the futility of life and the "forlorn" men who had tried to show others the way out—"Democritus, Socrates, Epicurus, Christ" (211), and later, while chastising himself for his cowardice in not acting, he acknowledges that protest would be a "futile gesture" (340). He has no illusions about the possibility of change either, saying, "human society has been always that, and perhaps will be always that: organizations growing and stifling individuals, and individuals revolting hopelessly against them, and at last forming new societies to crush the old societies and becoming slaves again in their turn" (421). Nonetheless, as Michael Clark points out, in Three Soldiers "gesture" is frequently used to "describe actions by diverse characters, to suggest an essential truth, the moment at which the concrete action and the spiritual life of the character are melded inextricably" (91). Now that he has made the "gesture" of desertion, now that he has taken off the uniform, he is in a position to

consummate a freely determined act, to choose to be himself, to choose to "live like John Andrews" (265).

After his desertion, Andrews is not immediately isolated from society, from his community of friends. He makes his way back to Paris and to his old rooms, where he encounters his friends, Henslowe and Walters. These two desperately try to convince him to return and assure him that the problems of returning are not insurmountable, and they are correct in their assessment. But Andrews is adamant that "Being free's the only thing that matters," prompting Henslowe to mutter, "As if anyone was ever free" (394). Later, Geneviève Rod urges the same argument as his other friends, to which Andrews replies, "I am ashamed of many things in my life, Geneviève, I'm rather proud of this." And she responds, "But can't you understand that other people haven't your notions of individual liberty?" (428). This is precisely the point. Dos Passos has set up Andrews to be what we now call an existential hero. He has made a Sartrean choice to be free, and despite the fact that he is later apprehended by the military police and presumably imprisoned for many long years, he has freely made a choice to be free. As we will see in this study, such choices are almost always quixotic, but nonetheless existentially authenticating for the individual. Yet, Andrews is not fully contented because, despite his isolation, he has been influenced by the biblical and republican traditions and still has concern for others.

> And why, instead of writing music that would have been worth while if he hadn't been a deserter, he kept asking himself, hadn't he tried long ago to act, to make a gesture, however feeble, however forlorn, for

> other people's freedom? Half by accident he had managed to free himself from the treadmill. Couldn't he have helped others? . . . No; he had not lived up to the name of John Brown. (431)

Of course, John Brown, besides being the alias Andrews is using, is a reference to the anti-slavery hero of Harper's Ferry who fought for the freedom and dignity of all people. Here, the youthful idealism of the times, the desire to do something noble and heroic is shown in all its impotence by Dos Passos in the person of John Andrews. Yet, one must ask, what if he had heeded the advice of his community of friends? Perhaps then Andrews could have ultimately found means to positively affect the lives of others in ways that will be impossible for him to accomplish while in prison. It appears to me that Dos Passos is suggesting that life is an exercise in futility, and the best one can hope for is to be an authentic individual, true to one's own sense of humanity and one's own understanding of what it means to be a free human being.

Like Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, in his 1929 novel A Farewell to Arms, also examines individuality, liberty, and the war. Hemingway tried to enlist in the army after graduating from high school, but a bad eye prevented him from doing so. Eventually, though, he managed to join the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps and to become severely wounded in Italy before he had turned nineteen. After his recovery, he joined the Italian infantry and served until the war's end. His war experience informed much of his early work and ultimately laid the foundation for one of his most acclaimed and influential novels, A Farewell to Arms. Peter Aichinger contends that the novel is "symbolic of the outlook of the twenties" in that the Italian collapse

at Caporetto represents the collapse of American "moral certitude," and the subsequent chaotic retreat "parallels America's frenetic search for new values in the twenties" (17). This may be so, on the whole, but what I want to briefly examine is simply the novel's treatment of one individual possessed of "moral certitude" and the values that Hemingway attributes to him.

A Farewell to Arms is the story of Frederic Henry, an American ambulance driver in Italy during the Great War, and Aichinger likens his story of isolation and loss to the alienation expressed by many writers of Hemingway's generation, the so-called "lost generation" (17). D. S. Savage finds Hemingway's characters to be "victims of a meaningless determinism" (95). This description fits Henry well, as he has been "blown up while . . . eating cheese" (66) and eventually deserts rather than allowing himself to be uselessly, mindlessly executed amidst the retreat from Caporetto. He tries to take control of his destiny but is thwarted by circumstance, even losing his lover, Catherine, and their child to the whims of physiology. Michael Garrety sums up, "Man is trapped socially and biologically; life is an unfair game, and the only inescapable fact he has is death" (20). As Hemingway puts it, "They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. . . . You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you" (338). But Henry does not roll over and die.

As Peter G. Jones contends, Henry makes an individual decision to "struggle" on. "Like Sisyphus returning to his rock, Henry knows that defeat is inevitable and that he can assert himself as man only by making the decision to continue" (9). This

moral decision to go on, to not give up, makes Henry kin to Dos Passos's Andrews. His is an existential decision in the face of absurdity. Cooperman argues that Andrews and Henry "become heroes of the negative act; it is their insistence upon the imperative of action which sets up their antiheroic role" (Novel 189). Yet, Cooperman sees Henry's actions as a "retreat from rather than an acceptance of existential absurdity" (Novel 187). Scott Donaldson concurs, finding Henry "driven by guilt," the guilt of the survivor, and unwilling "to accept responsibility for his actions" (166). Likewise, John Beversluis argues that Henry is not decisive but, rather, has simply persuaded "himself that what he really wanted to do was exactly what he was doing" (24). I disagree. Henry, like Andrews, makes his crucial decision on the spur of the moment. Like Andrews, he acts; he dives into the river and escapes his oppressors, and everything else follows from that decision. Yet, he continues to take responsibility for his life, making his way to Catherine and delivering both of them to safety in Switzerland. He also accepts the responsibility of Catherine's pregnancy and is perfectly willing to be husband and father. In the end, though, he loses Catherine, which leaves him alone and isolated in the world. But he voices no regret. He prays and pleads but does not shout at God or argue that life is unfair. The decision has been made. He has affirmed his freedom and his value as a human being and has acted upon the affirmation, regardless of the consequences. And the novel ends with him going on, walking "back to the hotel in the rain" (343), the sad, resolute possessor of a "separate peace" (252).

Dalton Trumbo gives us a character who is even more isolated than Andrews or Henry, but who, ironically, understands the tension between individuals and their communities better than either of them. Trumbo's antiwar novel Johnny Got His Gun is considered the last major novel of the Great War, the war-to-end-all-wars. Ironically, it was published in 1939, on the very eve of World War II. A left-wing novelist, film writer, pamphleteer, and magazine writer in the 1930s, Trumbo joined the Communist Party in 1943. He was later imprisoned after being cited for contempt of Congress for his refusal to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee and was blacklisted by Hollywood. His biographer Bruce Cook tells us that Trumbo was anxious to deliver his antiwar message to a "world hurtling toward war" in the late '30s (129). In a letter to his agent in February, 1939, Trumbo explicitly expressed his sense of urgency about getting the book published before "the country is either in war or in favor of war" (Cook 130). As it turned out, Johnny Got His Gun came out a week after Germany invaded Poland. Trumbo's detractors claim his novel was written to order for the Communists, but Cook points out that Trumbo did not join the Party until years later—December, 1943, to be exact (131, 146). Leonard Kriegel criticizes the novel's "overblown rhetoric," sentimentality, and "overly propagandistic ending," while acknowledging that the ending is not a "total failure, for one of the questions we must learn to ask of novels accused of being propagandistic is how accurate their propaganda is" (110). Still, in the protagonist, Joe Bonham, Kriegel finds an absurd reality that cannot be denied, stating that in Joe Bonham, Trumbo has "succeeded in creating our nightmare" (109-10). Jeffrey Walsh

calls the novel “the ultimate post-war communication crisis” (30) and finds a certain “residual social energy” in its depiction of the working class that is missing in later war novels (115). Aichinger, quite correctly I think, identifies the novel as the result of a “purely rational,” unemotional process, which “dwells on an absolute protest against war and . . . on the loneliness and isolation of the individual” (24).

Trumbo makes no secret of the fact that he is on the side of the little guy, the individual soldier. He concludes the novel with this sentence: “You plan the wars you masters of men plan the wars and point the way and we will point the gun” (309). They will point the guns at the masters, Trumbo clearly implies. His protagonist, Joe Bonham, has plenty of time to think, and he thinks about slaves, “little guys like himself ” (234). Trumbo’s novel is, on the whole, a paean to the “little guys,” a testament to the worth of the individual, and at the same time, a recognition of the social nature of human beings. He writes, “A man needed to be among other men. Every living thing needed to be among its own kind” (284). The novel tests what it means to be a free individual in the twentieth century against what it means to be a citizen of a nation or a member of the human community. Ultimately, Trumbo finds society lacking in respect for the individual. For example, the paradox of war and personal liberty is explored by Bonham.

> Somebody tapped you on the shoulder and said come along son we’re going to war. So you went. But why? In any other deal even like buying a car or running an errand you had the right to say what’s there in it for me? . . . It was a kind of duty you owed yourself that when anybody said

> come on son do this or do that you should stand up and say look mister why should I do this for whom am I doing it and what am I going to get out of it in the end? But when a guy comes along and says here come with me and risk your life . . . why then you've got no rights. (143)

Bonham comes to the realization that the things men are asked to die for—liberty, freedom, democracy, independence, decency, honor, womanhood—are all just words and of no use to a dead man. Anyone preaching that principles are worth dying for is "either a fool or a liar because he doesn't know what death is," since he has never experienced it (150). Bonham knows because he is a living dead man, and he says, "The most important thing is your life little guys. You're worth nothing dead except speeches" (154).

Joe Bonham awakes one day only to find himself in a hospital bed with no arms, no legs, no ears, no eyes, no nose, and no mouth. By presenting a character with such severe limitations, Trumbo encourages his readers to analyze just exactly what it means to be a human being, to consider what constitutes selfhood. The Bonham who rages against the "masters" on behalf of the "little guys" is confronted with an existential dilemma. Does he, in fact, exist, or does he not? Is he even capable of performing an act that is existentially authenticating? Bonham is first confronted with the question of his own existence when he realizes that he does not know if he is dreaming or awake. The only time he is sure that he is awake is when he can feel the nurse's hands on him. It soon becomes clear to him that the "inability to tell dreams

from thoughts was oblivion. It made him nothing and less than nothing" (131). The Cartesian description of selfhood does not apply if one is not conscious of thinking rational thoughts. Thus, Bonham determines to think, and eventually he discovers the importance of time and how it connects one with other people. He thinks, "No matter how far you are separated from other people if you have an idea of time why then you are in the same world with them you are part of them" (163). He becomes aware, though, that simply being awake and conscious of time is not enough. He remains isolated in his mind, alienated from all the human activity that surrounds him until one day he begins thinking about the vibrations he uses to understand what is going on around him.

> In the back of his mind something began to glimmer. If he could in some way make use of vibrations he could communicate with these people. The glimmer became a great dazzling white light. It opened up such breathless prospects that he thought he might suffocate from sheer excitement. Vibrations were a very important part of communication. . . . He still remembered the Morse code. All he had to do in order to break through to people in the outside world was to lie in his bed and dot dash to the nurse. Then he could talk. . . . and he would have made another step forward in his struggle to get back to people. (208-10)

Of course, the people around him do not realize that he is trying to talk to them for the longest time, but he never gives up hope and finally a nurse figures it out.

In his exaltation at her perspicacity, he imagines the reaction of the doctors. “Listen to him speak. You see his mind is unaffected he speaks like you and me *he is a person he has identity* he is part of the world” (275, italics added). This raises an important point. Is one a person, a self with an identity if one is *not* in communication with others? Many post-war authors and thinkers have commented on the increased isolation and alienation of individuals in the modern world. Are these isolated individuals, then, less human to the extent that they are divorced from communicating meaningfully with other individuals? Trumbo seems to say yes. Communication is all important, and as Bonham’s attempt to communicate is trivialized and categorically dismissed by the guardians of “REGULATIONS” (299), we feel his horror at being thrust back into the darkness of isolation. Yet, Bonham soon recovers and makes an existentially authenticating choice. He decides to continue tapping his Morse code in the face of their dismissal. “They might not answer him they might ignore him but at least they would never be able to forget that as long as he lived here was a man who was talking to them talking to them all the time” (304-05). He feels his solidarity with the community of “little guys,” and sees himself as the “new messiah of the battlefields” (306) whose duty it is to warn his community of the evil future planned for them. And so he taps his defiant message, “You plan the wars you masters of men plan the wars and point the way and we will point the gun” (309).

Clearly, the major war novels written in the aftermath of World War I have depicted the war experience as analogous to modern life. Just as soldiers such as Andrews, Bonham, Hicks, and Fuselli were reduced to little more than isolated cogs

in a machine by the regimentation and depersonalization of warfare and military life, individuals in modern American culture find themselves attached to but alienated from their core communities. Rather, what passes for community is all too often simply a manifestation of mob psychology and conformity with none of the elements of communication and care that the progressives, like Dewey, dreamed of. The Great War authors suggest various methods of escape from this isolation and alienation, with varying degrees of success. Some, like Hicks, just grow "numb," becoming mindless automatons. Others, like Fuselli, while not exactly mindless, seek to keep a low profile so as not to make even a ripple in the waters of conformity, let alone make waves. And still others, like Chrisfield, make a run for it, a run that is fruitless from the start because it is self-involved and has neither destination nor purpose. Nowhere in the novels we have examined have we seen a community consciously act as a community of thoughtful human beings. Some individuals, though, such as Andrews, Bonham, and Henry, have acted to secure their liberty and have managed to find a certain existential freedom. The authenticating factor in each of these cases has been the individual acting upon his belief in the traditional value of concern for others. From Henry's concern for Catherine to Bonham's concern for the "little guy" to March's unknown soldier's concern for all the little boys listening to the speeches of the politicos, somehow the existential hero finds individual freedom arising out of care for others, out of his realization of his own humanity. Nonetheless, the freedom of these authentic individuals is shown to be quixotic at best—Andrews is imprisoned, Henry loses Catherine, the unknown soldier dies, and Bonham is ignored. Still, the

"gestures" of the existential heroes in the war novels from between the world wars leave the reader with a much more positive and hopeful impression of humanity and of human possibilities than that derived from the futility of Hicks, Fuselli, Chrisfield, and their ilk.

We next turn to the novels of World War II. These works continue to address the Great War themes of the separate peace and the fate of the individual in modern industrial society. Notions of the absurdity and meaninglessness of the universe are pursued, and extremely deterministic, naturalistic visions of the world are espoused—even to the point of bleakness. Meanwhile, existential ideas are in evidence, and the only overtly existential novel in this study will be examined.

Chapter Three: World War Two

While the Great War soldiers marched off to the recruiting stations eagerly, World War II prompted a somewhat different reaction. Soldiers in the Second World War were less enthusiastic than their predecessors but resigned to the necessity of the endeavor, and most of them already understood that there is nothing glorious about war. Afterward, many of the authors who wrote about World War II were intent upon using the battlefield experience as a means of exploring issues of individuality and community in a modern mass culture. Their concern about such matters has its roots in the years between the wars, during which these soldiers and authors came to maturity. The years between the two world wars were marked by extremes, as evidenced by the popular appellations given to the two most frequently discussed periods of that span: the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression. The political tone of the 1920s was conservative and pro-business. Calvin Coolidge stated the prevailing view succinctly when he said, "The business of America is business" (Shannon 39). The successive Republican administrations were clearly much more interested in the concerns of big business, of large corporations than the needs of individuals such as factory workers and farmers. The fabled exuberance of the era, despite Prohibition, was largely restricted to urbanites and only a fortunate few of those. Rural dwellers did not fare as well but, nonetheless, generally supported the Republican, conservative political tickets. At the same time, the prodigalities of the jazz age and the subsequent failures of capitalism that resulted in the 1929 stock

market crash rendered socialistic ideas palatable to many intellectuals and workers alike. Yet, as Gerald W. Johnson points out, despite the depression Americans were not ready to give up on capitalism. Instead, in 1932 they opted for Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Dealers, who offered an alternative to "jumping all the way into Socialism or Communism" (168).

Roosevelt's New Deal was never entirely successful, yet he never lost voter support. His candidacy was opposed by the majority of the press each time he ran (60 percent of the dailies opposed him in 1932, 63 percent in 1936, and 75 percent in 1940), but the people kept re-electing him (Shannon 211). Historian David A. Shannon maintains that Roosevelt "was willing to modify traditional relationships between government and privately owned economic enterprise in the interest of the general welfare, but he clearly was no opponent of capitalism as such" (150). Most historians consider that it took the Second World War to bring about the total rehabilitation of the American economy. Eventually, the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy and the excesses of Stalin in communist Russia served to fuel the fires of American nationalism and douse the fervor of socialist dreamers. Chester E. Eisinger holds that the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact "signaled the failure, nay the death, of Marxism in this country, a Marxism that had nourished social idealists of the non-Communist left as well as party members" (3).

By the time the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor occurred, Roosevelt and many Americans were already resigned to and saw the necessity of their country's ultimate involvement in World War II (Shannon 215). In September, 1940, in the

midst of a Presidential election campaign, Roosevelt signed into law the first ever peacetime draft measure. Still, he was re-elected for a third term. The mechanized, powerfully destructive nature of warfare itself was well-known by that time and came as a surprise to no one, and thanks to the writers of the Great War, illusions of heroism and glory were virtually non-existent. Unlike the World War I combatants, the soldiers entering the second conflict did so with their eyes open and with a unity of purpose (Shannon 242). Clearly, the future of American democracy was hanging in the balance. According to Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., the lack of any real opposition to the war accounts for "the improved record of the government in the matter of civil liberties as compared with World War I. . . . The sensational raids and vindictive prosecutions of World War I were avoided" (307). Of course, the notable exception to this was the internment of the west coast Japanese Americans. Nonetheless, governmental power over the individual was greatly expanded during the war, most notably through the draft, rationing, and price controls (Ekirch 309). When the fighting was over, Johnson observes, the "satisfaction" these soldiers took in their victory "was profound but, to one who can remember the delirium of 1918, remarkably sober. Joy, gratification, pride were all present, but not much exultation. The dominant emotion of the time was profound relief" (228).

No American of the forties could escape the war experience, whether on the front lines or the home front, and the three novelists I will discuss in this chapter—Norman Mailer, James Jones, and Joseph Heller—were all combatants. John W. Aldridge argues that the writers of the forties and fifties found that "modern life is

still basically purposeless, that the typical condition of modern man is still doubt, confusion, and fear." These writers differ from the "Lost Generation" authors, though, in that they have always known life to be so; thus, "they can write of it from neither the perspective of protest nor that of disillusionment and loss" (After 90). Peter Aichinger points out that Americans participated in the Second World War with "a spirit of glum resignation." They saw it as a job that had to be done before they could return to their accustomed civilian lives. Aichinger writes, "If the attitude of the American soldier in World War I was informed with the 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" (34). These soldiers and all Americans of their generation had grown up during the depression and news of strikes, riots, revolutions, and unrest—both foreign and domestic—had been their daily fare. The crusading spirit was not theirs.

Out of the chaos which is war came a great ordering of society. Necessarily, the military was supremely ordered and disciplined, but such order spilled over into civilian life. Even after the war it continued as the Cold War began and the threat of Communism moved the country as a whole to the right, "in the name of national survival" (Eisinger 7-8). Military budgets remained high, never returning to pre-war levels, and the political influence of the military flourished in the atmosphere of perpetual crisis (Ekirch 323-27). The American traditional ideal of individuality was greatly diminished by the war and post-war conditions. People began to feel anonymous, insignificant, and pressured to conform. Edmond L. Volpe contends that

the works of writers such as Mailer and Jones were reactions, in different ways, to this threat to individuality (106-07). Donald Pizer argues that the "extermination camps, the atom bomb, the cold war in Europe and hot war in Korea, the McCarthy witch hunts . . . all contributed to a sense of malaise, of individual values and freedoms under immense pressure" (86). Even as America was entering the war in 1941, Erich Fromm was warning of the dangers to individuality and freedom that modern society presents. He maintains that modern industrial society produces personalities that feel "powerless and alone, anxious and insecure" and fosters the "tendency to conform" (240-41). Moreover, shortly after the war, in her analysis of modern mass society, The Origins of Totalitarianism, philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt argues that the very existence of totalitarianism requires "atomized, isolated individuals" (323).

In their novels, American authors approached the Second World War from many different angles. The Young Lions (1948), Irwin Shaw's allegorical depiction of the war, features a strong statement against anti-Semitism, while And Then We Heard the Thunder (1962, 1983) by John Oliver Killens focuses on the struggles of African American soldiers during World War II. Killens' novel stands as a call for black unity in the face of segregation, prejudice, and hate. The War Lover (1959) by John Hersey is a Freudian psychological novel which tries to understand the psyche of Buzz Marrow, a man who loves war. Set in occupied Italy in 1944, John Horne Burns's The Gallery (1947) contrasts Old World culture and values with the corrupt values of materialistic American culture. The novels I will discuss are some of the most notable

novels that have come out of World War II. They were chosen because they all treat the war as an analogy for the world at large and address the threats to individuality posed by mass culture. The four that I will consider in this chapter were published from 1948 to 1962. Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead came first in 1948, followed by James Jones's From Here to Eternity in 1953. Joseph Heller's Catch-22 came out in 1961 and The Thin Red Line by Jones in 1962.

The Naked and the Dead was Mailer's first novel. In it we will find that he has depicted a completely naturalistic universe for his characters to inhabit. The critics are generally agreed that the men of Recon platoon and their officers live lives filled with futility and impotence, looking for self-knowledge and power but rarely finding them. Their lives are ruled by chance, and their characters are shaped by the forces of social determinism. I will argue that beset by ennui, horror, and dejection, the soldiers are still able to hope, and some even rise above themselves to serve another in need. Therefore, Mailer leaves readers with some small sense of redemption for the individual in an absurd universe. In the war novels of James Jones, we will see a bleaker outlook for the future of human beings than that found in Mailer's novel. The critics and I agree that Jones's novels are naturalistic and that the individual is ultimately depicted as completely insignificant. Some call the depiction of Prewitt in From Here to Eternity a romantic portrait. That seems substantially correct to me, but additionally, I will argue that Prewitt, in being true to himself, achieves a sort of existential good faith. Moreover, I will show that individual integrity is important to Jones in Eternity, but the achievement of it is rare and potentially fatal. Furthermore, I

will contend that in The Thin Red Line self-assertion replaces self-knowledge as a goal, and nobody comes out a winner. Joseph Heller's Catch-22, on the other hand, offers a starkly contrasting vision. Critics, with good reason, have ranked Catch-22 with the literature of the absurd and have also referred to it as social surrealism and as a romance-parody. I will maintain that it is also an existential novel. Heller's world is filled with just as much evil and even more absurdity than the worlds of Mailer and Jones. But, in my opinion Heller holds out hope for the individual with an existential response to a dehumanizing world—a response that is an affirmation of the free individual and a call for responsible freedom.

Norman Mailer enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1944 after graduating from Harvard. His expressed intent was to garner the necessary experience to enable him to write the best American novel about World War II. He subsequently served in the Pacific theater and took part in the invasion of Luzon. The offspring of those military experiences is Mailer's first novel, The Naked and the Dead, and some critics feel that it is indeed the best of the Second World War novels. The Naked and the Dead is widely recognized as having been written in the naturalistic tradition, which is true, but I will argue that in the depictions of Goldstein and Ridges, Mailer leaves us with a sense that even in a meaningless world there is a place for positive values and positive action based on those values. Stanley T. Gutman asserts that "the antagonistic relationship between men and the natural world, a world Mailer consistently portrays

as powerful, harsh, alien, and impenetrable," is invariably in the foreground in the novel (6). Gutman sees evidence of determinism in all Mailer's later novels, but insists that only his first "uses naturalism to emphasize social determinism" with "a continuing accretion of detail which builds to a realization of the ponderous and pervasive power of circumstance in affecting human character and destiny" (12). Robert Ehrlich concurs with this opinion, finding that the individual is "almost completely weighed down by the effects of his environment" (14)—so much so, that individuals have little, if any, hope of overcoming past influences that have shaped them (21). Furthermore, Randall H. Waldron believes that the final pages of the novel "leave the definite impression of man lost, helpless, passive in the grip of the anonymity and meaninglessness of modern life" (277). He sees the novel's central conflict as a struggle between "the will to individual integrity" and the depersonalizing, deterministic forces of modern life (273). Other critics, while acknowledging the naturalism of the novel, have noted intimations of movement toward the existential ideas that are evident in Mailer's later novels. Raymond J. Wilson III, for one, remarks the paradoxical combination in The Naked and the Dead of a "pessimistic naturalism" with an emergent existentialism "containing a strong element of hope" (164). The existential tendencies of the novel, referred to by Wilson and others, are well worth considering.

Laura Adams is typical of critics who identify the naturalism and incipient existentialism of The Naked and the Dead but overlook the ethical dimensions I will identify. Adams sees Lieutenant Hearn's death in the novel as naturalistic and

describes him as one whose "youthful idealism" has turned to "naturalistic cynicism" in the war, as one who "hasn't quite become an existentialist" (38). She speaks of Mailer's existentialism as "rudimentary"(30), as "seeds" planted in a novel with a naturalistic tone. Adams argues that in his later work "Mailer's move from this uneasy naturalism to existentialism lies in his coming to believe that an individual must assume responsibility for his own destiny, and that God depends on the outcome of human action" (38). I will show that Mailer approaches this very belief in The Naked and the Dead in the persons of Goldstein and Ridges.

Other critics identify themes and stylistic elements in the novel that reflect typical existential viewpoints. Ihab Hassan finds that in the novel's portrayal of the war, "absurdity prevails" and "anxiety" is dramatized (Encounter 93). Norman Podhoretz sees a power struggle between men "driven by a hunger for absolute freedom," for "spiritual independence" and the combined forces of nature and the army, both impersonal, powerful, and evil (180, 182). More recently, Robert Merrill calls this a struggle with "the 'other' which because it resists [man's] control must be molded to serve his will" (Mailer 37). But Merrill, in contrast to Podhoretz, argues that "for Mailer the movement of man through history is an ongoing struggle between the bestial and visionary forces in man himself " *(*Mailer 38), which, of course, echoes a Nietzschean point of view.[4] Donald Pizer sums up the novel, saying that The Naked

[4] Nietzsche asserts in Thus Spake Zarathustra that "Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman—a rope over an abyss" (8).

and the Dead is "the human condition in all its absurdity as viewed by a 1950s existentialist" (92). Pizer contends that the various characters, Hearn, Valsen, Croft, Ridges, and Goldstein, in particular, are all seeking "self-knowledge," whether consciously or not (105-10). He concludes,

> Croft in his journey into self had found a frustrating limit to his power; Ridges and Goldstein in their journey discover the emptiness and hopelessness of their struggle through life. But despite the devastating nature of this self-knowledge, it nevertheless is self-knowledge. Man can face the outer edges of experience and of himself and seek to strike through, in exhaustion and rage, to the truth about himself and life; he can attempt to be a seer. And if this knowledge reveals the existential truth of the amoral emptiness of life, it also affirms and endorses the existential morality of the honest and concrete testing of the limits of life and of self, whatever the cost. (110)

Furthermore, Regis T. Sabol points out the existential nature of Ridges' and Goldstein's ordeal: "They carry Wilson because his burden defines their existence much as Sisyphus' burden defines his existence, much as the burden that all humankind must carry defines our existence" (91). This is true, and I will further maintain that their act is the redeeming element of the novel. Finally, Robert Solotaroff discloses a Nietzschean thread in the novel. General Cummings, he writes, "posits the will to power as the monism through whose thrustings all human activities can eventually be

explained. . . . this is straight Nietzsche. . . . The general's conception of the highest expression of the will to power is the control of others" (16).

More specifically, the existential themes of power and control have often captured the critics' attention. Andrew Gordon says that *power* and *control* are used more often than any other words in the novel (61). Hassan sees the world of The Naked and the Dead as "a dying world" ruled by "power and fear" (Encounter 94). General Cummings and Sergeant Croft, of course, are the embodiment of the will to power in Mailer's tale, and Podhoretz has pointed out the dual powers, nature and the army, that the men struggle against (180). Pizer contends that the "major themes" of The Naked and the Dead are the "nature of power and the nature of the self in relation to power, with the first theme dominating 'Argil and Mold' and the second 'Plant and Phantom.'" (95). We have seen that World War I was widely viewed by post-war authors as a catastrophe and a breakdown of civilization. On the other hand, according to John M. Muste, "the important novelists of World War II (and this is one of their distinctions) have tended to see the [Second World War] as a natural outgrowth of modern civilization and culture, not as an aberration. This view is implicit in *The Naked and the Dead*" (Question 373). The war was recognized as purely a power struggle and a violent one at that. Muste argues that

> Mailer's point is one which seems not to have occurred to the writers of the twenties: there is violence in man which civilization has not found the means to eradicate, and there is violence in American society which the

> genteel tradition in which Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Cummings had grown up tried to eliminate by pretending it did not exist. (Question 370)

Gordon sums up The Naked and the Dead as a novel in which "the central psychological conflict . . . is the struggle for power and control over the self and over outside objects, an effort that is doomed again and again to humiliating failure" (70). In fact, he says, after *power* and *control* "the terms next highest in frequency" of use in the novel are "*impotent rage* and *failure*" (61-62).

Recognizing the same impotence and failure that Gordon notes, one of the earliest critics of the novel, John W. Aldridge, sets the tone for many to follow when he writes, Mailer's "'Time Machine' portraits show us merely that the lives of the men were more purposeless and futile before the war than they can possibly be made as a result of the war" (After 135-36). The overall effect of the contrast between the portraits from the past and the present wartime scenes is to intensify the novel's mood of anomie, hopelessness, and meaninglessness, showing that the futility that the men feel began long before the war and is characteristic of the culture as a whole, not just of men at war. Chester Eisinger adds that the "dominant view of experience here is that an over-all futility marks man's every effort" (37). David F. Burg discusses the soldiers' "fateful sense of life's emptiness" (398), and Jean Radford judges the journeys of the litter-bearers and of Croft's mountain-climbing party to be "objectively, futile" (14). The sense of futility in the novel is ubiquitous and Waldron, as we have already seen, observes that "the final scenes leave the definite impression of man lost, helpless" (277). Finally, Gordon argues that the "novel recreates in the reader the sense of impotent rage

and helplessness of the child struggling for autonomy and failing" (71). Nonetheless, despite the pervasiveness of images of futility, impotence, and meaninglessness in the novel, some critics have detected elements of hope.

Aldridge feels that Mailer's soldiers, even before the war, "have no dignity, no hope of life" (After 136), which reflects the larger social concern of the novel, that modern industrial society is dehumanizing. Yet, Burg, while recognizing feelings of hopelessness in the men, detects a fundamental truth revealed by the novel—"that all things end as they began in an ever-recurring cycle" (398-99). Burg points out that the men "move beyond despair," deciding instead to laugh and sing "Roll me over in the clover." He concludes that "Life is simply a roundelay" (399-400). The realization that each end is a new beginning is the realization of hope, and the greatest failure is to not discover this truth. Burg writes,

> Mt. Anaka, as Mailer told us, symbolizes fate, death, the creative urge. Its meaning is precisely the same as the meaning of Sisyphus' fate. . . . The meaning of Sisyphus' fate is not entirely dependent upon its repetitiveness. He knows eternity after his first climb and return. To learn the truth once is to know it for all time. Croft's greatest failure is unawareness. The truth evades him. (399)

The discovery of such truth is part of the dawning self-knowledge that Pizer sees in some characters, such as Valsen and Goldstein (105, 110). Raymond J. Wilson III argues that The Naked and the Dead "presents a complex interaction of opposites: pessimistic naturalism forming the backdrop for the emergence of existential assumptions

containing a strong element of hope." For Wilson, this hope rests in the ability of one to regain the freedom he or she has freely given up in the pursuit of the "unrealistic American myth of success" (164). I believe Wilson overstates the case somewhat when he says "strong element of hope"; the men sometimes evince hope, but dejection is a more common emotion. Mailer, like the Great War authors before him, uses the experiences of soldiers, all of whom have their moments of frustration, their feelings of futility and impotence, to explore the crisis of individuality in modern industrial society and to ponder the implications for the future. The question, then, is, which characters have lost their freedom and been overwhelmed by life and which have demonstrated some form of existential heroism or validation by arriving at the freedom of self-knowledge and a realization of hope through communal concern? Indeed, can any of the characters in The Naked and the Dead be said to have consummated a meaningful act or to have established his individuality?

General Cummings is, arguably, the most fully drawn character in Mailer's novel. In the General, we can see manifested Mailer's deepest concerns about the shape the future will take. Cummings is an arch-conservative, Eisinger calls him a "proto-Fascist" (35), with distinct ideas about the direction of history. He firmly believes that the future belongs to the reactionary right and that "the only morality of the future is a power morality" (323). Solotaroff, we have seen, identifies Nietzsche as the source for the General's ideas about power (16-17). Power is the love of his life, and individual human beings are no more than chess pieces to be manipulated in his quest to satisfy his need. He became aware of his hunger for power when he was a junior officer in World War I.

As he witnessed, from the safety of the command bunker, his first battle unfold before his eyes, he was struck by the power of the commander, and thought, "*There were things one could do*" (415). Cummings conveys this conviction more completely when, in a fit of ecstasy, he contemplates the ramifications of firing an artillery piece one night.

> He dwelt pleasurably in many-webbed layers of complexity. The troops out in the jungle were disposed from the patterns in his mind, and yet at this moment he was living on many levels at once; in firing the gun he was a part of himself. All the roaring complex of odors and sounds and sights, multiplied and remultiplied by all the guns of the division, was contained in a few cells of his head, the faintest crease of his brain. All of it, all the violence, the dark co-ordination had sprung from his mind. In the night, at that moment, he felt such power that it was beyond joy; he was calm and sober. (566-67)

He revels in the belief that his mind is the seat of all power and control on the island. However, the opposing General, General Toyaku, has a good deal of power also, as does nature, which even Cummings cannot control.

Cummings feels a certain affinity with nature, in the form of Mount Anaka. Indulging a mystical mood, he thinks, "the mountain and he understood each other. Both of them, from necessity, were bleak and alone, commanding the heights" (563). Yet, in reality this affinity is nothing more than a human conceit, for we are early told that the naval "bombardment was insignificant before" the mountain (20), and that in the initial phases of the campaign, "the jungle was easily the General's worst opponent" (44).

Furthermore, the General's efforts to tame nature by improving the headquarters' bivouac are all laid to waste in a matter of minutes by a sudden tropical storm (106). The implacability and power of nature confronts the reader throughout the novel as Mailer paints a stark contrast between its power and human striving for power and control. Still, the General's striving is unabated by nature's indifferent opposition.

In his quest to achieve his ends, the General dons different "personality garment[s]," as Lieutenant Hearn puts it. He assumes various poses to appear to be the man any particular audience expects him to be (81). The degree to which this is calculated or to which it is instinctive is unclear, but it is consistent with his notion of individualism, which is extremely self-centered and calculated. He says, "The trick is to make yourself an instrument of your own policy. Whether you like it or not, that's the highest effectiveness man has achieved" (82). For him, equality is a myth, for the "average man always sees himself in relation to other men as either inferior or superior" (322). He sees the Army as one vast "fear ladder" that "functions best when you're frightened of the man above you, and contemptuous of your subordinates" (176). But he does not stop there. The twentieth-century world is driven by "machine techniques," he says, and this requires "consolidation" and a civilian version of the "fear ladder" because most men must be "subservient to the machine, and it's not a business they instinctively enjoy" (177). Mailer, writing immediately after the war, can see the direction in which the United States is headed—and has been headed for some time, judging from the downtrodden people depicted in his "Time Machine" portraits. General Cummings, as the most outspoken representative of that direction in the novel, can be seen as a sort of

cautionary tale. Cummings aspires to be a Nietzschean Superman, but despite Mailer's ostensible existentialism, Mailer does not appear to favor the Superman concept. He clearly shows the limits of the General's power, leaving readers of a more altruistic temperament some hope for the future.

As we have seen, the power of nature can overwhelm and ignore human pretensions to power. However, the General finds that nature is not the only source of his uneasiness nor the only thing thwarting his aims. Cummings believes in order in everything. In all aspects of life, he maintains that you can "always find a pattern if you looked for it" (401). His firm conviction is that "In the final analysis there was only necessity and one's own reactions to it" (402). However, for all his order and attempts at control, he finds his own troops becoming resistant to his command. "At night he would lie sleepless on his cot, suffering an almost unbearable frustration; there were times when he was burning with the impotence of his rage. . . . The division was going subtly and inevitably to pot, and he felt powerless to alter it" (300-01). His anger, though, never leads to a diminution of his desire for power or his belief that power is attainable and good. When faced with the revelation that the battle has been won by sheer accident, by a chance artillery shell landing on and destroying the majority of the Japanese stores, "Cummings was bothered by a suspicion, very faint, not quite stated, that he had no more to do with the success of the attack than a man who presses a button and waits for the elevator. It muddied the edges of his satisfaction, angered him subtly" (560). Such knowledge must be repressed by the man of power as it does not mesh with his Nietzschean concept of himself as "in transit between brute and God" (323). Cummings

has to believe that control is possible, but Mailer clearly wants his readers to doubt any such conclusion. Mailer reiterates the point in the final pages of the novel.

> For a moment he almost admitted that he had had very little or perhaps nothing at all to do with this victory, or indeed any victory—it had been accomplished by a random play of vulgar good luck larded into a causal net of factors too large, too vague, for him to comprehend. He allowed himself this thought, brought it almost to the point of words and then forced it back. But it caused him a deep depression. (716)

The sense is that the purveyors of "power morality" and all the self-absorption that that implies are not to be satisfied because they remain unaware of their place in the human condition and, thus, mired in existential inauthenticity. The reader is left with the distinct impression that such people are constitutionally unable to come to know themselves and will, thus, continue their quests for power in the face of all contradiction.

Staff Sergeant Sam Croft has been described by many critics as the enlisted counterpart to General Cummings. He is the most violent of Mailer's soldiers. Mailer offers no definite explanation for Croft's nature; no one knows why he is the way he is (156). It is clear, though, that he is totally self-centered. Mailer closes the Sergeant's "Time Machine" portrait with an emphatic statement: "I HATE EVERYTHING WHICH IS NOT IN MYSELF" (164). He is a perfectionist who disdains lesser men. The closest thing he has to a friend is Sergeant Martinez, the platoon's expert scout, whose competence he appreciates. Like General Cummings, Croft believes in an ordered universe and in himself; he "had a deep unspoken belief that whatever made

things happen was on his side" (9). He can't articulate his conviction that men are in transit to become gods like the General does (323), but he feels it to be true. When he predicts Hennessey's death to himself, he feels certain that it will happen but cannot help remembering his failed premonition about the previous night's card game. The memory confuses and disgusts him. "His disgust came because he felt he could not trust such emotions, rather than from any conviction that they had no meaning at all" (29). Croft trusts that life has meaning, but rarely can he get at it. The fulfillment of his premonition about Hennessey "opened to Croft vistas of such omnipotence that he was afraid to consider it directly. All day the fact hovered about his head, tantalizing him with odd dreams and portents of power" (40). He wants the same thing the General wants—power—but he is unable to form a conscious plan. His quest is instinctive, for "*There was a crude unformed vision in his soul but he was rarely conscious of it*" (157).

Croft's belief in meaning and order serves him well in the ordered society that is the military. He is driven to obey orders and feels that disobeying or even resenting an order is immoral (440). His morality, like the General's, is a "power morality." Therefore, he must repress and rationalize away his failure to strictly follow Lieutenant Hearn's orders, a failure that results in the lieutenant's death. He convinces himself that the platoon must climb Mount Anaka in order to fulfill their mission, or else "the thing he had done with Hearn was wrong, and he had been bucking the Army, simply disobeying an order" (643). His resort to rationalization is indicative of Croft's flaw. He is unaware, as Burg has argued. He never can quite conceive of, never can quite comprehend, the meaning he is convinced the world bears.

As Hassan points out, "the aspiration to omnipotence—in Croft, in Cummings . . . is merely shown to be futile" (Encounter 93). Like Cummings, Croft needs to be in control. Robert Merrill argues that the "mountain becomes for Croft what his troops are for Cummings: the 'other' which because it resists his control must be molded to serve his will. Like Cummings, however, Croft is unable to control the circuits of chance" (Mailer 37). I would add that the platoon also acts as an "other" that resists Croft's control, although not very successfully. Furthermore, neither Croft nor Cummings is able to understand his failures. Both are defeated but both fail to draw the necessary conclusions from the experience; both are left feeling frustrated. Pizer discerns various quests for self-knowledge in the novel. In Croft's case, he maintains that the patrol is a "journey into self " for the sergeant (105),

> a journey into the primitive, animal, instinctive center of himself—a journey through a wild, unexplored, and difficult landscape to the "pure" and "austere" absolute center of his identity. Croft undertakes this journey under the pressure of a compulsive desire, but he is also fearful, since its successful completion will result in the nakedness of complete self-knowledge. (106)

Croft grows increasingly anxious as he climbs because he senses that he has embarked upon an "internal contest" that will determine "which pole of his nature would be successful" (699). Mailer leaves it to the reader to decide what the contesting poles of Croft's nature are: will or instinct? human or animal? controller or controlled? The results of Croft's failure are somewhat ambiguous too. They are threefold. First, when

the platoon finally returns to the beach to wait for their boat, Croft is troubled by the relief he feels deep within himself. “For that afternoon at least . . . Croft was rested by the unadmitted knowledge that he had found a limit to his hunger” (701). Secondly, on the landing craft as the platoon is returning to their bivouac, Croft comes to the realization that he needs the other men, that “he could not have gone without them. The empty hills would have eroded any man’s courage” (709). Yet, finally, what Mailer leaves us with is Croft’s failure. He has failed both as an existentialist and as a humanist, lacking both self-awareness and concern for others. The last we hear of him is that

> Croft kept looking at the mountain. He had lost it, had missed some tantalizing revelation of himself.
>
> Of himself and much more. Of life.
>
> Everything. (709)

One suspects that Croft’s hunger for power and control will soon be as strong as ever and that his acknowledgment of his need for others will be equally short-lived. I would argue that what he has “missed” is his humanity, his solidarity with the human condition. His ascent of the mountain is purely for his own gratification, despite his rationalization of it. He has the power to compel the platoon to accompany him, and he uses it, even to the point of threatening to kill any soldier who resists. In fact, Private Roth does die to satisfy Croft’s ambition. Ironically, Croft believes life has meaning, yet he resists the one thing that most Americans raised in and influenced by our republican and biblical traditions believe can truly make it meaningful—care for others.

Lieutenant Robert Hearn serves as a foil to both Cummings and Croft, although the General believes that deep down the lieutenant is just like himself. Mailer paints Hearn as an idealist who disdains others for not living up to his ideals—"He had said once, 'When I find the shoddy motive in them I'm bored. Then the only catch is how to say good-bye'" (79). Hearn values his "inviolate freedom" because he believes that it is what separates him from the herd of humanity and protects him from suffering "all the wants and sores that caught up everybody about him" (79). For Hearn, freedom is a matter of personal integrity. He holds that the only thing that is important is to "let no one in any ultimate issue ever violate your integrity" (326). Thus, after the General forces him to pick up a cigarette the General has tossed onto the floor, Hearn "lay face down on his cot, burning with shame and self-disgust and an impossible impotent anger" because he considers the test of wills with the General to have been "an ultimate issue" (326). It has been a display of pure power on Cummings' part, meant to deliberately humiliate Hearn, and he has failed to resist. Hearn feels that he has not stood up for his own values, for his belief in his own self-worth as an individual. The average reader might see this as an overreaction on Hearn's part, though; the issue seems more trivial than "ultimate," the price more severe than the point of honor warrants.

The General considers Hearn's ideals to be misguided, if not downright insincere. Hearn claims to be an egalitarian whose concern is that the enlisted men are treated fairly. When he realizes that the troops will hate him sooner or later despite what he does and that Croft is an effective leader because he is hated, he becomes depressed because the circumstances seem to prove the General's "fear ladder" perspective on life (506).

Yet, when Hearn actually has the opportunity to exercise power, to lead his platoon, he discovers that he enjoys it, that "There was an emotion in it somewhere, as sweet as anything he had ever known" (513). And always, even before he enlisted, there had been the "other thing," the "yearning," the "stirrings of the deeper urge," the "primal satisfaction," the "power that leaped at you, invited you" (350-53).

Podhoretz contends that the "world of *The Naked and the Dead* is one in which a varied group of clearly defined individuals are pitted in a very direct and simple way against two allied enemies—the army and nature." What these two enemies have in common is their power to overwhelm the individual "driven by a hunger for absolute freedom" (180). Podhoretz overlooks the fact that not all the characters "hunger for absolute freedom," yet they all are overwhelmed by nature. Nature, we know, mocks human freedom. Hearn recognizes this when he contemplates Mount Anaka—"He was gloomy, and as he stared through the glasses the mountain troubled him, roused his awe and then his fear. It was too immense, too powerful" (497). The army, though, being a human construct, appears to me to be a little less daunting, although "absolute freedom" is out of the question. Along these lines, Podhoretz argues that "The army, then, is evil and the individual caught in its grip has only two basic choices: he can either submit without resistance (and eventually be led into identifying himself with his persecutors) or he can try to maintain at least a minimum of spiritual independence" (182). Hearn chooses the latter. He opts to exercise what little freedom he has, deciding that "When they finally got back to their bivouac, if they ever did, he could turn in his commission. That was the thing he could do, that would be honest, true to himself" (584). This seems

to him to be his only recourse if he is to salvage his integrity. Yet, he is fully aware of the futility of the gesture. He thinks,

> For whatever reason, you had to keep resisting. You had to do things like giving up a commission.
>
> Hearn and Quixote. Bourgeois liberals. (586)

Of course, Croft leads Hearn into a fatal ambush before Hearn can put his resolve into action. Therefore, it is difficult to see Hearn as an existential hero because no meaningful act was consummated. One is left to wonder just how meaningful it would have been anyway because, in the final analysis, it was a purely self-centered act that he contemplated. No "other" would directly benefit from him resigning his commission and only in the abstract can it be seen as anything more than a gesture of defiance towards "power morality."

Mailer seems to be pessimistic about the future, judging from Hearn's meditations about his own future. Hearn expects that resigning his commission will win him no friends among either the officers or the enlisted, and he does not expect to learn anything more than that he can "fit into a fear ladder as well as anyone else." He muses, "There was a saying, 'It is better to be the hunted than the hunter,' and that had a meaning for him now, a value" (584). Indeed, although he does not realize it, he is the hunted, and Croft is the hunter. Hearn's analysis of Cummings (and by extension, Croft) is that if you grant him the premise that man is "a sonofabitch," then all the rest of his ideas follow logically from that (585). Hearn is not willing to grant the premise, though, and imagines himself resisting the fascist mentality to the end, even to the point of

becoming an anti-fascist terrorist, which act, if carried out, would indeed show he truly has concern for others. Yet, a few pages later, Mailer kills off Hearn through the machinations of Cummings' counterpart, Croft, which at that point in the novel seems to indicate that man is indeed a "sonofabitch" and that idealistic conceptions of human virtue are mere delusions. The novel does not end there, though, and further considerations will shed more light on Mailer's vision.

Just as critics see Croft as the enlisted counterpart of General Cummings, Lieutenant Hearn is frequently coupled with Private Red Valsen. One major difference between Hearn and Valsen is noticeable, though. Red is much more of a fatalist than the lieutenant. Hearn sees his resolved-upon action for the quixotic gesture that it would be, but he still believes that there is some efficacy in acting and some good in humankind. Red is a former Montana miner and hobo who lacks Hearn's formal education. His fatalism is summed up in his remark, "Aaah, you can only get killed once" (12). He is cynical, opining that to the Army "a man's no more important than a goddam cow" (199) and that there "damn sure ain't anything special about a man if he can smell as bad as he does when he's dead" (217). Yet, at heart Red is kind and considerate, but he holds his sympathy for his fellows in check because he "always curdled before emotion" (576). Mailer makes a point of Red's fatalism but undercuts it with repeated references to Hennessey's death. In that death Red finds himself detecting a subtle "pattern where there shouldn't be one" (39). This realization threatens to unhinge Red's outlook on life.

> Until Hennessey had been killed, Red had accepted all the deaths of the men he knew as something large and devastating and meaningless. . . . It

> was merely something that happened to somebody he knew, and Red had always let it go at that. But Hennessey's death had opened a secret fear. It was so ironic, so obvious, when he remembered the things Hennessey had said, that he found himself at the edge of a bottomless dread. (123)

Red takes refuge from the unknown dread in his fatalism, which protects him from the pain of caring. Nonetheless, even though he can say, "Aaah, everybody loses. . . . Nothing ever turns out the way you want it," Red still understands that human nature is optimistic. He sees that people tend to believe that everything will be "perfect in the end, they separated all the golden grains in the sand and looked at them, only at them—with a magnifying glass. He did it himself, and he had nothing to look forward to" (577). Mailer seems to reveal rays of hope for his characters from time to time, but they are eventually clouded over by depressing realities, human failures, and futility.

While Lieutenant Hearn can contemplate the nature of his power struggle with the General and can philosophically evaluate his situation, Red is much less capable of understanding his similar circumstance. He thinks, "A man had to take crap even if it was just by keeping his mouth shut. You don't last a month if you do everything you want, he told himself. And yet nothing was worth doing if you let yourself be pushed around. There was no way to figure that one out" (371). Red has no gesture that he can make. When he does take a stand in opposition to Croft to assert himself, he comes face to face with the barrel of a gun. It becomes literally a life or death choice for Red. This is a crucial incident in the novel. Red backs down, choosing life. However, Red is not the only one who is affected by the confrontation—"All of them felt a wretched

embarrassment. Each man was trying to forget the way he had been tempted to shoot Croft and had failed" (696). Power, or perhaps the will to use power, wins again, just as it did in the showdown between Cummings and Hearn. Mailer seems genuinely concerned about the effect that succumbing to corrupt power has on people, individually or en masse. We can read Red's evaluation of the episode.

> He was licked. That was all there was to it. At the base of his shame was an added guilt. He was glad it was over, glad the long contest with Croft was finished, and he could obey orders with submission, without feeling that he must resist. This was the extra humiliation, the crushing one. Could that be all, was that the end of all he had done in his life? Did it always come to laying down a load? (696)

Submission to authority brings certain comforts, Mailer seems to say, but not without questions, too.

By way of contrast, earlier in the novel Mailer presents Private Toglio. Toglio is totally submissive, and he even believes that the face the General shows to the troops is his true face (104). To Toglio's way of thinking, Red is too independent. He thinks, "Where would you be if everybody was like him? You'd get nowhere. It took co-operation in everything. Something like this invasion was planned, it was efficient, down to a timetable. You couldn't run trains if the engineer took off when he felt like it" (27). The railroad reference appears to be reminiscent of fascist efficiency under Mussolini, who was often praised for getting the trains to run on time. Toglio's version of "co-operation" is simply submission to authority. People like Hearn and Valsen have a

different definition of cooperation, though, one that is more democratic. Mailer appears to be sympathetic to the definition held by Red and the lieutenant, but he also seems to question whether or not such a conception will ever be realized. Clearly, an individual alone is powerless—Croft had a gun to back up his power and the General had the full weight of the military justice system behind him. Mailer seems to suggest that a certain heroism can be achieved if one can only find the will to act cooperatively. Red analyzes his situation and that of modern man.

> You carried it alone as long as you could, and then you weren't strong enough to take it any longer. You kept fighting everything, and everything broke you down, until in the end you were just a little goddam bolt holding on and squealing when the machine went too fast.
>
> He had to depend on other men, he needed other men now, and he didn't know how to go about it. Deep within him were the first nebulae of an idea, but he could not phrase it. If they all stuck together . . .
>
> Aaah, fug. All they knew was to cut each other's throats. There were no answers, there wasn't even any pride a man could have at the end. (703-04)

People, Mailer implies, are too devoted to self-interest to consider truly working together for the common good. American individualism lends itself to self-assertion and the quest for power more readily than to selflessness. Thus, "power morality" wins out. Those with power will use it to attain their own ends, and those without power will be forced to aid and abet the powerful or be crushed, perhaps both. However, I will argue

that Mailer hedges on this conclusion, that he does hold out some hope to his readers in the persons of Privates Goldstein and Ridges.

Goldstein and Ridges seem to be minor characters throughout most of the novel. In fact, Ossie Ridges does not even rate his own "Time Machine" portrait. However, I believe they ultimately convey one of Mailer's central points. Ridges is an illiterate, hard-working, Bible-belt farm boy. Joey Goldstein is a high school and welding school graduate, a Brooklyn Jew with a wife, a son, and a dream of owning his own welding shop. Ridges is staunch, stoical, and dependable. Like everyone in the novel, his character was formed by his environment. Mailer reveals the essence of Ridges in the following passage.

> "I'll tell you, Ossie," his father had said, "a man works and he toils, he puts in his good sweat tryin' to pull out a livin' from the land, and when all his work is done, if the good Lord sees it fitten, it's taken away in a storm." Perhaps that was the deepest truth in Ridges's nature. (97)

While Ridges is an unquestioning, quiet man, Goldstein is much more gregarious, always ready to converse if the opportunity presents itself. Mailer describes Goldstein as possessing an "ingenuous nature," as a man who is "always trusting" and who "never became completely disheartened. Essentially he was an active man, a positive man" (448). But Goldstein is prone to occasional fits of despondency during which he becomes almost fatalistic, asking himself, "Oh, what does it all mean? What are we born for, why do we work? You're born and then you die, is that all there is to it? . . . You're born and then you die. The knowledge somehow made him feel superior" (473).

Furthermore, he is constantly being disillusioned by men seeming friendly one day and snubbing him the next. He bemoans the fact that he always has "to be nicer than the next fellow" (633), but it comes naturally to him, as when he is the first to offer his own blanket to keep Wilson warm (544). Goldstein's grandfather told him that "Israel is the heart of all nations" (672), and by extension Goldstein can be seen as the heart, the conscience, the life of Mailer's novel. On a similar note, Ridges is described by Goldstein as the "salt of the earth" (704). There is something fundamental, something basic, about the role these two soldiers play in the novel.

Goldstein and Ridges remain minor characters until they are suddenly brought to the forefront when Wilson is wounded and they are assigned to the detail that will carry him back to the beach. They are coupled with Sergeant Brown and Corporal Stanley for the journey, but neither non-com is up to the task. Brown and Stanley both fall by the wayside with a good ten miles of hills and jungle still to be traversed. But Goldstein and Ridges stumble onward; beset by mind-numbing fatigue, they refuse to abandon Wilson. "Wilson was a burden they had to carry; it would go on and on and they could never let him go. They did not understand this, but comprehension was lurking behind their fatigue" (646). Wilson dies, though, before they reach the beach.

Still, they carry him, until nature intervenes and his body is torn from their grasp by treacherous rapids. They give chase down the river until, finally, the body is swept into a swamp and lost. Their ordeal is all but over at that juncture, and the effect is profound. All the ups and downs of their lives brought them to this point. For Ridges, this experience is the ultimate test of his exceedingly strong Christian faith.

> Wilson would not have his burial, but somehow that was not important now. What counted was that he had carried this burden through such distances of space and time, and it had washed away in the end. All his life he had labored without repayment. . . . Ridges felt the beginning of a deep and unending bitterness. It was not fair. . . . What kind of God could there be who always tricked you in the end?
>
> The practical joker.
>
> He wept out of bitterness and longing and despair; he wept from exhaustion and failure and the shattering naked conviction that nothing mattered. (681-82)

And for Goldstein, the experience was equally religious.

> All the suffering of the Jews came to nothing. No sacrifices were paid, no lessons were learned. It was all thrown away, all statistics in the cruel wastes of history. All the ghettos, all the soul cripplings, all the massacres and pogroms, the gas chambers, lime kilns—all of it touched no one, all of it was lost. It was carried and carried and carried, and when it finally grew too heavy it was dropped. That was all there was to it. . . . There was nothing in him at the moment, nothing but a vague anger, a deep resentment, and the origins of a vast hopelessness. (682)

But humans are resilient, Mailer seems to say. We do not hear much more about Goldstein and Ridges until all the men are in the landing craft on their way back to headquarters. Then we discover that Goldstein considers Ridges to be his buddy now,

that there is "an understanding between Ridges and him." He calls Ridges a "good man" and sees something "enduring" in him (704), and the reader is inclined to say the same about Goldstein. One feels that the two have known the depth of despair but have been able to return to life and go on with it. They arrived at the point of despair as a result of their concern for Wilson, for an "other." This concern, which is rooted in their biblical traditions, constitutes the kernel of their natures; it is what motivates them to endure, to keep going, to keep living despite the absurdity of the whole experience. Goldstein and Ridges are the only two soldiers who are returning from the patrol feeling as though they have gained something. Everyone else is still carrying a burden of guilt, shame, embarrassment, or loss.

In The Naked and the Dead Mailer has created a naturalistic environment in which his characters, consciously or not, search for the meanings of their lives. Ehrlich has pointed out the overwhelming social determinism of Mailer's "Time Machine" passages, while almost all of Mailer's critics have identified the overall sense of futility and impotence that permeates the novel. On the island of Anopopei, chance is more likely to decide the outcome of human endeavors than any human planning. For example, the battle is won through the chance destruction of the main Japanese supply dump, and the platoon's ascent of Mount Anaka is thwarted by their chance encounter with a hornet's nest. Nonetheless, the very fact that the men keep going, do not give up and die, indicates the depths of hope available to the human spirit and the powerful influence on the men of their biblical and republican traditions. At novel's end, Mailer depicts the platoon as possessing conflicting emotions. There is the inevitable letdown

and introspection that follows any great undertaking, and Mailer says that they all feel pretty much the same way.

> The patrol was over and yet they had so little to anticipate. The months and years ahead were very palpable to them. They were still on the treadmill; the misery, the ennui, the dislocated horror. . . . Things would happen and time would pass, but there was no hope, no anticipation. There would be nothing but the deep cloudy dejection that overcast everything. (702)

However, according to Burg, the men transform the dejection into an appreciation of the absurdity of life, and they begin to sing "Roll me over in the clover" (707). Burg argues that this song reveals Mailer's thesis. He writes, "The song, like the fate of Sisyphus, is the absurd truth. The repeated refrain with its repeated action is like the wave and its wake, like the ascent and descent of Mt. Anaka. Life is simply a roundelay" (399-400). Perhaps, but Sisyphus, at least in Albert Camus' version, possesses an awareness of his fate that is redemptive, validating. To credit any of the soldiers of Recon platoon with a true awareness of his condition is difficult. Camus contends that there is "no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (121). Maybe Lieutenant Hearn possesses the proper awareness and scorn to be seen as existentially heroic, but he is never afforded the opportunity to act on his awareness, so it remains theoretical. Goldstein and Ridges achieve a sort of Judeo-Christian heroism with their self-sacrificing ordeal. They certainly experience the absurdity of life and feel it deeply, and they exhibit remarkable self-control, self-command in being able to persevere in

carrying their burden. Their selflessness is unmatched by anyone else in the novel. Most notable, though, is their scorn for any thought of abandoning Wilson, of failing in their duty toward another human being. In this sense, I think it might be possible to call them existential heroes because they possess the power of will necessary to endure, a power that is intimately entwined with self-image and self-esteem. Ultimately, though, I must argue that even Goldstein and Ridges, in all their humanity, are merely acting out their social conditioning—one Jewish and the other Bible-belt Christian. There seems to be no real evidence that either of them has a true existential awareness of his place in the human condition or the ability to make free, fully conscious choices.

The war novels of James Jones differ from Mailer's work in that they present an even bleaker vision of the world. Whereas Mailer leaves readers with an inkling of hope, Jones, when all is said and done, leaves us feeling that the individual is totally insignificant. James Jones was born and raised in Robinson, Illinois. The son of an alcoholic father and a socially ambitious mother, his home life was tumultuous, which led him to become a rebellious loner (MacShane 8-9). Unable to afford college, he enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1939. He served at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. While he was stationed there, his mother died of congestive heart failure, and his father committed suicide (MacShane 33, 41). Not long after, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and Schofield, an event Jones describes in From Here to Eternity. He subsequently shipped out with his unit and ended up fighting on Guadalcanal. He received minor wounds, but

was eventually returned stateside as a result of an old ankle injury. Like Mailer, Jones drew upon his military experiences in his writing. Many people, myself included, consider Jones to be the premier novelist of World War II. His trilogy of war novels, From Here to Eternity, The Thin Red Line, and Whistle (some would include his short novel The Pistol and call it a quartet), have often been cited as his best work. He also wrote several short stories based on the war and authored the text of WWII, a collection of graphic art from the war.

This study will focus on From Here to Eternity and The Thin Red Line because they are Jones's most renowned works, and they are quite representative of his ideas about individuals in the modern world. From Here to Eternity was Jones's first novel, and it was wildly successful commercially, while generally receiving critical acclaim as well. John Lardner calls it a "slovenly, ferocious book" in his New Yorker review (117). Many critics took Jones to task for his "slovenly" grammar, particularly for his conceit of not using apostrophes, but most were able to see beyond that and applauded the power and uniqueness of the novel. Lardner, for example, writes, "the English language is capable of absorbing, and condoning, a good deal of abuse from a man who has something to say and wants very desperately to say it" (117). The book is unique in its portrait of the Regular Army—the army that existed before conscription and the war turned it into a civilian army. Leslie A. Fiedler finds that "its value as literature, slight, intermittent but undeniable, lies in its redeeming for the imagination aspects of regular army life never before exploited" (253). From Here to Eternity won the National Book Award for Jones in 1952. The Thin Red Line was published nine years later, and while

not as commercially successful as Eternity, it was favorably reviewed by most critics. The Thin Red Line is the only novel of the trilogy that actually deals with combat, and it pulls no punches in its treatment. Both novels have been lauded for their realism while some scholars have also remarked elements of naturalism, romanticism, and existentialism in the works.

Lardner finds From Here to Eternity to be the "most realistic and forceful" novel he has read about the army (117). Jeffrey Walsh also comments on the novel's "realism," declaring that its "naturalistically rendered scenes of internal army violence are among the most brutal in Second World War fiction and are conveyed in a tone of genuine outrage" (142). The Thin Red Line is also realistic, both in its portrayal of the soldiers' lives and in the attitudes towards life of those soldiers. Novelist Saul Bellow contends that "In apprehending what is real, Jones' combat soldiers learn a bitter and leveling truth and in their realism revenge themselves on the slothful and easy civilian conception of the Self" (162). Although he later goes on to claim that he really does not like the word "realism" (54), Jones himself, in his Paris Review interview with Nelson W. Aldrich, Jr., proclaims his realistic intent. He says, "I don't think that combat has ever been written about truthfully; it has been described in terms of bravery and cowardice. I won't even accept these words as terms of human reference any more. And, anyway, hell, they don't even apply to what, in actual fact, modern warfare has become" (52).

Walsh is not the only one to see Jones's war novels as naturalistic. Speaking of Prewitt in Eternity, Peter G. Jones finds that he "retains in triumph over the naturalistic crush of events his invincible sense of human dignity" (44). This deterministic vein that

runs through the novels is also mentioned by David L. Stevenson, who refers to the "meaningless world" and "senseless universe" in which the soldiers dwell without any real control over their own lives (206). Furthermore, John W. Aldridge remarks that in Jones's combat episodes, "questions of personal morality are shown to be meaningless. Courage and cowardice are wholly arbitrary responses dependent on chance and physical circumstances" (Last 31). Finally, Jones biographer George Garrett observes that in The Thin Red Line

> there is no such thing as rational cause and effect, except insofar as individual characters, themselves mere fragments, insist on perceiving some kind of order in chaos. In fact, from an individual point of view, there is only accident, pure luck, good or bad. Men and women live by accident and die by accident. Nothing they plan or do really makes any difference at all. (136)

Still other critics have noticed elements of romanticism and existentialism in Jones's work.

Many have commented on the romanticism that is evident in From Here to Eternity and is missing in The Thin Red Line. Peter G. Jones maintains that "Prewitt's astonishing intransigence is compounded of the tragic flaw, religious guilt, and a new element: he personifies the irrational romantic asserting himself against an increasingly monolithic technological society" (44). Richard P. Adams finds Jones to be a "thorough-going and reasonably sophisticated romantic writer" (206). He argues that Eternity depicts the "conflict between the mechanistic world view, based on the materialistic

assumptions that dominate modern popular thinking, and the organic world view that characterizes romanticism in all its phases" (207). The romanticizing of Warden and Prewitt in Eternity came to be viewed as a flaw by Jones himself, according to Steven R. Carter. Carter argues that Jones had good reason to be bothered by this because "Such romanticizing likely does interfere with the theme of spiritual evolution, because it has led many people to view Prewitt as a tragic hero rather than a too-proud man needing to learn humility and compassion" (63).

Some commentators make existential comparisons and see a certain degree of the absurd in Jones's work. Peter G. Jones holds that Prewitt in Eternity is desperate to find some meaning, some order in life. Jones writes, "He is understandably troubled by the realization that he is trapped in a world he did not make, in a life for which he may be held responsible. Like Camus's Sisyphus, Prewitt's only choice is to be either inactive or inert" (35). Edmond L. Volpe goes so far, too far in my opinion, as to call The Thin Red Line "Jones's existential novel." According to Volpe, it

> strips away all inherited concepts and all illusions, metaphysical or social, about man's inherent dignity and being. Atheistic or religious, brave or cowardly, these men are equally vulnerable to the indiscriminate governance of chance. Even those incalculable forces within man which make him a coward or a hero under fire are beyond the individual's control. . . . Circumstances create values, and a man's sense of himself comes from his actions in these circumstances. Each man contains within

> his being the potential for every human virtue or vice, heroism and cowardice, compassion and sadism. (111-12)

Furthermore, Aldridge speaks to the issues I have been discussing when he points out that in The Thin Red Line "the individual disappears into the bureaucratic collective, and the issue becomes not honor but survival. . . . Men die in combat for no reason or for absurd reasons" (Last 31). Finally, David L. Stevenson seems to concur with Aldridge, commenting that "Jones's characters are totally involved in the impersonal sensuality of the pain and the mutilation of war where existence is viewed as a grotesque dance of death, taking place in a senseless universe" (206). Thus, we see that Jones's war novels have much in common with other twentieth-century war novels in that they explore the fate of the individual in the modern world—a meaningless, absurd world that is increasingly mechanical and inhuman and that can be described in both naturalistic and faintly existential terms.

The experiences of particular individuals in a military context have often been seen to have universal validity, to be applicable to and representative of the fate of all individuals in modern society. Jones biographer Frank MacShane holds that "For Jones, the battlefield was a microcosm of a world gone mad" (201). In a similar vein, Robie Macauley sees Eternity as a typical American novel of "social protest." "Substitute captains and colonels for unscrupulous employers, enlisted men for oppressed workers, the peculiarities of the U.S. Army for the peculiarities of an inhuman industrial machine and you have it" (526-27). Jerry H. Bryant agrees with Macauley and adds that "the oppressive quality of the military society is not confined to a unique and temporary

situation such as war, but extends to the whole fabric of American life" (122). Leslie A. Fiedler, in discussing Jones's documentation of regular army life in Eternity, finds that the book makes "certain of those aspects (the stockade, for instance, our homegrown concentration camp) symbols of the human situation everywhere" (253). Similarly, Peter G. Jones says that "Prewitt in the army personifies man in the modern world." He goes on to laud Jones's "achievement," saying that its importance will grow as the years pass because "he expressed, almost a generation before it became a fact of American life, the crisis between the individual and the institutions that dominate society" (44). That "crisis" is what we are examining. We have seen that Norman Mailer's war novel left us with the image of an individual who was, by-and-large, thoroughly frustrated and impotent, albeit possessed of an indomitable spirit. Jones offers a slightly different picture in From Here to Eternity and then reprises and rethinks it in The Thin Red Line.

Jones's first novel is essentially the study of the struggle of the individual to maintain some semblance of individual integrity without being swallowed up by the system, in this case the army. In a deterministic universe the integrity of the individual, Jones seems to say, is achieved by making choices that are consistent with one's conception of self, even though one can see the absurdity and meaninglessness of the expected results. Robert E. Lee Prewitt and First Sergeant Milton Warden are the main characters through whom Jones explores his theme, but other characters, including the women, convey other facets of the problem. By the time Jones writes The Thin Red Line, though, his estimate of individuality seems to have regressed to the point at which the individual has become, for all intents and purposes, insignificant. Critics have often cited

C-for-Charlie Company as the corporate main character of that novel. From Here to Eternity sets up the conflict in the first chapter. Prewitt has decided to transfer from the Bugle Corps to straight duty in an infantry company as a matter of principle when he, the best bugler, is passed over for the First Bugler's position in favor of an inferior bugler. To Prewitt the choice is a matter of "deciding right," that is, a matter of acting to maintain one's integrity. For Prew, "It was like with a virgin, one wrong decision was enough to do it; after one you were not ever the same again" (8). The irony is that once one decides "right," one must continually make decisions. There is no rest from deciding, as there would be if one were to simply conform (7). Sergeant Warden, on the other hand, has an equally strong sense of individual integrity. However, as Ellen Serlen Uffen points out, Warden "has survived because he recognizes there is no way to win. Instead, he has learned that to retain some amount of identity and self-respect, it is necessary to appear to adhere to the system" (143). Warden makes a game of outwitting the system, whereas Prewitt seems incapable of such subtleties.

Ironically, Prewitt acquired his strict code of personal integrity from the mass medium of the movies. He "had only been a green kid but he had learned from all those pictures to believe in fighting for the underdog, against the top dog. He had even made himself a philosophy of life out of it" (275). Anyone who has seen some key films of the 1930s will recognize the image of the lone individual struggling against powerful social forces or institutions aiming to mold the individualist—or break him in the process. Prew has embraced an idealism that is rare and exceedingly difficult to live up to and which leaves him with only two options: resist as an individual or conform as an

automaton. He does show some awareness, though, of the solitariness of his position. Thinking of his new company, he realizes that "G Company was a single personality formed by many men, but he was not a part of it" (71). Jones's constant theme of social coercion is here demonstrated by the peer pressure that turns the company into a "single personality." Also, he recognizes his isolation as he sits on a porch listening to the family of his "shackjob" fixing supper; he feels, "again the indignation he had felt before, the sense of loss and the aloneness, the utter defenselessness that was each man's lot, sealed up in his bee cell from all the others in the world" (89). Jones uses the "bee" image again later when Prew is contemplating his budding relationship with the prostitute Lorene. He thinks,

> in this world, any more, with things like they are, the hardest of all hard things was to know the real from the illusion, to meet one other human being breath to breath without the prefabricated sound-proofed walls of modern sanitation always in between and know in meeting that this was this human and not this human's momentary role; in this world that was the hardest, because in this world, he thought, each bee out of his own thorax makes the wax for his own cell, to protect his own private stock of honey, but I have broken through, just once, this one time only. Or, at least, . . . I think I have. (263)

Before anything comes of that relationship, though, Prewitt has other problems to face back in the company.

Boxing and the jockstrap mentality of the company are Prewitt's downfall. He has decided "right" that he will not box, partly because he blinded a man and partly because he promised his mother on her deathbed that he would not hurt anyone without just cause. To overcome his resistance to boxing, the company begins giving Prewitt the "treatment," a form of harsh and overt harassment designed to pressure him into complying with their wishes. After initially thinking he can outlast them because he feels capable of taking all they can dish out, Prew comes to realize the futility of his situation. He analyzes it this way,

> But this now is free will. Your own free will, thats doing this. Not them thats doing this. They are merely offering your free will a free choice. Kindly but logically, seriously but without malice, a free choice for your free will. . . .
>
> Now if we reduce these fractions we have on the one hand, go out for boxing; and, on the other hand, we have go out for the Stockade. Since you are an artistic bugler (instead of an artistic fighter . . .) we can cancel out the first. So, reducing still further, we have 1) go out for the Stockade; or, 2) go out for the Stockade. The choice is up to you, a rather restricted choice but nevertheless a choice, presented to your free will. (274-75)

Still, it seems to me that Prewitt considers himself able to make free choices throughout the rest of the novel. He seems to view this choiceless choice as atypical, not the way of the world. Ultimately, he takes what can be called an existential stand, accomplishing an act of Sartrean good faith because his sense of fair play will not allow him even to accept

an assignment as a cook that is offered to him and that would put him out of harm's way. Warden and the mess sergeant, Stark, see this as pure stubbornness, but to Prewitt, his actions are "right"; therefore, he will lose his integrity if he hides from the consequences of his decisions. Stark tells him,

> you're looking at it all bassackwards, you're going on the idea of the world as people say it is, instead of as it really is. In this world, no man really has any rights at all. Except what rights he can grab holt of and hang on to. And usually the only way he can get *them* is by taking them away from somebody else. (210)

Later, the question as to whether or not a man, a soldier has any rights at all is raised again. Prewitt believes that what he does when he is off-duty is his own business. His squad leader, Chief Choate, is not so sure. Prewitt and his buddy Maggio see the Chief 's point and universalize it. Chief Choate says,

> "It aint a question of right or wrong, it's a question of fack. But there is awys been a question if there is any outside duty hours for a soljer, whether the *soljer* has the right to be a man."
>
> [Prewitt answers] "And its gettin more and more that way lately, in this world all over."
>
> "And not ony in the Army," Maggio put in. (266)

Here we see Jones's characters using warfare and the military as a metaphor for the world at large, which is exactly what I am arguing that Jones himself is doing. Moreover,

from this exchange we can perceive that Prewitt's idealism and "heroic" existential stand are not thoughtless or ignorant; he understands the modern world.

Another discussion of individual rights in the novel centers around suicide. The subject arises because the newly-made sergeant Bloom puts his rifle in his mouth and blows off the top of his head. While contemplating the act, Bloom broods, "All his life he had tried to act, to do, to be strong and forceful enough to be able to point to something just once and say *I* did this, to just once commit one irrevocable act through his own willful motivation." He feels powerless, feeling that always "it was outside influences that governed him and he was blown by chance, by pure happenstance, coincidence, one way or the other, without having anything to say about it" (572). And so he makes the irrevocable decision of pulling the trigger, but in the last instant, Jones writes, Bloom tries to yell, "I take it back! I was ony kiddin!" (573). Of course, no one particularly misses Bloom, and the main reaction is disgust at the extra work he has caused. Bloom's self-pitying thoughts and ultimate indecision contrast sharply with the discussion of the event that occurs later in the stockade. While Prewitt and the other prisoners are having difficulty understanding why someone would kill himself, Jack Malloy puts the act in the context of rights and freedom. Malloy says,

> Every man has the right to kill himself. . . . It's the only absolute inviolable right a man does have, the only act he can commit which nobody else has a sayso in, the one irrevocable deed he can execute without outside influence. The old Anglo-Saxon term of 'freedom' came from that: 'free' and 'doom,' with the idea that every man always had that last final resort

> that nobody could take away from him, if he wanted to avail himself of it. (585)

Malloy maintains that suicide is the only right or freedom anyone has. Prewitt, though, says he does not want to believe that. Ultimately, although one could argue just how conscious the decision is, Prewitt does exercise his freedom to die rather than return to the stockade. He stops and turns to face the guns, instinctively it seems, rather than either surrendering or taking the chance of being shot in the back.

What view of Prewitt and his actions are readers supposed to take? To Ben W. Griffith, Jr., "Prewitt is the folk hero standing alone against the organized system, the individual vs. the advent of the Age of Regimentation" (46). I am sure many readers have indeed seen Prewitt in this light, and it would seem to reflect Prewitt's own conception of himself as the fighter for the underdog. However, at heart, Prew was a soldier, a thirty-year-man, and it is hard to see him as anti-regimentation, *per se*. Volpe refers to the "masculine life" depicted in the novel and speculates that the army might be the "final frontier of rugged individualism" threatened only by "the bureaucracy represented by the officer class, and women" (108). Similarly, Jeffrey Walsh finds that Jones's men "move stoically through a tough environment, and in the best of them, such as Prewitt or Maggio, according to Jones's narrator, survives the pioneer spirit, a disappearing element of the American tradition" (143). These astute perceptions seem to be founded in the American mythology of the rugged individual, the pioneer defying all odds and continually moving west to find the freedom to act without constraint. Walsh goes on to say,

> The Stockade chapters stand out as among the most memorable in the whole of Second World War fiction, and are imaginatively intended as a vindication of Prewitt's rebellious attitude, since they show in its clearest form the oppression of the enlisted man by the discipline of fear. Here the novelist makes his most profound affirmation of human endurance and heroism in his portrayal of the men of Number Two Barracks, the élite who defy their punishment and emerge undefeated. (144)

Yet, despite painting Prewitt and his friends in the stockade as heroic individuals, Walsh contends that Prewitt's "rebellion is . . . extreme, almost to the extent of being masochistic" (145). I have to disagree with that opinion, though. Prewitt's stand may seem extreme, but although rare, it is not unheard of for a person to take a firm stand on principle at great cost.

On the other hand, while James R. Giles refers to Prewitt as a "quixotic young man" (43), and Volpe speaks of his "quixotic struggle," Volpe does call Prewitt's story an "eloquent paean to a concept of individualism rapidly becoming anachronistic in an increasingly bureaucratic society," which sounds about right to me (109). Prewitt's choiceless choice is increasingly familiar to individuals engaged in a zero-sum game with modern mass culture, and fewer and fewer individuals faced with such a "choice" think the way Prewitt does, I believe. Furthermore, Ihab Hassan contends that Prewitt "stands as an emblem of antipower. Recalcitrance is the badge of his heroism—and his victimization" (Radical 86). Likewise, Peter G. Jones maintains that "Refusing to surrender his individual prerogatives, Prewitt retains in triumph over the naturalistic

crush of events his invincible sense of human dignity. He remains to the end unconvinced that 'what a man is don't mean anything at all.'" (44). In my opinion, Prewitt is similar to the likes of Dos Passos's John Andrews and Hemingway's Frederic Henry in that he is true to himself. Nonetheless, in his story it is hard to see any real concern for or solidarity with an "other" or any real awareness of his place in the human condition. He is a good friend to Maggio, although he does not go to his aid when the MPs are beating him, and he does avenge Blues Berry's death. But these acts seem to have more to do with Prewitt's image of himself than they do with any existential concern. Clearly, something in Prewitt's tale strikes a chord in American hearts. We want to see Prewitt as a tragic hero, but it seems doubtful that such a conception was Jones's intent. His contrasting portrait of Sergeant Warden seems to me to be more in line with Jones's own attitudes, judging from his personal life and his other novels.

First of all, Jones clearly states Warden's opinion of Prewitt's idealism—"what was it to you [Milt Warden] if some damned son of a bitching stupid fool of an antediluvian got himself beheaded by a progressive world by going around in a dream world and trying to live up to a romantic, backward ideal of individual integrity?" (288). Warden himself has his own personal brand of integrity, "his own private, self-constructed line of equity" (82). This is evidenced in the way he assigns Prewitt to work details. Warden always assigns Prewitt the worst detail if he shows up in the duty formation in a particular spot but never if he is not in that place. Warden often plays little games with himself where he sets the rules and strictly abides by them. This is one way he manages to cope with the assault upon individuality that is the army. Another

coping technique is his penchant for manipulating the company commander so that, in essence, Warden rules the company. Sometimes, as another little game, he tries to influence the captain's decisions just to see if he can (288-89). Unlike Prewitt, Warden never openly challenges the system; he always works within it or around it. He and Prewitt are very much alike in some ways, though. Both are thirty-year-men and excellent soldiers. Both are also acutely aware of the difficulties of communication with another person. Jones describes Warden comforting Karen Holmes, "'There,' he said helplessly. 'There. There,' feeling the absurdity, the oppressive impossibility of any human being trying to communicate with and understand another's mind in a life where nothing was ever what it seemed to be" (124).

Warden is aware also that the army is an assault on his individuality, but he devises ways to even the slate. When he decides to pay a visit to Captain Holmes's home to seduce the captain's wife, he does it

> not as vengeance, or even retribution, but as an expression of himself, to regain the individuality that Holmes and all the rest of them, unknowing, had taken from him. And he understood suddenly why a man who has lived his whole life working for a corporation might commit suicide simply to express himself, would foolishly destroy himself because it was the only way to prove his own existence. (107)

Much to his surprise, he falls in love with Karen Holmes, and this turns out to be a major test of his personal integrity. In order for her to leave her husband and marry Warden, Warden must become an officer because she refuses to move down in the

world. Warden goes so far as to take the test and receive a commission before he tears it up, refusing to be an officer. He tells Karen, ". . . I looked at them, Ross and Culpepper and Cribbage and the rest of them, and I saw what they were—I couldn't do it" (824). To accept would have been a break with his own self-image; refusing the commission, though, was empowering. "From the day he turned down his commission Warden had had G Company wrapped and tied and stamped with the Indian sign the way he used to kid himself he had it under Holmes, but hadnt" (836).

Warden is a realist, to counter the romantic portrait of Prewitt, as is the mess sergeant, Stark, who worked the system to get his kitchen, which is his comfort zone. The two main female characters, Karen Holmes and Lorene (Alma Schmidt), are also more realistic than Prew. Karen will continue to manipulate her husband to get what she wants, while always remaining on the lookout for a better situation. Lorene will use her beauty and the position her earnings can buy to find a secure niche for herself. Both women, like Warden and Stark, will strive to work within the system and try to manipulate the system to work for them, which fact helps demonstrate the fundamental incompatibility between individual and community we have so often seen in this study. Prewitt, on the other hand, is uncompromising. Although correct in his assessment of the system, he accomplishes nothing by rigidly opposing it. Still, that readers and critics, myself included, are reluctant to criticize Prewitt too harshly is interesting, as there seems to be a certain heroism associated with sticking to one's principles that it is hard not to admire.

Whereas individuals are in the foreground in From Here to Eternity, the company itself, C-for-Charlie Company, is the focus of The Thin Red Line. Prewitt's company, Company G, is divided into jockstraps and non-jockstraps and is ruled, primarily, by the whims of its commander, Captain Holmes. Thus, all the noncoms are jockstraps. C-for-Charlie Company is in a combat situation, though, and such arbitrary methods of assigning rank are quickly supplanted by necessity and proven ability. Holmes tries to control Prewitt through fear, as advised by General Slater. Slater's philosophy is reminiscent of General Cummings' point of view in The Naked and the Dead. Essentially, Slater believes in the same "fear ladder" concept that Mailer's General espoused. According to Slater, "Modern armies, like every other brand of modern society, must be governed and controlled by fear. The lot of modern man has become what I call 'perpetual apprehension'" (342). He presents a vision of the future that is almost identical to that envisioned by Cummings—an extension of the fear principle by which the many are ruled and dominated by the few (340-47).

In The Thin Red Line, First Sergeant Welsh, the counterpart of Eternity's Warden, echoes Slater's vision when he tells the mess sergeant, Storm, "There aint any choice. There's no choice left for anybody. And it aint only here, with us. It's everywhere. And it aint going to get any better. This war's just the start. You understand that" (79). James Jones makes it abundantly clear that what is just starting is the reduction of human beings to insignificant ciphers. He hints at such at the end of Eternity when Lieutenant Ross tells Warden that "One soldier more, or less, don't matter much. . . . Production is what wins

wars" (806). Elsewhere, Jones writes that modern war is machine war and that the combatant with the best industry will win.

> But men had to die or be maimed to prove it. Men had to die at the wheels or triggers of the machines.
>
> It could even be worked out mathematically: *n* number of men had to be invested, and *x* number had to die, in order for objective *y* to be reached, and finale *z* achieved. That was the horrible, true meaning of anonymity to the soldier. (WWII 150)

In The Thin Red Line Jones hammers away at this theme of the insignificance of man, time and again. However, his characters continually attempt to assert their individuality, even in the face of their own recognition of their condition.

Welsh says of his clerk that "Fife had not yet learned—if he ever would—that his life and himself, his He, didn't mean a goddamned thing to the world in general, and never would" (25). But Welsh is frequently wrong in his assessments of people. Fife, early in the novel, is observing the aerial attack on the transport ships that had delivered C-for-Charlie to Guadalcanal. He is smart enough to see that what is at play is a simple "mathematical equation" of cost and effect. That is, how many expensive planes are worth losing to sink an even more expensive ship? He is also smart enough to realize that the men in the machines are unimportant, and that "very idea itself, and what it implied, struck a cold blade of terror into Fife's essentially defenseless vitals, a terror both of unimportance, his unimportance, and of powerlessness: his powerlessness. He had no control or sayso in any of it" (40). Fife and Welsh are not the only ones intelligent

enough to see the truth. Private, ultimately Lieutenant, Bell often muses about the war, and he realizes that industrial production is what wins wars. He also realizes that

> *Some* men would survive, but no *one* individual man *could* survive. It was a discrepancy in methods of counting. The whole thing was too vast, too complicated, too technological for any one individual man to count in it. Only collections of men counted, only communities of men, only *numbers* of men. (230)

Indeed, we see at the end of the novel that C-for-Charlie Company is embarking for New Georgia. The Company has survived to fight again—but not with the same faces. It now consists of a boatload of new recruits led by a handful of veterans. Nonetheless, all the historical accounts will speak of C-for-Charlie as one ongoing, continuous entity. Not only did the individual not count, but as Storm says, a man is no more than "a tool with its serial number of manufacture stamped right on it" (356). Even nature, in the form of the jungle, knows the insignificance of the individual—"Almost invisible in the rain, it loomed there, alien, supremely confident, making them aware of it even when they could not see it, a fact of nature like a mountain or an ocean and equally as ominous to the human ego" (52). Finally, the initial company commander, Captain Stein, contemplating his role, thinks,

> It was a horrifying vision: all of them doing the same identical thing, all of them powerless to stop it, all of them devoutly and proudly believing themselves to be free individuals. It expanded to include the scores of nations, the millions of men, doing the same on thousands of hilltops

> across the world. And it didn't stop there. It went on. It was the concept—concept? the fact; the reality—of the modern State in action. (215)

He hits on the irony of it all—all of them think they are "free individuals." Yet, clearly, the soldier, representative of the individual in modern industrial society, is at the mercy of both natural and social forces that threaten to overwhelm him.

Jones elects Bell to fully state the irony. Bell considers his fellows,

> They thought they were men. They all thought they were real people. They really did. How funny. They thought they made decisions and ran their own lives, and proudly called themselves free individual human beings. The truth was they were here, and they were gonna stay here, until the state through some other automaton told them to go someplace else, and then they'd go. But they'd go freely, of their own free choice and will, because they were free individual human beings. Well, well. (267)

One is reminded of Prewitt's "free choice" to go to the stockade or go to the stockade. Jones does insert one character who seems to act as a counterpoint to his theme of the insignificance of man. This is Private Witt, who is the counterpart to Prewitt, his new incarnation, so to speak. Yet, as Peter Aichinger argues, "in Witt the human elements have disappeared; he is practically an idiot, neither physically nor morally attractive." Aichinger contends that this signals Jones's repudiation of the romanticism of Prewitt because "Prewitt's individualism becomes Witt's perversity and Prewitt's loyalty to his private code of conduct becomes Witt's 'goddamed, stupid Kentucky code'" (86). Witt

is unlike any other character because he is not officially a member of C-for-Charlie Company. He is a former member who has been transferred to Cannon Company but who dearly wants to return. Witt is able to come and go as he pleases, leaving his company at will to go to the front to fight with C-for-Charlie. Not being a member of C-for-Charlie, he can also depart from them at will. He is the joker in the deck, the wild card who seems to have real freedom. Indeed, Jones writes, "Witt . . . did think he was a man, and did believe he was a real person. As a matter of fact, the question had never entered his head. . . . he was a free individual as far as he was concerned. He was free, white and twenty-one and had never taken no shit off nobody and never would" (267). Still, at novel's end, Witt has returned to C-for-Charlie, has been made a sergeant, and is embarking with them for New Georgia. One wonders how free he will be now that he is in the company, but then, he has been busted before, so he may still be the exception to the "fear ladder" concept.

On the other hand, maybe Witt is not an exception at all. Despite the theories of the Generals, the fear of one's direct superior does not seem to be the primary motivation for any of the men of C-for-Charlie. Rather, the fear of being considered a coward by one's comrades in arms seems to be uppermost in the soldiers' minds. As Jones writes of the First Sergeant, "All Welsh knew was that he was scared shitless, and at the same time was afflicted with a choking gorge of anger that any social coercion existed in the world which could force him to be here" (134). What social coercion? Foremost is the call of simple patriotism and all the peer pressure it generates. A nation at war depends upon the love of country that its institutions instill in its citizens from an

early age—a form of social coercion in itself. A byproduct of this love is to cultivate in each person a sense of duty to fight to protect the state when it is endangered. Consequently, all the citizens exert social pressure on one another to do their duty, and to refuse is virtually unthinkable because the self-esteem of the modern individual is so tightly bound to the opinions of others. Moreover, throughout their childhood and adolescence little boys are subject to social conditioning that tells them that being a man means being brave, even fearless in the face of any threatening presence. Being without fear is too much to ask, though, as everyone is afraid in combat in The Thin Red Line, with the possible exception of PFC Dale, and he seems more insane than brave. Fife also is aware of what is happening to him and the power of the forces arrayed against him.

> Helplessness, that was what he felt; complete helplessness. He was as helpless as if agents of his government had bound him hand and foot and delivered him here and then gone back to wherever it was good agents went. . . . And here he lay, as bound and tied by his own mental processes and social indoctrination as if they were ropes. . . . He was reacting exactly as the smarter minds of his society had anticipated he would react. (191-92)

Fife's "mental processes" are largely related to his concerns about what others think of him. Jones tells us that Fife's thoughts are typical—"somewhere in the back of each mind, like a fingernail picking uncontrollably at a scabby sore, was the small voice saying: but is it worth it? Is it really worth it to die, to be dead, just to prove to everybody that you're not a coward?" (68). Thus, we can discern an indication that Jones

believes that resistance to social conditioning and peer pressure is normal but deeply repressed.

Jones delves a little deeper into the concept of the opinions of others in his characterizations of Doll and Big Queen. Doll believes he has it all figured out. As far as he can see, people "acted what they wanted you to think they were, just as if it was really what they really were." If one is honest and admits that he does not really know who he is, then he will not be popular and well thought of by others. "But when you made up your fiction story about yourself and what a great guy you were, and then pretended that that was really you, everybody accepted it and believed you" (14). Ironically, the more Doll acts like the person he wants people to think he is, the more he actually becomes that person. His self-image is a powerful force that drives him to volunteer for hazardous duty and makes him heroic in spite of himself. Likewise, Witt believes whole-heartedly that he is a free individual; therefore, he acts freely. Jones's depiction of Big Queen is another exploration of the same idea:

> a myth had grown up around him in C-for-Charlie company. And once Queen discovered it (he was rather slow about certain things which concerned himself) he had—with a strange welcoming sense of having at last found his identity—done everything he could to live up to it. . . . Whatever its source, it was now established as fact rather than myth, and believed by nearly everybody including Queen, that Big Queen was invincible both in heart and physique. . . . Remembering how to act

> required a great deal of Queen's time and energy. He found himself having to think almost all the time. It tired him. (61)

Living up to the expectations of others or one's conception of what others expect is indeed tiring and not at all liberating.

While leaving a little room for subjective perceptions of freedom, Jones mainly seems to see people as trapped by a social coercion that is detrimental to a true sense of personal identity and destructive of individuality. He expresses this in his description of Fife's nightmares:

> the essential essence of which was a feeling of complete entrapment. Trapped in every direction no matter where he turned, trapped by patriotic doctors, trapped by longfaced crewcut infantry Colonels who demanded the willingness to die, trapped by Japanese colonial ambitions, trapped by chic grinning S-1 officers secure in their right to ask only after other officers, trapped by his own government and its faceless nameless administrators, trapped by Stein and his increasingly sad face, trapped by 1st/Sgt Mad Welsh who wanted only to laugh at him. (390-91)

Trapped and imprisoned, Jones says. Not all prisoners are behind bars in jail cells. "Your government could just as easily imprison you on, say, a jungled island in the South Seas until you had done to its satisfaction what your government had sent you there to do" (345). And unlike the troops depicted in the movies the folks back home were watching, the concept of *esprit de corps* has given way to self-assertion in C-for-Charlie Company. As Jerry H. Bryant points out, the soldiers "get drunk after a battle and, on

their hands and knees, bay like wolves at the moon, get into fights with each other, and stagger to the tent of their new company commander to tell him how much they hate him. There is no saintliness here, no brotherhood, no cooperative utopia—only debasement and degradation" (156). Instead, whether by insisting upon the freedom to get drunk or by growing a beard, we detect a desperate attempt by the soldiers to assert themselves as individuals. When, after the battle is won, the order comes down for the men to shave off their beards, they assert themselves by trying to see who can grow the most outlandish mustache, since there is no regulation banning mustaches (478-79). In Jones's meaningless and absurd universe the individual is reduced to experiencing only small interior moments of self-imposed meaning, which are generally expressed by little self-assertive acts that neither change nor accomplish anything.

All the self-assertion in the world cannot change the fact that the men are nothing more than government issue—GIs. Those who are able to find a way to get themselves evacuated do so, thus ensuring their survival, but nobody defeats the machine. Jones makes this clear in the final novel of the trilogy, Whistle. The main characters of that novel are, under new names, the counterparts of Fife, Welsh/Warden, Witt/Prewitt, and Storm/Stark, and there is no final redemption or existential validation for them. One goes mad, one gets himself killed in a bar fight, and the other two commit suicide. In the final analysis, there are no existential heroes in Jones's world. Prewitt's stand for principle can be seen as a demonstration of existential good faith, but with his demise, Jones puts to rest any further consideration of the idea. Furthermore, in any novel of the trilogy, the closest Jones gets to having a character show some concern for the "other"or

to being self-sacrificing is the case of Sergeant Keck, who accidentally pulls the pin out of a grenade which remains stuck in his back pocket. Realizing what he has done, Keck backs up to a nearby dirt hummock so that the explosion of the grenade does not harm anyone but himself (231-32). Anyone looking for hope for the fate of the individual will not find it in Jones's war trilogy. As James R. Giles observes, in Jones's view "the postwar world would be dominated by an impersonal bureaucracy and technology. The day of the individualist was over" (195), which assumes, incorrectly I think, that there ever was such a "day," although many Americans do believe in the myth of the rugged individual. All in all, Volpe has it exactly right, concluding that Jones "has presented a frightening twentieth-century view of individual man's insignificance in society and in the universe" (112).

While Mailer and Jones suggest existential possibilities in their novels, Joseph Heller in Catch-22 presents a full-blown existential hero in his portrayal of Captain John Yossarian. Heller was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, near Coney Island. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1942 and was eventually sent to Italy, in 1944, to serve as a bombardier. He was commissioned a lieutenant and flew sixty combat missions. After the war, Heller took advantage of the G.I. Bill to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees in literature, then went to work in the advertising departments of various magazines. Like Mailer and Jones, he drew upon his wartime experiences in his writing, but it was a full fifteen years after the war before his war novel appeared.

Heller's Catch-22 was not an immediate success like James Jones's From Here to Eternity. Its initial critical reception ranged from Nelson Algren's declaration that "it is the best American novel that has come out of anywhere in years" (358) to Roger H. Smith's judgement that the novel is "worthless" and "immoral" (155, 164). Many of the early reviews expressed consternation about the book's form, and indeed, the first critical articles that appeared attempted to make sense of its narrative structure. Still, the novel caught on and acquired a huge cult following among the disaffected youth of the turbulent late sixties who saw parallels between the book's absurdity and the absurd reality of the Vietnam war. The novel has endured and generally is considered an American classic. Over time, serious students of Catch-22 have come to realize that the book's apparently chaotic structure was carefully planned by Heller and that its effect on its readers is precisely as the author intended. Heller's basic strategy is to repeat incidents and to embellish them with more and more detail until, finally, the full import of the story is revealed to the reader. What seems so very hilarious early in the novel turns out to be quite horrific. Readers, then, are faced with the necessity of examining their own reactions and of realizing their own culpability in a society that dehumanizes.

Catch-22 is set in World War II; nonetheless, that the novel is not just about war is abundantly clear. The novels I have discussed previously have all been about war and its effect on the individual, to one extent or another, while at the same time lending themselves to the reading that war and the military machine are microcosms of society at large. Heller has consciously and forthrightly used war as a metaphor for modern industrial society—perhaps more so than anyone since Dos Passos. As he says in

response to critics of the book, Catch-22 "is about the contemporary, regimented business society depicted against the background of universal sorrow and inevitable death that is the lot of all of us" (Replies 30). Aside from Heller's own testimony, there is sufficient evidence that Catch-22, is as Norman Podhoretz contends, "actually one of the bravest and most nearly successful attempts we have yet had to describe and make credible the incredible reality of American life in the middle of the 20th century" (229). One of the clearest indications that this is not a typical World War II novel in the tradition of Mailer and Jones is Heller's use of anachronisms. As he tells Sam Merrill, "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" (150). Another indication is the novel's almost total lack of realism. The use of realism is reserved for the relatively few scenes in which the protagonist, Yossarian, is actually in combat, and even many of those tend toward the ironic and the surreal.

We have seen that Jones's From Here to Eternity contains elements of romanticism, particularly in its depiction of Prewitt. It is the exception in this respect among the novels we have considered. So far, the war novels that we have looked at, with the possible exception of Trumbo's Johnny Got His Gun, have relied upon heavy doses of realism to make their points about the inhumanity of war—and by extension of modern society. Catch-22 is a different type of novel altogether. Constance Denniston has labeled it a romance-parody, contrasting it to the many war romances that have idealized the soldier and combat. It has the complicated plot, the improbable events, the

emphasis on ideals, the large number of characters generally depicted as either good or evil with no shades of grey in between, and the questing hero of the typical romance. Yet, through the use of satire and irony it parodies these elements. According to Denniston, "The entire structure of the book consists of the juxtaposition of two groups of characters and two plots. The ideals of the war romance are shown in reverse, and the comic element recedes into irony. . . . *Catch-22* is typical of the romance-parody" (Nagel 69). Denniston concludes that the romantic ideals of patriotism and heroism are undermined by the realities of the commanders' motives. The hero, Yossarian, is reluctant and at times downright cowardly. And whereas order is typically restored at the end of a romance, the world depicted in Catch-22 is absurd and chaotic from beginning to end (Nagel 76).

Alternately, many critics have noticed a surrealistic element in the novel. The surreal is most evident in the chapter entitled "The Eternal City," in which the "tops of the sheer buildings slanted in weird, surrealistic perspective, and the street seemed tilted" (402). We have noted the social protest inherent in the realism of From Here to Eternity. In a similar vein, Jesse Ritter sees Catch-22 as a work of social surrealism. Ritter says, "Social surrealism in modern fiction is a rhetorical strategy forged to embrace and convey a sense of the Absurd, the grotesque disrelations, and the collective violence of our world" (83). The absurdity that both Denniston and Ritter remark is almost universally recognized by critics as the novel's defining characteristic. Furthermore, as we have noticed throughout this study, the battlefield experience is emblematic of absurdity. Thus, we must now turn to the literature of the absurd in order to get a better

understanding of how Heller is telling his tale before we go on to examine what he is telling us.

I have pointed out elements of absurdity in many of the works previously discussed. Yet, Catch-22 is the first novel we have looked at that can actually be ranked among the works that make up what has been called the literature of the absurd, which draws upon expressionism and surrealism for its stylistic devices and upon existentialism for its philosophy. Brian Way will help us define this genre.

> When the radical wrote naturalistic novels, he did so with positivist rationalist assumptions—that if, for example, he showed how a railroad was really operated, or what it was like to live and work in a fruit-picking camp, the reader, sharing in the common stock of human reason, would react with the indignation the writer desired. But the new writers do not have this rationalist faith: they see the objects of their attack as images of non-reason, and so they turn to the literature of non-reason, the literature of the absurd, for the appropriate means of exploration and criticism. (257)

The literature of the absurd has its roots in existential philosophy and the view that humans are isolated, alienated, bewildered beings adrift in a meaningless universe. Way tells us that, in general, the shared "metaphysical assumptions" of these authors of the absurd "are that events occur in a manner which is arbitrary or contingent and that human experience far from presenting an orderly sense of continuity is dislocated—directed by a principle of irrelevance and non-reason, if by any principle at

all" (258). As befits metaphors for the world at large, events in the war novels studied thus far undoubtedly fit this description, and following in their footsteps, Catch-22 likewise presents human experience as dislocated, jumbled, and chaotic. To realize just how meticulously Heller planned his novel in order to achieve this appearance of randomness and formlessness is indeed ironic.

The literature of the absurd also makes use of what Way calls "new patterns" of writing. According to Way, Kafka, considered by many to be the greatest practitioner of the literature of the absurd, "developed three of the most fertile new patterns," which Heller uses as the organizational foundation of Catch-22. Way goes on to delineate these patterns for us.

> First, he [Kafka] evolved the image of the fruitless search—the figure of a man looking for something he can never find, for something which may not even exist. . . . Secondly, there is Kafka's systematic pursuit of irrelevance—the argument which settles nothing, or the rational exploration of a situation which is constantly changing and may, in any case, have no real existence. . . . Thirdly, Kafka . . . has given the twentieth century its imaginative sense of bureaucracy. He sees bureaucracy as the absurd institutionalized. (258-60)

In Catch-22, Yossarian is certainly searching for survival. His search is fruitless, much like the search for the nature of his crime made by Joseph K. in Kafka's The Trial (Way 258). Fruitless indeed, until Yossarian discovers a way to provide his search with meaning by accepting responsibility. I'll discuss this in more detail later. As Way points

out, similar to Kafka's "Investigations of a Dog," the "whole strategy and method" of Catch-22 is based on the "pursuit of irrelevance," (259-60). Circular reasoning abounds, as does utter nonsense—Appleby cannot see the flies in his eyes because he has flies in his eyes (46), and Clevinger must be guilty or he would not have been accused (79). And of course, bureaucratic absurdity like that depicted in Kafka's The Castle thwarts Yossarian at every turn, while the chaplain's interrogation is clearly reminiscent of The Trial (Way 260).

The absurdity of Catch-22 has been commented upon by many critics. John W. Hunt finds that the novel's "atmosphere" is such that readers tend to take its absurdity as obviously representative of their daily existence. Hunt credits Heller's comic structure for taking "the surprise out of absurdity. With absurdity established as a premise rather than a conclusion, Heller can probe its moral implications as adroitly as a Camus or a Sartre" (98). Robert Merrill draws a parallel between Catch-22 and some Great War novels. He says, "the fictional world of *Catch-22* includes most of the absurdities first remarked by Hemingway, Dos Passos, and their contemporaries. And Heller's response is also very similar. . . . *Catch-22* is closer in spirit to the war novels of the 1920s than to the novels of World War II" (Heller 15-16). This is due, I believe, to the fact that many authors of Great War novels were shocked by the realities of their war into a disenchantment that extended to society as a whole. Heller, their spiritual son, appropriates this dissatisfaction with society and makes it his central focus. A most obvious demonstration of this connection is Heller's use of the theme of desertion, of the separate peace that we have seen in Dos Passos, Hemingway, and others—a theme

that is noticeably absent in the war novels of Mailer and Jones. Sanford Pinsker makes a similar connection when he writes that in Catch-22 the "loss of values suffered by the 'lost generation' now becomes a black-and-white faith that institutions are 'bad' and individualism is 'good'" (Protest 151). Pinsker may be understating the case somewhat. Individualism is not just good in the novel, but additionally, the individual is all alone, isolated, and at the mercy of the bureaucratic institutions and, thus, earns the empathy of readers who identify with the characters' situation. Furthermore, "good" individualism is qualified by Heller; it requires responsibility, as we shall see. Finally, Bijaya K. Nanda contends that Heller "has never viewed absurdity as an ontological facet of existence from which there is no escape. . . . Absurdity and Catch-22 . . . are pervasive . . . , but they are not necessarily universal" (128). There seems to be some merit to this view, since Yossarian is apparently running to something, not simply away from something. Nanda further observes that "For Camus, the absurdity of the universe inheres in its nature and in that of man. But for Heller, both man's attitudes and institutions are susceptible to alteration. His protagonist discovers that Catch-22 is not necessarily the way things have to be, that one can break out of the system because its rules are not absolute" (129-30). Indeed, I agree, and we will see later that Heller does hold out hope both for the individual and for human communities precisely by breaking out of the system. Let's now consider this "system" and Heller's portrayal of it more closely.

The system in Catch-22 is the military as an institution, which, as we have seen, is plainly a metaphor for modern industrial societies. Thomas Blues anticipates my argument when he finds war and the military establishment to be apt metaphors for the

modern world "because they subordinate the value of human life to all other values, values that in *Catch-22* have no relationship to the preservation of life, but which in fact are predicated on the reification of it" (Nagel 103). The reification of the individual is a theme we have seen in just about every war novel I have discussed. The image of the soldier as a cog in a huge machine is endlessly repeated. Victor J. Milne takes a theological perspective on this, contending that

> the novel presents exploitation and submission to exploitation as the two great sins. Exploitation, however, need not involve the imposition of physical hardships; it is better defined in Erich Fromm's phrase as "the reification of man." . . . The political system, as much as the market place, encourages the process of reification. . . . Yossarian, then, in insisting upon the unique value of his individual life, constitutes a focal point of resistance to exploitation. (59-60)

Thus, to allow oneself to be reified, to be used and abused as one would a machine is to deny one's own humanity, to deny what one is. In this sense submission to exploitation can indeed be seen as sinful, if we define *sin* in the Aristotelian sense of *falling short of the mark*, that is, not fulfilling one's human potential. Moreover, I will argue that Yossarian does more than simply insist upon "the unique value of his individual life," he actually creates that value by accepting responsibility and showing concern for others.

Curiously, at least one other character in the novel appears to be able to resist exploitation and reification. This is Milo Minderbinder, who, as Pinsker points out, has made himself so indispensable to M&M Enterprises that he is exempted from flying

missions at all and seems to have a free rein to do whatever he wants whenever he wants (Understanding 36-37). This appearance is deceiving, though, I believe, because although Milo has freedom of movement and property, he lacks freedom of self. He is so caught up in his business dealings that he lacks any human concern for others. Leon F. Seltzer argues in a similar vein when he writes, "both Milo and his admirers are best understood as products of a system which has itself corrupted them. For it is the system that has somehow fostered their belief that as free citizens their birthright, indeed their very duty, is competitively to pursue individual interests at every opportunity" (82). And they pursue those interests without regard for others. Seltzer gets to the heart of the matter in his further analysis. He says,

> Given any social, political, or economic system designed primarily to safeguard individualism and only secondarily to safeguard individuals, moral chaos must be the result. The horrible irony of this situation is that this humanly unaccountable law of opportunism was never intended as a law at all, was never meant by those who founded government, particularly *our* government, to become a national creed. (88)

Seltzer's contention is certainly correct. The government of the United States, as we have discussed in Chapter One, was founded on the Lockean ideal of independence and equality, and one of Locke's prime tenets was that citizens should not do harm to one another. This principle is based upon and rooted in what Robert Bellah and his colleagues call our biblical and republican traditions that place the highest value on human life (Habits 333, 335). Now, to ensure that one does not harm one's neighbor

requires that one be concerned about that neighbor, that one take the effect on that neighbor of one's actions into account before acting, a principle that the "law of opportunism" does not recognize.

Instead, in Milo and in Heller's Generals and Colonels what we find is a very Hobbesean view of life in which all people are basically at war with one another. Competition is the gospel of these characters. Peckem and Dreedle are in a constant state of one-up-manship, while Milo bombs his own squadron because to do so is profitable. I believe that Heller is right on the mark in his depiction of the system as calculated to foster individual acquisitiveness and self-interest, what Jerry H. Bryant calls "individualistic anarchy" (73), at the expense of human feeling and awareness of one's place in and solidarity with the human condition. David H. Richter concurs with this view in his appraisal of Milo and Aarfy, whom he calls "moral imbeciles, unconscious of any ethical dimension to their actions." He goes on to comment that they "represent in exaggerated form civilian attitudes typical of businessmen and young middle-class climbers" (150). Yossarian, on the other hand, eventually understands his complicity and acts. According to Robert Merrill, "When he deserts, Yossarian finally does something that will affect the system: he ceases to serve it. Heller's implication is that effective action is possible if we are prepared to accept responsibility for our acts" (Heller 51). The key word is "responsibility," and Yossarian's understanding of responsibility is an existential understanding based on a Sartrean concept of freedom with an accretion of traditional concern for others. We will now turn to an examination of the existential nature of the novel.

Catch-22 seems to be the most clearly existential novel we have examined up to this point. As John M. Muste puts it, Catch-22 is "part of a still small but growing [in 1962] body of fiction which has accepted the existentialist formulation of the absurd and decided that it is better to laugh at it than cry over it" (Better 27). When Clevinger answers Yossarian's concerns about people trying to kill him with "They're trying to kill everyone," Yossarian responds, "And what difference does that make?" (16). Muste sees this response as "the final anti-social question of the pure existentialist, for Yossarian is the reasonable man who has understood that for him nothing can have any reality unless he can manage to stay alive" (Better 26). That is part of it, certainly, but Heller does not stop at just existence; he is interested in conscious and satisfying existence. Considering Yossarian's expressed concerns about others at the end of the novel, it appears that Heller may be trying to give existentialism a social consciousness. Also, as Nanda comments, Heller "portrays the existential revolt in terms of action rather than thought" (129). To think existentially is not enough, one must act out of one's awareness to make it meaningful. Of course, some critics, such as Howard J. Stark, do not consider that Yossarian has acted properly. Stark argues that "Yossarian's jump . . . is no great symbolic leap in which the hero nobly opts out for existential identity and freedom. . . . Yossarian is an existential dupe who answers a call from afar and succumbs to a false message" (137). Stark feels that Yossarian should stay and persevere, like the chaplain does. But Yossarian is in the tradition of other fictional deserters—John Andrews and Frederic Henry come immediately to mind. Their desertions are not entirely self-serving, and Yossarian's is not either. Moreover, Walter R. McDonald goes so far as to maintain

that Yossarian's departure is in the line of a great "American tradition—escaping, or trying to escape, in order to save himself from absurdity, compromise, or despair" (14). McDonald compares Yossarian to such fictional and real individuals as Huck Finn, Henry David Thoreau, Natty Bumpo, and Hester Prynne—all of whom fled society in order to retain their integrity and self-respect. Moreover, Yossarian, as we shall see, does not consider himself to be fleeing *from*, but rather fleeing *to*.

Similarly, Vance Ramsey points out that Heller has inverted another American literary tradition.

> Paradoxically (in terms of an older literary tradition) disengagement in this novel is not immoral but moral. The literature of social criticism of the thirties [by authors such as Caldwell, Faulkner, and Steinbeck], for example, insisted that one finds himself only in social involvement. In *Catch-22* such involvement is the way to lose oneself, as the case of Appleby and others shows. It is as Yossarian disengages himself that he finds himself. (113)

He cannot accept the Colonels' "deal," he cannot fly any more missions for the personal aggrandizement of his superiors, and to go to prison would be a pointless, futile waste. So he chooses to run, despite the odds. He shows that he accepts responsibility and that he has concern for others by his stated intention to find and save Nately's whore's little sister and by setting a good example for the other aviators by refusing to compromise his integrity.

Many of the critics find that Yossarian's act is existentially valid and, apparently, that existentialism is morally sound when it results in responsible action, as Nanda and Ramsey have suggested. Stephen W. Potts believes that Yossarian "is rejecting against all odds the miserable ironies of human life upon which the novel has dwelt in favor of a Kierkegaardian leap of faith ('Yossarian jumped,' reads the text as Nately's whore appears again), believing for belief 's own sake, like the chaplain, that there is something to hope for and live for after all" (18). Pinsker also obliquely refers to Kierkegaard in his assessment of the relationship between Yossarian and Orr. He writes, "Heller gives every indication that Yossarian and Orr comprise a sort of either/or relationship. *Either* one opposes the system (Yossarian) *or* one adapts to it (Orr)" (Protest 161). I, however, have to question the existential validity of Orr's act. Exactly how conscious he is of himself as a being in solidarity with the human condition is really not clear. That he always shows concern for his crew when he ditches his plane is true, but when he makes his exit, he goes alone. Furthermore, he invites Yossarian along, but he never explains to him why he should go or what he intends to do. On the other hand, Orr does give Yossarian plenty of hints, but Yossarian is just not aware enough at the time to understand them. I do believe Heller expects readers to ultimately see Orr in a positive light.

As for Yossarian, Frederick R. Karl contends that he "is the man who acts in good faith, to use Sartre's often-repeated phrase" (137). Daniel Walden says something similar, "Yossarian ultimately concludes that he will choose life over death, creation over destruction. Having been told that he'll never make it, he answers, 'I know, but I'll try.' A

resolution of choice was demanded. His desertion . . . was an act of faith, an act of opposition to irrationality, a value-goal, an admirable attempt" (61). By way of contrast, Jerry H. Bryant analyzes Wintergreen and Clevinger and finds that both are "in bad faith" because they accept without examination the system's values and live the roles assigned to them by the system without objection. It seems to me that the system itself is inauthentic and immoral because its tendency to reify people runs counter to the biblical and republican tradition of valuing individual human lives. According to Bryant,

> The principle of Catch-22 is a metaphor of the "world" of Husserl which must be bracketed, the "inauthenticity" of Heidegger, the "bad faith" of Sartre, the "false consciousness" of Mannheim, the refusal of the scientist to acknowledge all evidence. By deserting, Yossarian will scrape away all of those restrictions, prejudices, and preconceptions that confine him in a shell of reduced possibilities. Thus, Yossarian . . . seeks to preserve his authentic self against a suffocating system. (163)

The question remains, how is this accomplished? How does one live in good faith? The answer is, by accepting responsibility. We now turn our attention to an examination of just what that means and of how Heller communicates that point in Catch-22.

Responsibility is the point of connection between an individual and his or her community. It arises from an awareness of one's individuality in the context of the human condition. This connection can only be made, though, when individuals exercise their freedom to choose. According to Jim Castelli, "Erich Fromm in *Escape from Freedom* tells us that the responsibility called for by freedom is too big a burden for many

people, and it is their search for someone to tell them what to do that is the greatest invitation to fascism" (202). Fascism, or mass conformity, may give the illusion of community, but it is really nothing more than a mob of mindless automatons going through the motions by rote. There can be no real, satisfying community without concern for one another. Furthermore, concern implies freedom of choice. One cannot be commanded to care; concern comes from within the individual and is rooted in a concern for one's future, for what one is to become (cf. Bryant 60-61). One must have concern before one can accept responsibility.

In Yossarian's case, as Stephen L. Sniderman contends, "the structure of the novel places the fictional burden almost entirely on him. He can be held personally responsible for virtually everything in the book: 'In a way it was all Yossarian's fault'" (38). Sniderman's argument is persuasive, and he cites both obvious cases, like Kraft's death as a result of Yossarian taking the group in over Ferrara a second time or the chaplain being investigated because Yossarian forged his name on a letter he was censoring, and more abstruse cases, such as being responsible for getting Milo started on his enterprise by letting him use the letter from the doctor that allowed Yossarian all the fruit he wanted. When not directly responsible, Yossarian can be seen as morally responsible. As James J. Martine points out, "After the first time Nately's whore (who holds him responsible for Nately's death) tries to kill him, Yossarian recognizes and accepts his own responsibility. He now understands the meaning of responsibility—that everyone, including him, is responsible for all the voiceless misery in the world" (147). As Yossarian puts it, explaining why Nately's whore holds him responsible,

> Why the hell shouldn't she? It was a man's world, and she and everyone younger had every right to blame him and everyone older for every unnatural tragedy that befell them; just as she, even in her grief, was to blame for every man-made misery that landed on her kid sister and on all other children behind her. Someone had to do something sometime. (396)

We are all responsible, but not everyone accepts the responsibility. Yossarian, for most of the novel, has not accepted responsibility. What does it mean to accept responsibility?

First of all, it means to act. Martine helps make this point in relation to the Bologna episode in the novel, which he says "presents a fatalistic vision." Yossarian goes out of his way to avoid the Bologna mission, getting the cook to poison the men with soap in the food, moving the bomb line on the map, even ripping out his intercom wires and demanding that his plane return to base. All these ploys, ultimately, are fruitless. The mission he turns back from turns out to be a milk run, and when he goes on the return mission to Bologna the next day he encounters what he feared all along, extremely heavy antiaircraft fire. According to Martine, "The point seems to be that a man cannot avoid his fate. This apparently major motif is countered by the ending of the novel, which demonstrates that a man can, and must, do something" (146). Early in the novel Heller tells us that Yossarian "was willing to be the victim of anything but circumstance" (67). This explains Yossarian's actions in trying to avoid Bologna. But why were these acts unsuccessful? I believe they failed because they were selfish; they showed a lack of awareness of his place in and solidarity with the human condition. To know oneself as a

free individual is to know oneself as not alone and free to choose. But, in my formulation, to choose to act selfishly is to deny solidarity with one's humanity and, thus, to throw oneself into inauthenticity, into bad faith by lacking self-aware acceptance of one's being. My notion is similar to Karl Jaspers' call for one not to withdraw from society but to find purpose and meaning in freely assumed social ties (Bryant 78). Yossarian's early actions were not an acceptance of responsibility but, rather, an avoidance of responsibility. This is the second part of the equation. One must act, must do something, but it must be done responsibly, with a full acceptance of one's responsibility to others, as well as to oneself. The question arises, then: is Yossarian's desertion a responsible act, or merely another case of avoidance?

In arguing for the morality of Yossarian's decision, Victor J. Milne writes,

> Basically, we may say that responsibility [according to Dietrich Bonhoeffer] involves an acceptance of the need to relate all moral action to the concrete situation of mingled good and evil, and thus it is opposed to a Kantian affirmation of abstract ethical demands which are to be practiced universally without regard to the concrete situation. Yossarian recognizes that he must make his choice in the real situation which offers only relative good and relative evil. Any choice will involve sinning against some abstract ethical principle. (64)

In other words, one's responsibility to others overrides considerations of personal innocence. That is, to be guilty and accept responsibility is better than to be innocent and refuse responsibility. Yossarian is in much the same situation that Jones's Prewitt is in.

He can acquiesce to the demands of the system (honor his "deal" with the Colonels) and violate his own integrity, or he can go to prison on trumped up charges. Prewitt chooses prison (the stockade), but after his release he chooses desertion and eventually death over ever returning there. For Yossarian to choose prison would be for him to retain his innocence, but he would also be abdicating responsibility. Instead, Yossarian chooses desertion, making himself guilty of violating an abstract ethical principle but, at the same time, becoming a free and authentic individual aware of his place in the human condition. Heller seems to be saying that passive resistance to evil is not good enough. Still, one can ask just how efficacious Yossarian's action really is?

Robert Merrill points to the many ways that Yossarian protests the system throughout the novel, but he finds that these protests are merely "symbolic gestures," since Yossarian continues to fly missions and even to ferry Milo around to his various markets. Merrill only applauds Yossarian when he finally "ceases to serve" the system (Heller 51). Daniel Green, on the other hand, is not convinced. He sees even the desertion as a "gesture." "In the face of a world so wholly irredeemable, Yossarian's only alternative is to abandon it in a gesture of personal survival. He may have managed to get the last laugh, but it is a feeble one, and his apparent optimism about the possibilities of 'Sweden' make this reader feel the joke is still on him" (194). Green's position would seem to put Yossarian in the company of Dos Passos's John Andrews and Mailer's Lieutenant Hearn as a quixotic hero, at best. However, Yossarian concedes the difficulties of ever getting to Sweden and of finding Nately's whore's little sister, but he says, "at least I'll be trying" (442). His is a Sartrean view of freedom by which results

do not matter, the freedom and good faith comes from choosing to try. Raymond M. Olderman also sees a "gesture," writing, "Heller's ending is like many other endings in the novel of the sixties; its affirmation is possible only through a symbolic gesture." He goes on to offer what I believe is an accurate summary of Heller's point: "What is important to Heller is that man need not be beaten—the choices may be extreme, and like Yossarian, man may always be plagued by Nately's Whore, something popping up everywhere to threaten life; but still, life is possible and man can always find some way to assert the human spirit" (113). Just such an assertion is crucial to making an individual an authentic human being.

Most recent critics approve of Yossarian's choice without romanticizing or idealizing it. As Leon F. Seltzer says, "although his impassioned effort to leave all the Milo's of the modern world behind him and locate an area where sane moral commitments prevail may indeed be futile, there is no denying its integrity and courage" (91). J. P. Stern concurs, "The condition of [Yossarian's] freedom is not barren detachment or alienation, but the sentience *and* essential integrity of the self in the onslaught of history" (214-15). And such integrity, I believe, is dependent upon both responsibility and concern. According to Vance Ramsey, "The process of disengaging himself from the institutions which threaten to victimize him leads to his total moral engagement with others. He accepts his guilt (as Camus says that each man must) in the form of being the target of Nately's whore" (114). This acceptance does allow Yossarian to avoid something, though. As David H. Richter puts it, Yossarian avoids "spiritual

death through moral surrender" (159). And, of course, he avoids living his life in "bad faith." As Frederick R. Karl argues, Yossarian is a hero because

> the true hero of our era is the man who can accept absolute responsibility. He must act alone, and his faith—not in God, but in himself—must be good, honest, pure. If, as Nietzsche said, all the gods are dead, then man must become mature enough to assume the role. Yossarian's decision that life must pre-empt all other considerations is precisely this moral act of responsibility. In choosing life, Yossarian shows himself to be reflective, conscious, indeed free. All others are slugs living in the swampy depths of self-deception; not bad men necessarily, they are simply unaware, and unaware they cannot be free. (137-38)

The community of men and women on Pianosa is clearly a false, unsatisfying community of individuals mired in bad faith. Like the post-war society envisioned by Mailer's General Cummings and Jones's General Slater, it is ordered from the top down. To exacerbate the situation, those at the top govern by principles of self-interest and opportunism. Yet, even those at the top are ruled by the chance bunglings of bureaucracy—Major Major Major Major is promoted by a computer, and General Scheisskopf, he who sees men as nothing more than marching machines, assumes command by clerical default. The powerless in this false community are symbolized by the mute, helpless soldier in white, who is "filed next to the Texan" in the hospital when we first encounter him (9-10). Heller drives home the image of individuals at the mercy of bureaucracy with the twin stories of Mudd and Doc Daneeka, both of whom only

exist as long as the official records acknowledge their existence. One of Yossarian's most terrifying, most frustrating and futile moments occurs when he is trapped in the nose of the plane with Aarfy, who cannot or will not hear him (146-48). This is an image of a man trapped in a machine and isolated by the lack of communication—an apt image for the human individual in the false community that is modern industrial society.

On the other hand, Heller closes Catch-22 with a depiction of a small, burgeoning community that consists of Yossarian, Chaplain Tappman, and Major Danby. This community is founded upon communication—they discuss the situation and all its ramifications before any decision is made—and upon mutual concern. In his conclusion, Heller emphasizes the situational nature of existential choice by showing Yossarian and the chaplain as both accepting responsibility and displaying good faith. Although each makes a different choice, both choices are consistent with the individual's situation—Yossarian chooses to run rather than compromise or go to prison, while the chaplain, who is in no imminent danger, chooses to stay and persevere and fight. Danby can be seen as a ray of hope for all because he lacks courage but seems to be becoming increasingly more aware of the situation and his choices. Readers find themselves hoping that when his existential moment arrives, he will choose rightly, as Yossarian and the chaplain have done. Heller would have his readers become aware, as Yossarian has become aware through his experience with Snowden, that we are nothing but mortal matter—unless we "do something" to resist reification and dehumanization (396).

The battlefield experience in World War II novels is once again used as a metaphor for the world at large by the major novelists of that war. In doing so, they have modeled for us the tension between individuals and their communities that is an undoubted fact of twentieth-century existence. We have seen that the major novels of the Second World War that deal with the fate of the individual in modern industrial society offer three takes on meaninglessness. First, we have a deterministic view of the universe in which the individual is reified, coerced, and totally ruled by forces beyond his control. This nihilistic view is best represented by the novels of James Jones, particularly The Thin Red Line, in which the individual could hardly be more insignificant. Next, we have an existential view of the world in which the individual has the possibility of meaningful action if he can only become aware of his place in the human condition and embrace concern for his own future and the future of an "other." This view is represented by Joseph Heller's Catch-22, particularly in the person of Yossarian, who fights back, seizing his freedom and refusing to be a mindless cog in the machine. Finally, Mailer's The Naked and the Dead lies between these two poles, albeit closer to Jones's vision than to Heller's. Mailer's universe is certainly naturalistic, but his soldiers sense that hope and social action are possibilities, although, with the possible exception of Goldstein and Ridges, none achieve the necessary consciousness in the novel to be considered existentially validated. Furthermore, for the first time in any of the novels discussed up to this point, we see in Catch-22 the beginnings of a real, model community. The small group of individuals—Yossarian, Chaplain Tappman, and Major Danby—that closes out the novel appears to be truly concerned about one another, capable of actually

communicating among themselves, and able to decide upon a course of action that is beneficial to all. By contrast, the traditional communities of men—the platoons and companies of soldiers—while generally effective in accomplishing their missions, are divided, dysfunctional, and uncommunicative, acting by decree from above, often arbitrary and self-serving, rather than by common consent.

We can now move on to consider what novels of the Vietnam War have to say about the individual. The Korean War intervened between World War II and Vietnam, of course. Only one major novel came out of that war, though, James Michener's The Bridges at Toko-Ri (1953), which seems to me to be basically a well-written propaganda piece for the Air Force, and its themes do not touch upon the concerns I have been examining. Therefore, we can turn to Vietnam War novels to close out this study. We will see that these novels have built upon the foundation established by the novels of the two world wars. Yet, they have made significant additions, both stylistically and thematically, to the tradition of the war novel in America. The Vietnam War was the most controversial war in America's history, and the times were turbulent. All of this is reflected in the literature from the war, and the various authors' conceptions of the fate of the individual in our modern technological society bear the stamp of the times.

Chapter Four: The Vietnam War

Like the novelists I have previously discussed, the Vietnam War authors I will consider tend to see the world as deterministic, absurd, and meaningless. Furthermore, a significant number of Vietnam War novels abandon the realistic tradition that has predominated in twentieth-century war literature and embrace an experimental style, making them spiritual descendants of Catch-22. Vietnam novels tend to be more self-conscious than earlier war novels in the ways in which they use the battlefield as a metaphor for the world at large, but they are no less ambiguous. They reveal the same contradictory impulses—a yearning for absolute autonomy and nostalgia for community—found in the novels from the world wars. Moreover, we will once again encounter soldiers struggling to establish a separate peace and to revitalize their diminished selves, but the existential hero accepting the responsibility of his or her own freedom will be notably absent.

As has been often noted, the Vietnam War was, in some ways, just like any other war, but it has left a lasting impression on the American consciousness that is unique. This impression is the result of several facts that are singular in American experience: that the war was the first televised war in our history, which gave it an immediacy that previous wars lacked; that a significant portion of the population opposed the war, sometimes vehemently; that the war was lost; and that the returning soldiers were not accorded the celebratory and grateful homecoming that the soldiers who served in the two world wars had received. The war itself, figuratively speaking,

sneaked up on the American people. Unlike the world wars that were in progress and that the citizenry were well aware of before America entered them, Americans only gradually became cognizant of the Vietnam War. American soldiers were dying in Vietnam[5] before most Americans even realized that a war was happening there because prior to the middle of 1963 no television networks had full-time news crews in Vietnam, and the New York Times was the only newspaper to have a full-time reporter there (Delli Carpini 44). Furthermore, while the world wars were marked by explicit declarations of war in response to specific, well-known incidents, the Vietnam War was never declared, and American involvement was well underway before any sort of triggering incident became public knowledge. Moreover, the second Gulf of Tonkin incident in the summer of 1964, which President Johnson cited as the justification for initiating an American air war against North Vietnam, quite possibly never even occurred (Maclear 113).

The Vietnam War need never have happened. Its roots were in the Cold War mentality which dominated American life after World War II. This mentality tended to dichotomize the whole world, dividing it into the good guys (capitalists) and the bad guys (communists). This outlook led to a fundamental misunderstanding of the hopes and desires of most of the Vietnamese people—both in the South and in the North. By and large, their goal was to be free of foreign domination and to establish an

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[5] From January 1961 through July 1965, 561 Americans were killed in Vietnam (Maclear 142).

independent Vietnam for the Vietnamese (Tran 199). A succession of American leaders, though, from Truman through Ford, were only able to see Vietnam as the first in a series of "dominoes" that were in peril of falling into the hands of the Red Menace—a theory that in the minds of most scholars has long since been discredited (Maclear 59).[6] Consequently, due to this belief that the conflict had global significance, the United States was gradually drawn into what was essentially a civil war (Maclear 355). In fact, the United States may have actually created the war by backing the Diem regime in the South and supporting its refusal to hold the elections agreed upon in Geneva in 1954 (Baritz 88-91).

This original mistake was then compounded by an underestimation of the determination of the enemy. They could not be simply bombed into submission, and they were exceptionally skilled at fighting an unconventional, guerrilla war that the American military was unprepared to fight. The American military forces, led by General William Westmoreland, with their superior firepower, believed they could achieve victory through attrition (Maclear 150-51). This strategy (if one can call it that) was doomed to failure because it was difficult to know who among the Vietnamese was friend or foe, because the enemy were experts at literally going underground, and because the guerrillas preferred hit and run tactics to conventional set-piece battles.

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[6] The "domino" metaphor dates from the Eisenhower administration, but the political theory it describes was articulated by the Truman administration in 1950 (Baritz 79; Donovan 146).

The fact that successive Presidents and their advisors never fully committed to any one, distinct military policy made the task even more difficult for the commanders and soldiers in the field. For example, the goal was "winning hearts and minds" at one time, "search and destroy" at another, and finally "Vietnamization" (Maclear 62, 151, 286). The foregoing history is simplistic, of course, but it does outline the futility of the whole Vietnam misadventure. Not surprisingly, this pervasive feeling of futility gravitated to the individual soldiers ordered to fight the war and to the novelists who wrote about them.

The soldiers who fought in Vietnam were the so-called "Baby-Boomers." Born after World War II, they grew up in the 1950s and '60s. These young men were raised on television, rock 'n' roll, John Wayne movies, and Civil Defense drills. Historian Loren Baritz points out that the undemocratic draft system that was in place for most of the war[7] drew its conscripts largely from the lower socio-economic strata (284-86). Baritz contends that this "kept the middle class from creating political pressure on the war administrations" (284). Furthermore, the troops in Vietnam were very young. The average age of the soldier in Vietnam was nineteen, as compared to twenty-six during the Second World War (Maclear 267). John Hellmann persuasively argues that American involvement in Vietnam was at heart an attempt to act out the American frontier myth by which the hero tames wild nature and brings progress and protection

[7] The institution of a draft lottery was announced in 1969, but it was not implemented until late in 1971 (Maclear 232).

to the dark natives (35). Believing they were going to do precisely that, many of these young soldiers went to Vietnam with Hollywood-inspired visions of themselves becoming heroic figures, just like John Wayne in his cowboy and combat movies (Metress 111-13, Novelli 107-08).

The disillusionment experienced by American soldiers in Vietnam was widespread. They experienced the horrors of warfare, the death and maiming of their buddies, just like troops in any war, but they were also beset with mounting frustrations. The enemy was rarely seen, and distinguishing the innocent villager from the dangerous guerrilla was nearly impossible. Unlike previous wars, Vietnam rarely provided the soldiers any sense of accomplishment, any sense of a mission completed because land was fought for and won and then promptly abandoned. Clear front lines did not exist (Maclear 269). Compounding the soldiers' feelings of futility was the knowledge that they were only required to serve a one year tour of duty. This fact made survival a top priority, especially as each soldier drew closer and closer to his DEROS date.[8] Combatants in previous wars knew they were not going home until victory was achieved, which helped knit units together since they were all in it for the duration. The fighting man in Vietnam, on the other hand, was much more likely to look out for himself first (Maclear 265). This tendency was exacerbated when, in 1969, the government began withdrawing troops. The soldiers, quite rightly, grew reluctant

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[8] DEROS is an acronym for "date eligible for return from overseas," which is the date on which a soldier was scheduled to leave Vietnam (Baritz 283).

to die for a cause that the politicians, it seemed, had already decided was not worth fighting for any longer (Baritz 293). Thousands of these soldiers came home suffering from severe psychological disorders, so many so that we now have a name for the malady—Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (Lomperis 28).

Considering the ambiguity of purpose of the war and the ambivalent attitudes toward it held by the American people, we should not be surprised that the novels arising out of it have presented a wide range of ideological, political, and social perspectives and that the best of these decline to draw any firm conclusions about the war. As Edward F. Palm points out, World War I "writers were trying to assimilate the 'new meaning' of industrialized mass trench warfare. Vietnam writers are faced with having to go one step further and make sense of the abstract processes of modern industrialized political warfare in which the individual seems to have no personal stake whatsoever" (120-21). How a writer portrays individuals reacting to and dealing with this state of affairs will tell us much about how that author views the modern individual living in a technological[9] society.

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[9] During the Vietnam era, the military was at the leading edge of America's technological revolution. Whereas the world wars were often referred to as "mechanized," wars, the Vietnam war can be called the first technologized war. This included the implementation of computerized record-keeping, the use of high tech weaponry such as helicopters and the M-16 assault weapon, and sophisticated electronic gadgetry such as acoustic and seismic sensors used to detect enemy movement. These sensors were disguised to look like small plants

Hundreds of novels based on the Vietnam War have been published, beginning even while the war was in progress. Some of these are quite good and rank with the best that have come out of the world wars. It should be pointed out that many Vietnam authors had a very difficult time finding publishers for their work in the early 1970s due to the widespread desire of Americans to put the war behind them (Lomperis 44). John Newman in his exhaustive bibliography lists 666 novels about the Vietnam War. Many of these are of little worth, such as a few romance novels about nurses in love with Green Beret officers and quite a number that are simply pornography using the war as a setting. Another large batch of novels could be called pulp fiction. Many of these are serial adventure novels that use Vietnam as the setting for heroic exploits. Serial titles such as Gunships (1981), Saigon Commandos (1983), and The Black Eagles (1984) began appearing in the 1980s and are notably lacking in historical accuracy while seeming to promulgate the myth of the American soldier as the frontier hero that the real war clearly debunked. These novels are very similar to the conservative, revisionist Vietnam films, such as First Blood and Uncommon Valor, that Hollywood was producing at about the same time. Still, hundreds of serious novels about the war remain, and many of those are well worth reading.

Probably the most well-known, and certainly the best-selling, novel about Vietnam is Robin Moore's The Green Berets (1965), which is a realistic account

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and were dropped by aircraft to land near suspected enemy trails (Maclear 183-85).

supportive of the Kennedy-era vision of America's role in the war. Not surprisingly, John Wayne starred in the film version of the novel, which bore a striking resemblance to Wayne's many western and war movie scripts with its simplistic "heroes and villains" perspective. John Clark Pratt points out that Moore's novel and the handful of other "realistic" novels published during or shortly after the early years of American involvement—roughly 1964 to 1966—are less critical of the war effort as a whole than novels published much later, which have more historical perspective and tend to "show more antagonism." Pratt gives the example of Jonathan Rubin's "surrealistic parable" The Barking Deer (1974), which depicts the Special Forces in a similar locale and time frame as that described in Moore's book but which differs in that all of the soldiers and most of the villagers they are trying to save from Communism end up dead (132). The later novels incline toward a pessimistic view of the war and an accurate assessment of the soldiers' attitudes and actions. Increasingly, later novels turn to stylistic experiment and away from realism. The novels I will discuss are all later novels and were chosen because I feel that they most accurately reflect the real dilemmas faced by modern individuals at war and, by extension, in the world at large, which is the focus of this study.

A noteworthy later work that tells a story that is vastly different from Moore's Green Berets is Larry Heinemann's Close Quarters (1977). Heinemann writes in a realistic style that World War II novelists such as Mailer and Jones would recognize. Moore is writing about 1964, while Heinemann's novel is set in 1967. By that time, over 400,00 American soldiers were in Vietnam and "amorality," "horror," "drugs,

sensation-seeking newsmen, and sex" were the soldier's experience (Pratt 139). Heinemann realistically portrays all of that, and then brings his protagonist, Philip Dosier, home to the United States and realistically and without comment shows the obsessions and trauma that are the lot of the returning soldier. The Vietnam portion of Heinemann's novel ends before the 1968 Tet offensive, the acknowledged turning point of the war. Novels written about the period after Tet tend to be much less certain about anything than those written about the early years of the war.

Many novels set in the post-Tet period are written in the realistic mode, but some, including several of the best, use a style of writing that is very experimental. One novel that seems to do both is Pratt's own Laotian Fragments (1974, 1985). The story is realistic enough but is told through a variety of documents pieced together—letters, memoranda, notebooks, official documents, diaries, and transcriptions. Prominent realistic novels are James Webb's Fields of Fire (1978) and John M. Del Vecchio's The 13th Valley (1982). Webb's novel is set in 1969, and he, like Heinemann, portrays the war and one character's return home and leaves his readers wrestling with the war's ambiguities. Like Mailer, Webb concentrates on one platoon and intersperses his account of their actions with brief biographical flashbacks, similar to Mailer's "Time Machine" portraits. He dictates no definitive answers but also does not shy away from raising questions—particularly about home front attitudes towards returning veterans, of whom Webb is clearly supportive. Webb later went on to become the minority counsel to the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Del Vecchio is writing about a later period, 1971, after troop withdrawals

have begun. His combat episodes are very realistic, but he also has written extended passages in which his characters debate the state of the war and of American society, especially in regards to racism. Like Webb, Del Vecchio does not have answers; he just presents all the sides of the issues and leaves it to the readers to decide what they want to make of them.

I have chosen to discuss The 13th Valley and novels by Stephen Wright and Tim O'Brien in this chapter because they treat the battlefield experience as a microcosm of the world at large while offering an accurate portrayal of the tensions between individuals and their communities during the Vietnam era. I will examine Del Vecchio's exploration of the state of American society in 1971, the contradictions that society presents to individuals in the forms of racism and the social construction of the self, and the realistic hopes for community that the author introduces. The other two novels discussed in this chapter are quite experimental stylistically in their attempt to represent the truth of Vietnam as the individual soldier experienced it. That any such "truth" is nearly incomprehensible is reflected in the novels' multiple perspectives and open-ended conclusions. These novels are Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green (1983) and Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato (1978). Wright's book is set in both 1969 Vietnam and 1976 America, alternating between the protagonist's past as a soldier and his present civilian life in urban America. In Wright's work we will find a bleak portrait of disappearing selves and futile escapism. O'Brien's novel is also an experimental narrative in which we experience his main character's past, present, and imaginings. O'Brien gives us a variation on the separate

peace motif in which the individual's fulfillment of his obligation to the social contract plays a significant role. As Palm states, "great war literature never dwells on war as an institution but serves to place all of life in better perspective" (119). Accordingly, the Vietnam War novels I am about to discuss will show individuals fantasizing autonomy while in the double bind of being dependent upon and alienated from our modern technological society in ways that are somewhat different from what we have found in the works from the world wars, particularly in the absence of any existential response to their plight.

John M. Del Vecchio was drafted in 1969 after graduating from Lafayette College. He served as a Combat Correspondent with the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) in Vietnam in 1970 and '71 and earned a Bronze Star. The story of The 13th Valley is based on an actual operation in the Khe Ta Laou valley in which the 101st participated in August, 1970. The novel is unusual in that the operation it depicts is a large, battalion-sized operation that pits soldiers against soldiers with no civilians involved. Most Vietnam novels portray smaller units (generally squads or platoons) undertaking prolonged jungle patrols and interacting with Vietnamese civilians. Del Vecchio's tale focuses on Company A, 7th Battalion, 402nd Infantry—the Oh-deuce—commanded by the African-American Lieutenant Rufus Brooks, possessor of a Master's degree in philosophy. Del Vecchio intersperses his account of the operation with the philosophical musings of Brooks and his discussions

with other key characters, in particular Sergeant Egan, the soldier's soldier with a degree in engineering; "Cherry" Chelini, the new guy who majored in psychology; Doc, an African-American medic from Harlem; El Paso, a Chicano with a degree in history and a year of law school; Jax, an African-American from rural Mississippi; Silvers, a Jew and aspiring writer; and Minh, the Vietnamese scout.

Walter Hölbling has deemed The 13th Valley to be an "ambitious 'naturalist epic'" that follows in the tradition of war novels by writers such as Dos Passos, Mailer, and Jones (132). Philip K. Jason concurs in that assessment and further asserts that realistic novels like Del Vecchio's cannot "create the 'new thing'—the absurd experience—within the reader" (77). Jason makes an interesting point. Nonetheless, I believe readers will easily grasp, at least intellectually, the absurdities that the realistic author realistically depicts. An absurdity does not become less absurd by being related realistically. For example, in Del Vecchio's novel the battalion commander observes the Khe Ta Laou operation from far above in his helicopter. Oblivious to the mud, jungle, and heat prostration Alpha Company is experiencing on the ground, he keeps screaming at Brooks to "Get that raggedyass outfit movin. . . . Move. Get them little people" (286). Then, while the troops are bedding down every night among the mud, rain, and leeches, the battalion commander manages to "take twelve hot showers in the rear, eat thirty hot meals, and read twenty-seven Fantastic Four comic books" (567). Or so El Paso imagines it, but he probably is not far wrong as Del Vecchio has made clear because Brooks often has to deal with the obnoxious executive officer Major Hellman in the commander's stead during the operation.

Readers, it seems to me, are bound to experience the same feelings of frustration that Brooks and his troops feel at the absurd contradiction that exists between the grunts' reality and the expectations and concerns of the commanders and, at least to that extent, experience the absurdity of the Vietnam War.

Interestingly, some other critics have likened The 13th Valley to Moby Dick. John Hellmann calls the novel a "tragic epic" in which the author follows "Melville's strategy of having the commander of the operation see a cosmic significance in the objective" (128). Thomas Myers goes farther, seeing "the same tensions of man and nature, knowledge and innocence, and history and language that Ahab's vengeful hunt entails" (57). Finally, Hölbling calls Del Vecchio's Alpha Company a "microcosm of American Society" (132). Del Vecchio states the same notion this way,

> These men . . . all of them, were products of the Great American Experiment, black brown yellow white and red, children of the Melting Pot. . . . What they had in common was the denominator of American society in the '50s and '60s, a television culture, the army experience—basic, AIT, RVN training, SERTS, the Oh-deuce and now the sitting, waiting in the trench at LZ Sally, I Corps, in the Republic of Vietnam. (132)

It is as a "microcosm" of America that I will examine the novel itself. Del Vecchio's depiction of the men of Company A reveals much about American racial tensions, the differences between Western and Eastern attitudes toward the individual, and the prospects for forming a genuine community in the latter part of the twentieth century.

As we saw above, Del Vecchio sees the soldiers as products of American culture. He expands upon that idea in the words of Lieutenant Brooks:

> the individual is manufactured by the traditions of his culture. A man is like a rough casting entering a machine shop. He's already made but the culture he's brought up in is going to sharpen his edges. That culture is going to re-form him, cut away at his humanity, mill him down to size and get rid of what the culture doesn't think is necessary or efficient or beneficial. (136)

This is a social determinism similar to what we have found in Mailer and Jones, although not quite so pessimistic a formulation of the idea as the social coercion Jones depicts. As we shall see, Del Vecchio suggests that one must exercise one's individuality within a community, recognizing that the tension between the one and the many is a reality we all must confront. He seems to find hope for the individual in the possibility that a person can rise above, break out of his or her social construction in ways that will ultimately be beneficial for both the individual and the community. For example, the medic from the ghetto, Doc, dreams of becoming a nurse or even a doctor after he gets discharged, and the reader can believe he has what it takes to accomplish his dream because he is portrayed as extremely competent and knowledgeable. Achieving his dream would allow Doc to break from the diminished expectations of the community in which he was raised. It would also be a boon to that community or to any other community to which he thereafter belonged because dedicated medical professionals are always needed. Unfortunately, Doc dies. In a

deterministic universe, one's individual hopes, dreams, and desires have a way of being overridden by one's fate. This is shown most clearly in the case of the machine-gunner called Whiteboy. Whiteboy is short, and when he receives a relatively minor eye injury, he is evacuated and all assume that he is going to be a survivor and go home. As fate would have it, though, the helicopter in which he is being transported comes under some minor sniper fire, and Whiteboy is hit in the chest, a wound he dies from several days later. The vagaries of fate are natural, though, as the scout Minh explains:

> man does not control nature with his scientific theory or with his engineering principles or with his history or with words of any kind. All he does is seek to explain nature. We seek to know how it works. Perhaps to be able to forecast the future from the past. We can arrange elements but we are one with nature and perhaps nature has simply had us arrange the elements for her. Things happen. People die. That is the flow of reality. (502)

Still, within that limitation, Del Vecchio finds the individual to be free and responsible.

I have argued in my discussion of The Thin Red Line that James Jones finds the individual to be insignificant, of little worth to anyone but himself. Del Vecchio resists this notion, although he acknowledges that it is true to a certain extent through Brooks' memory of a conversation he once had with his father, who told him

> about technology making men obsolete and interchangeable and interchangeable meant dispensible and dispensible [sic] meant cheap and a black man was the cheapest throwaway that industry had. Brooks thought about that for several moments. . . . Then he said to his father, "We're even cheaper in the infantry, Pop." (67)

Expendable, the individual nonetheless is unique and has certain powers. One thing that differentiates one person from another is the way each one orders the world he or she lives in. Brooks points out that the historian, the engineer, the scientist, and even the simple person of common sense all have valid methods of ordering their worlds (87). Each individual, then, is capable of imposing some meaning upon the meaningless universe—a notion an existentialist would certainly agree with. Also, in a free society each person has a role to play. As El Paso says, "Free criticism is good. It keeps government honest and stable" (484). Therefore, it is important for individuals to consider themselves to be free individuals, each with unique value and abilities, because "*every organized system of thought, religious or governmental*" encourages "*dependence*" (511). This concerns Lieutenant Brooks because he is seeking the reasons for wars so that an end can be put to them. He posits that the answer lies in enlightened individuality. In his "thesis on conflict" he writes, "*People who understand that conflict in interpersonal relations is a normal event, that it tends to come and go in cycles, that they are capable of dealing with others themselves without a rigid set of regulations directing them, these people will not wind up as victims, as automatons of the machine*" (511). Not only does he want everyone to be an independent individual, he also wants everyone to recognize others as

independent individuals with whom a common bond is shared. His conclusion is: "*Let us each believe and teach our young—first, I am an individual human being and then I am a human being*" (514). Del Vecchio appears to consider Americans lacking in this respect, though, as he respectfully introduces some ostensibly Eastern ideas about individuals and their communities into the novel to serve as counterpoint and guide.

Minh is Del Vecchio's conduit for the Eastern viewpoint, which seems to be a Westernized version (or perversion, perhaps) of Eastern thought. The infusion of Eastern ideas into American popular culture was widespread in the late 1960s and early '70s. Minh seems to believe in the value of the individual. He says, "A man should control himself. . . . It is not the rightful pursuit of any man to try to control the life of another" (504). A look at Minh's conception of how government should be structured will shed further light on his thought.

> A national government had authority only down to the province, a province government only to district, district only to hamlet and hamlet only to the doors of a man's home. No one had the right to intrude upon a family and no member of a family had the right to intrude into the thoughts of an individual. That was the natural course of the universe. (139-40)

Some might call this a form of libertarian individualism. The whole structure rests on the mind of the individual, which is sacrosanct. Brooks seems to recognize the importance of the individual mind when he muses on the lot of the infantry, "infantrymen while in the jungle spend most of their time alone, a man conditions his

mind to be the place where most of his time is spent" (65). But Minh questions just how comfortable Westerners are in their minds. He draws a contrast between West and East, saying, "You have moral codes and religious laws and civil laws imposed on you but it is unusual to find an American with principles of living inside him. All Vietnamese know this. There is nothing in your culture to lead you to develop your inside principles. That is why you require outside laws. We are just the reverse" (503). These "principles" are what Minh calls Tao, and I believe he is correct that most Westerners do not understand the concept (if it can even be called a concept). One thing Minh does insist upon is that "*Everything is unity*" (512). We may feel like isolated individuals, but we are in fact interconnected with the universe. Recognition of this, Del Vecchio suggests, is the foundation for true community.

Del Vecchio seems to indicate that not realizing one's interconnectedness is insanity. He conveys this through his portrayal of the radioman Cherry Chelini. Chelini's story also could be read as an indictment of the notion of the Nietzschean superman, the exaltation of the individual. Chelini undergoes a transformation after his first kill. He begins to think, "I am a mangod. . . . Every man is part god, every man who knows his soul belongs only to himself " (428). And it is not long before we are told, "During that same pre-dawn Cherry had his last rational thoughts" (495), and "Egan nodded to the trail. Cherry looked. Something in his mind snapped" (496). Chelini firmly believes he is a mangod at this point, and at the end of the novel he believes that his deceased comrades live on in him. Rather than being a part of the universe, in his mind he is the universe, a complete perversion of Minh's idea. In other

words, not recognizing our interconnectedness with independent others is insanity. Del Vecchio seems to favor a responsible individuality that considers others.

As I noted in the last chapter, at the end of Catch-22 Joseph Heller shows us the beginnings of a true community. Del Vecchio, by comparison, depicts the closest thing to a genuine community that we will see in any of the novels of this study. We have already seen that the company and in particular the core group around Lieutenant Brooks is made up of men from all segments of American society. Susan Jeffords has remarked upon the togetherness of this group. She writes, "It is a bonding that cuts across boundaries that exist in the 'World,' boundaries that separate men by color, income, accent, and education" (185). A prime example of this is the case of Jax. A native of the rural South, he joined the Army because there was no opportunity for him to be someone at home. Now he is a proud soldier and can say, "This the first time I ever been somebody" (264). Yet, his brother-in-law sends him letters urging him to revolt against the white man's army and join his black brothers in revolution. The letters resonate with Jax, but he is torn because he is truly devoted to his comrades-in-arms, of all races. His community there in Vietnam has a stronger influence on him than his community of memory back home. To understand this, we need to look at the work of sociologist Robert Bellah and his associates, particularly as presented in Habits of the Heart.

Bellah and his colleagues promote a responsible individualism that includes a commitment to community. They define *community* as "a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making,

and who share certain *practices* . . . that both define the community and are nurtured by it." This *community* is sometimes, but not always or necessarily, also a "*community of memory*, defined in part by its past and its memory of its past" (Habits 333). By *practices* they mean "shared activities that are not undertaken as means to an end but are ethically good in themselves. . . . A genuine community . . . is constituted by such practices" (Habits 335). The men of Alpha Company of the Oh-deuce constitute just such a genuine community—unlike any other unit we have seen (Jones's C-for-Charlie Company comes to mind as a point of contrast). Del Vecchio accomplishes a complete reversal of what we have observed in other war novels. Those novels tend to expose the ugly face of society at large, but The 13th Valley reveals a utopian ideal instead. The closeness of this community, Alpha Company, is generated in large part by the command style of Lieutenant Brooks. That the men are interdependent goes pretty much without saying. None can survive if they do not all pull together. We have all seen this necessary interdependence portrayed often enough in popular war movies that depict military units as microcosms of the American "melting pot" while at the same time acknowledging the imperfections of American society. In The 13th Valley, specifically, the soldiers need each other to spot and remove leeches from one another's bodies, and certainly when the firing starts, they depend upon each other for mutual protection. As Jax puts it, "Every fucka here depend on me, depend on Jax keepin the gooks from comin through his side a the perimeter" (264).

That Alpha Company has shared practices can be seen in the company-wide understanding that no one brings drugs into the field. No one objects to partying

when they are in the rear, but community practice is to leave that behind when they go out to fight. Another practice is the sharing of the workload and the hazardous duties. They rotate the walking of point, for example, so that no platoon or squad bears a greater share of that dangerous work. Sharing food is also a routine practice. When the opportunity presents itself, they pool their C-ration resources and concoct such culinary delights as "Vichyssoise. Beef Bearnaise. Mocha. And . . . pound cake with peaches" (199)—all in the interest of making life in the bush a little more bearable for one another. This practice also allows the men to feel that they have some control over their lives "in a life where control seemed the utmost criteria for survival," as Brooks puts it (100).

What really makes this company different, though, is the element of discussion and decision-making. Lieutenant Brooks continually holds meetings to get input from all the men which he uses to inform all of his decisions. This contrasts starkly with the situation on the home front where the Johnson and Nixon administrations tended to dismiss and even deride opposing positions as not worthy of consideration. Brooks has to have the final say, but he truly wants to hear as many opinions as he can before deciding on a course of action. This is definitely a unique way for an officer to conduct his command, and since Company A is the best company in the battalion, Del Vecchio seems to be promoting this style of leadership. At the same time, the battalion commander "strongly emphasized that each individual was part of his own leadership and he was responsible for his actions" (126). Brooks, by involving his men

and building a genuine community, is furthering the responsible individuality of his men by requiring them to take some ownership of the group actions.

Del Vecchio's vision of a workable community composed of independent and responsible individuals is unique. We have seen that the novels of World Wars I and II have portrayed the individual as either overwhelmed or, rarely, capable of free and independent action. Not all of Del Vecchio's characters are exemplary, of course. Chelini goes insane and Numbnuts is a coward, for example, but the best soldiers are not overwhelmed, are free and independent within the limits of a deterministic universe, and are cognizant of their relationship to their community. Del Vecchio never makes an overt plea for Americans living in a contentious and fragmented time to adopt the versions of individuality, community, and leadership that he is presenting. Furthermore, one has to wonder if he really believes in the viability of his own vision since he undercuts it by having the acknowledged leaders of the company—Brooks, Egan, and Doc—all die in the end, and skilled leadership appears to be crucial to Del Vecchio's concept of community. Their deaths create a depressing undertone that says the best, the capable leaders, those who could come home and make a difference, are not going to survive. With this in mind, we now turn to a novel that depicts a survivor—Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green. This survivor is not as traumatized as Trumbo's Joe Bonham, but he has his own problems, and he is not the responsible individual Del Vecchio envisions.

Unlike the realistic style of The 13th Valley, Wright's novel is experimental. It alternates between the past and the present and is structured out of fragments—episodes varying from a paragraph long to several pages—divided into fifteen "chapters," each headed by a "Meditation in Green." These meditations are basically poems or lists, mainly about plant-life. Moreover, Meditations in Green is singular in that it unflinchingly portrays the hard drug use that Baritz maintains was "pandemic" among grunts in Vietnam (315).

Stephen Wright was born and raised in Ohio. In 1969 he was drafted, and he served in Vietnam throughout 1970. Meditations in Green, based on his war experiences, was published in 1983 and earned him the Maxwell Perkins Prize for best first novel. Wright explores the contradictions of the war and of modern life but without ever attempting to reconcile them, thus helping his readers experience the ambiguity first-hand. The novel's protagonist, James I. Griffin, is portrayed both in Vietnam and back home some seven years later, suffering from Delayed Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. William J. Searle feels that Wright's novel resembles Catch-22 in "its use of absurd briefings, a war zone section structured around the deaths of the protagonist's buddies, and satire of monomaniacal enlisted men, outrageously incompetent staff officers, and military corruption." It differs from Heller's work in that it includes "the stereotypes of the Vietnam War," "racism, troop insubordination," "atrocity," "drug abuse and fragging" (156). I would add that it resembles not only Catch-22 but all of the novels that I have been discussing in its use of the war as a representative depiction of the state of the world at large. As Thomas

Myers puts it, Wright's novel assumes "the proposition that the war is not a bracketed aberration of American history but the new imprint of what the culture has become" (199). Wright's narrative technique is one method by which this proposition is conveyed.

We have seen that some critics of The 13th Valley and other realistic novels of Vietnam contend that realism is an inadequate form for conveying the Vietnam experience. Agreeing with this view, Nancy Anisfield maintains that "If the fragmentation of time, in-country language, and surrealistic suggestions of the effects of war on the psyche can accurately remind us of what the Vietnam experience was like, then, and only then, do we have the best possible chance, through literature, of assimilating this experience" (61). Perhaps, but I do agree that we need to assimilate the experience because, as Myers has pointed out above, it reveals what our "culture has become." Wright uses all three techniques that Anisfield mentions. The novel has a dual time structure, advancing time chronologically in both the present and the past intermittently. The effect of fragmentation is achieved by the movement from present to past and back again and by the use of montage, jumping around from one story-line or image to another. Wright also alternates between a first-person narrator and a third-person narrator, which increases the feeling of fragmentation. The language of Meditations in Green is clearly "in-country language," both in the Vietnam sections of the narrative and in the urban America sections. Owen W. Gilman, Jr. has made an interesting observation about Wright's use of language. He contends that Wright's

> technique dramatically implies that, for veterans at least, all time is synchronous, all centered on the Vietnam period. Certain terms make it this way, certain dispositions toward language. If we think of life as an act of languaging, then the languaging action peculiar to the Vietnam War orders and directs the life [sic] of those who lived through it. (Nomenclature 67)

The use of a Vietnam-derived vocabulary by Griffin and his pal Trips seven years after returning home would seem to verify Gilman's contention. They are still living the war, and their language reflects this. Finally, Wright's depiction of Griffin's psychic reveries and distortions is clearly surrealistic, but not unique in the novel. Wright explores the psyches of other characters as well, most notably Claypool and Kraft, and their experiences are every bit as surreal as Griffin's. Wright's depiction of individuals as fragmented, isolated, and beset by an absurd and surreal world which is increasingly meaningless is not Vietnam-specific, though. It represents the state of the individual in modern society.

Wright acknowledges that he was trying to accurately convey the Vietnam experience in his novel. He says,

> It was a struggle to find a form for writing about Vietnam. . . . What I tried to do was simply put down the experience as well as I could. You couldn't take a definite moral outlook, so instead of holding up signs as to what's proper and what isn't, I tried to leave it up to the reader to decide. I tried to convey the specific feel of Vietnam with the texture of

> the language. There was a kind of dislocation I tried to get in there—a constant nervousness and jumpiness. (Kakutani 40)

Most critics have hailed Wright's efforts as successful. Donald Ringnalda believes "that the most successful novels [of the Vietnam War] are those that are *not* literary agent orange. That is, the most successful novels neither defoliate the horror and absurdity of Vietnam by 'making sense' of the experience, nor nihilistically wallow in it." Ringnalda calls Meditations in Green "possibly the finest" Vietnam novel yet written (127). I must concur; Wright's novel, with all its absurdity and surrealism, is the Vietnam novel I find the most intriguing. Nonetheless, it is not entirely absurd and surreal.

Certain passages in Meditations in Green are every bit as realistic as James Jones's work. As Matthew Stewart points out, "Perhaps the unique strength of the novel's descriptive realism is its ability to portray the boredom and futility ever-present in the lives of many rear-echelon soldiers in Vietnam" (129). Stewart also finds Wright to be successful in his depiction of the war due largely to "the multiple levels of reading that the novel calls for" which enables it "to suggest truths that the run-of-the-mill Vietnam narrative cannot render with equal power and vividness" (135). The ambiguities, craziness, and contradictions of the war and of America during the war and in its aftermath are well represented by Wright's narrative. On the whole, his novel is unlike anything we have seen from Mailer, Jones, or the Great War novelists, and with good reason, as Christopher Metress explains. "Wright is remythologizing the war experience, encouraging us to alter our traditional points of reference. We are

no longer in the landscape of the American Western, and the mythology and iconography of *The Sands of Iwo Jima* has given way to *The Night of the Living Dead"* (118). Why should we alter our "traditional points of reference," we might ask Wright? I will argue that Wright believes we need to alter them because late twentieth-century American society is constructed, ordered, linear, and at odds with nature, which tends to be circular, cyclic and somewhat random. Consequently, individuals are rendered incapable of self-awareness and are isolated from others because they are oblivious to their interconnectedness with nature and with one another. We need to examine, first, just how Wright depicts modern American society (which we can see as representative of all technologically-advanced societies).

Wright's dedication of his novel is a tell-tale sign of what he thinks about the state of the individual in modern America. He dedicates the work to "the graphed, the charted, the data processed and to all the uncounted." Clearly, he sees the individual as dehumanized, reduced to a cipher—if counted at all. This depiction of the condition of the individual is then reinforced by the very first of Wright's fifteen "Meditation[s] in Green." The "I" of the meditation is a flower (a poppy, as the reader will later discern). This poppy has been taken out of nature, out of its natural environment. Placed on a sill, its view is of "colorless sky, lusterless sun, sooty field of rusted television antennas, the unharvested crop of the city; and below, down a sheer wall, the persistent dead unavoidable concrete. . . . five stories vertical, a mile and a half horizontal from the nearest uncemented ground" It has been made totally dependent, subject to "enervations, apathy, loneliness" (3). Of course, the reader soon

realizes that this poppy is a metaphor for a human being in modern, urban, technological societies—removed and remote from nature and isolated. The linear character of the vertical and horizontal references presage one of Wright's favorite images—geometrical form.

The first paragraph of the novel finds Griffin walking his daily route which he describes as "a stitching of right angles" (4). Not long after, we read, "Someone flipped a switch and the darkness exploded into geometry. Spheres of light overhead illuminated the angles and planes of an enormous rectangular room. Two rows of bunks faced one another in mirrored perfection and on the last bunk of the left row, a warp in the symmetry" (11). The warp, of course, is Griffin, lying on his bunk. In this passage we are introduced to the linear geometry of the army. This is reinforced by the description of the 1069th Intelligence Group's compound: "the unit's basic geometric design possessed a pleasing sense of natural logic and finality. . . . Approaching from the east you thought of the runway as a pole and the perfectly engineered rectangle of buildings to the right of its top as a flag" (41). The military's straight lines and orderly rows are typical of the technological mindset that has little patience with warps in the symmetry. What this linear, ordered view of the world means to Griffin begins to become clear when we find him years later looking out his window. He says, "I see little colored rectangles shuttling around a concrete board. Too many pieces, too many rules, not enough turns" (102). Angles and edges, rules and regulations are human constructs and humanity's nemesis; what Griffin wants is to "Get all the corners . . . rounded off " (101).

Lines and angles are not natural, Wright implies, as Griffin imagines what the unit's compound will look like after the American forces abandon it. "Plants have taken the compound. Elephant grass in the motor pool. Plantain in the mess hall. Lotus in the latrine. Shapes are losing outline, character. Wooden frames turning spongy. The attrition of squares and rectangles. The loss of geometry. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form" (146). According to Donald Ringnalda, "Wright's point is that this attrition of geometry is accompanied by, and largely causes, the attrition of Griffin's psychic geometry" (129). This is true because Griffin's psyche reflects a technological, linear world view rather than a cyclic, circular natural view of life. He finds it increasingly difficult to cope with the uncontrolled, the uncertain, and the unfamiliar that is the daily fare of life in Vietnam. The point can be further illustrated.

Americans fight nature because nature is too bothersome, too much trouble for them, Wright seems to say in Meditation Ten. Conversely, he writes, "Plastic" plants "bloom forever / a perfect green day" (205). No fuss, no muss, and easy to forget about, like the dusty plastic plants in the cafeteria Griffin and Trips frequent (114). Significantly, Griffin's first military job is to analyze aerial photographs and send bombers on missions during which "metal and machinery were busy churning plants and animals into garbage" (21), and later, his analyses are designed to aid the pilots who are dispensing the defoliant Agent Orange to the countryside. Griffin himself says, "I guess the trick must be to keep clear of moving parts" (24). Moving parts are machine parts, human constructs that dehumanize individuals and alienate

them from nature. This image is reinforced by Meditation Three, which is an account of a bombing run from a tree's point of view. The natural bliss of centuries is literally uprooted in seconds, turned upside down, exposing "shocked roots" that have "already begun to blacken and curl at the touch of a light photosynthesis is hopelessly unable to transform" (36). Wright contrasts the waste of human destruction with the economy of natural processes when Griffin finds himself overwhelmed by the jungle. Griffin "realized that were he to die in here among these botanical springs and gears, a Green Machine larger and more efficient than any human bureaucracy or mechanical invention would promptly initiate the indifferent process of converting flesh and dreams into plant food" (277). In nature, of course, death breeds life. Griffin, though, has the American's linear, ordered view of life, an approach to the world that emphasizes and seeks control, breeding waste and destruction rather than life.

In response to the jungle, Griffin experiences "a vegetable overdose, a chlorophyll freakout." He thinks, "The whole stinking forest should have been sprayed long ago, hosed down, drenched in [Agent] Orange, leaves blackened, branches denuded, undergrowth dried into brittle paper. . . . Who permitted these outrages, where was the technology when you needed it?" (278). The inference that our technology is destroying us begs to be made. To destroy nature as America did in Vietnam with its defoliation program is to destroy ourselves by not recognizing our natural place in the universe. Griffin is the prime individual example of the point, desiring to destroy what he cannot understand or control. Wright's view of nature as a source of value seems opposed to an existential view that finds nature meaningless or

capable only of inducing a Sartrean nausea. It is also opposed to the naturalism of Mailer and Jones, who seem to find nature's indifference inimical to man. Wright, on the other hand, while acknowledging nature's indifference and ability to overwhelm the individual, depicts it as a positive, vitalizing force if one only attunes oneself to its rhythms. Ultimately, the jungle proves too strong to disappear altogether at the behest of humans, while Griffin proves too weak to resist his own gradual diminishment, his own loss of self to the snares of drug addiction. But he is not alone in the novel, and I will begin by identifying the several examples of disappearing selves that Wright presents, which, one can surmise, may have been inspired by Catch-22, in which "they" disappear Dunbar.

Griffin's friend Simon does not totally disappear, but his letters symbolize the tendency. His first letter begins normally enough with the salutation "Dear Mom and Dad" and is signed "Lewis" (58). Interestingly, though, the salutation and signature are diminished with each succeeding letter: "Dear Mom and Pop" and "Lew" (133); "Dear Ma and Pa" and "Lew" (176-77); "Dear M & P" and "L" (224-25); and finally, "Dear Folks" and "Me" (267). The diminution of self represented by the regress from "Lewis" to "L" is clear, and I would argue that the final "Me" represents a recognition of lost self and a desire to locate the self, the "Me" he once was. The final "Me" is also ironic because the person Simon depicts as himself in all his letters bears no resemblance to the reality, nor does his depiction of the conditions under which he is living. Because he has invented a mock-heroic persona intended to impress the folks back home, his sense of self is doubly lost. Neither he nor his family will recognize the

Simon who returns home (if he does return). Similarly, years later when visiting his psychologist, who urges his clients to meditate upon flowers and who bears the apt Shakespearean appellation of Arden, Griffin has the following exchange:

> Don't call me Grif.
>
> Oh? What do I call you?
>
> G.
>
> G?
>
> Just the initial. I'm down to the initial. (240)

Disappearance of the self is not generally instantaneous, and Griffin, at least, holds out hope for an eventual reappearance or rebirth of the self after he sloughs off all the cultural accretions, which is why he is seeing Arden.

The most extreme disappearances are those of Kraft and Claypool. Kraft is the CIA man. He is an experienced operative. Devoted to duty and a believer in the American "mission," he is a lone-wolf familiar with the underbelly of the war, no stranger to political assassination, and supremely confident in his own abilities. Kraft is knowledgeable about the jungle, the "Bush," and its effect on a person. He believes that "Moving through it, conscious of it, you were conscious of yourself. Irrevocably itself, a presence distinct and unyielding, it offered opportunities for definition" (77). When the helicopter in which he is riding is shot down and the crew massacred and mutilated, Kraft is not found among the victims. Alive or dead, he has disappeared. Eventually, much later, Kraft reappears from the jungle—fatigued, filthy, and with a broken arm.

> He seemed to be okay mentally, he told them his name, rank, unit, the details of how he had come to be where they found him, but what he wanted to talk about most was the jungle, its aloofness, its beauty, its breathing life, and certain nonverbal secrets it had imparted to him through the intimacy of its soft green touch. (304)

Subsequently, Kraft declines orders and remains in his room, unmoving and rarely speaking, sitting on the floor with an "expression of intense bafflement as though attending to a sound or an interior process distant and subtle" (320-21). No one knows what to make of his withdrawal, and when he is asked about it,

> his hands would lift in gestures of helpless amazement, and he'd look away saying softly, "The plants . . . they're so . . . the trees . . . I . . . I don't know." Finally they left him there like that because he was obviously useless and he only had forty days to go and no one cared anyway. (321)

Kraft obviously has found his "opportunities for definition" in the jungle, and no definition he recognizes has been forthcoming. This dutiful minion of the American, linear, ordered point of view cannot find a way to express the natural, random reality he has encountered. Unable to articulate the experience rationally according to the mindset with which he met it, he is lost; his self has disappeared.

Something similar happens to Claypool. An interpreter assigned to the prisoner interrogation unit, he is new to Vietnam and quickly bewildered by the failure of the reality to meet his expectations. The first jolt to his grasp on reality is his initial

exposure to interrogation by torture. He has heard rumors of such things but imagines them to be the aberrant behavior of an isolated few under the stress of combat. The reality that torture is a matter of course for intelligence staff "stationed in cozy rear area quarters" shocks him. "It was like learning your family dentist overcharged for extractions or drilled into healthy teeth. It meant there were cliffs where he had always assumed there were fences" (106). His faith in American order and goodwill is further shaken when he is sent on a field operation. He had believed that signing papers to extend his enlistment in exchange for a non-combat job description would protect him from being sent into the field. Not only is he sent into combat, but in short order everyone around him is horribly slaughtered. Claypool survives, but upon returning to base he rarely talks and the deterioration of his self is rapid. Finally, he disappears. No one knows where he is; even Claypool does not know. Seeing his own name on his uniform, he rejects it. "He had abandoned that name and the life clinging to it like dead meat, he had thrown it away and gone on as easily as one removes a pebble from a shoe" (234). Peering out from his hiding place, watching troops painting, he believes that "When they applied this liquid buildings would vanish. . . . soon all mistakes would be erased." And the painters, "these people would disappear too" (234-35). Watching this scene over the course of days, he is awestruck by the brightness of it and imagines: "It wouldn't be long until the screen was as clean and white as a page upon which nothing had ever been written. . . . When they came to do his wall would he disappear too? He thought so. He knew he was a mistake" (235). Eventually, he is discovered and an attempt is made to put him back to work, but he flees naked and

finally winds up in a mental ward, "where, as Trips liked to joke, he could spend the remainder of the war, sitting in a closet and drooling in his shoe" (238).

Claypool's disappearance is the most extreme we see in the novel, but it is really only a matter of degree. As Griffin muses when he hears of the naked Claypool fleeing,

> any day now he had been expecting one of them . . . to unwrap, to go natural; you could feel the adhesive coming loose in the humidity, the edges beginning to curl . . . running from, running toward, the exhilarating fear of how easy it would be simply to keep on, past the regs, across the laws, over the code, boundaries bursting like ribbon, on into a jungle of hair and teeth, raking the darkness with extended claws. (238)

Each soldier is susceptible to the loss of the self he has brought with him to Vietnam. The contradictions and ambiguities of the war abound and overwhelm the individual and are only exacerbated by unfamiliarity with the ripeness of nature. It is to Griffin that we must now turn. As the novel's main character, he carries the burden of revealing Wright's outlook for the future of the individual.

We meet Griffin in the present and quickly learn that for him "This is not a settled life." He spends most of his time alone, and ordinary, commonplace things such as Crispy Critters cereal and Charlie perfume are nauseating reminders of the war. Even his sometimes girlfriend Huey shares "her name with a ten-thousand-pound assault helicopter" (8). The only other person he spends any time with is his wartime

buddy, Trips, who is obsessed with finding their former sergeant and who says, “I can’t get a job, my family doesn’t speak to me, the VA wouldn’t give me a Band-Aid if I slit my wrists in their lobby” (116). Much the same could apparently be said of Griffin, who appears to be living off disability benefits and who never once mentions his family in the entire novel.

Griffin seems to be a man without a past, and Wright confirms this impression later in the novel. Sitting atop a hootch, Griffin contemplates the ghostly afterimages of extinguished flares. “Except that even these ghosts possessed more form, solidity, and permanence than the rapidly vanishing real objects and beings of Griffin’s prewar existence.” And the more “raw” incidents of death, pain, and degradation he sees, the more insubstantial and fantastic his past becomes for him.

> The war was real; he was not. It was like memory, and therefore his most profound sense of self was a tub of tepid water into which chunks of rock (the war) fell almost daily now in wide splashes, spilling his past and his life onto a cold black-and-white linoleum floor. Griffin couldn’t help but wonder what the displacement would be equal to finally. (193)

Wright does not say that Griffin has no past; rather, the war has displaced him from his past. It has isolated him from other human beings. As he muses on another night while sitting on the hootch-top, “It’s like we’re all these weird spacemen or something and everyone’s got marooned on his own chunk of rock and we just whizz past each other like asteroids speeding along at different rates, burning up at different temperatures, know what I mean?” (300).

Griffin believes that "Catastrophe" lacks "coherence" and the war is the catastrophe he is encountering daily (272). Initially, marijuana serves the purpose of elevating "tolerance levels" (210), but eventually he discovers heroin and realizes that it makes the days go "Zip" (290). But that has its problems, too, as he discovers one day when he hallucinates and passes out while at his job, which deeply disturbs him because "he didn't know what had happened" (272-73). A few days later he volunteers to go on a field operation to recover the remains of the men on Kraft's downed helicopter. He realizes en route that he volunteered for two reasons:

> He wanted to experience some portion of this madness as his own, not as accident or bad luck or whim of his superiors but as choice, freely made, the consequences freely accepted; he wanted a purge, a flushing out of the corners, . . . so that when he returned the office would be simply an office again, neutral objects arranged between four neutral walls. (275)

No purgation occurs, though, and Griffin continues to use heroin until the base is overrun and he is wounded. Wright is somewhat ambiguous about what happens to Griffin between receiving his leg wound in Vietnam and the present, seven years later. There is a hint that he suffers withdrawal while hospitalized and that he has stayed off the heroin until Huey's brother sends him a bag of "DOUBLEUOGLOBE BRAND" dope (7). Interestingly, he does not hesitate, immediately smokes some of the gift, and heroin and/or opium is a part of his life for the rest of the novel. We now will look

more closely at Griffin as a civilian in the present of the novel to discover just what Wright sees as the future of the individual in a modern technological society.

The meditations Arden prescribes for Griffin are based upon "pilferings from nineteenth-century flower chapbooks, . . . gnarled notions of Oriental religion," and "generous handfuls of native positive thinking" (87). Arden wants Griffin to find the seed of his self at his core and then to bust "through the accumulated muck of a lifetime" like a new shoot breaking soil (89-90). Arden does not see Griffin as essentially different from other Americans. They are all out of touch with their natural selves, their inner selves that are attuned to the rhythms of nature, but a problem thwarts his remedy. Arden says, "there's the awareness problem. Problem is they [Americans] don't really want it, awareness. To be aware is to, well, suffer, can't escape the masters. Instead, they want happiness, little fixes of delight" (88). Arden, although painted as a charlatan, may actually have a point. Modern culture discourages becoming aware of one's connection to the natural world. It encourages synthetics, following fashions, mass media manipulation, amusement, just about anything except discovering oneself as an individual interconnected with the universe. Griffin seems quite different from the average person. At least, his lifestyle is not typical, but he is having no success with his meditation. Arden asks him what he wants from his meditation, and Griffin replies, "Oh, I don't know, some distant kin, a second cousin or a great uncle, to authenticity, I suppose" (90). Arden scoffs at the existential term and all modern philosophical answers. Wright would seem to agree with Arden because there are no existential heroes in this novel. No one exhibits Sartrean good

faith or exercises a Nietzschean will to power. All the characters seem pretty helpless, actually, batted about by forces beyond their control. Accordingly, we find Griffin identifying his socially-determined place in the universe: "He saw how the gestures of each instant since his induction and probably from further back than he wished to know had conspired to lead him gently as a domesticated animal to the violence of this moment" (336). As we have seen, the forces shaping Griffin and all individuals in our modern society are the linear, ordered logics of technology that are at odds with a random, seemingly indifferent nature. In response to the social construction that is dehumanizing him, Griffin seems to consider only two alternatives, neither of which is promising—death or escapism.

For modern Western man, meditation does not seem to be a suitable alternative to technological order, and Wright really does not appear to be promoting it since Arden comes across as a fraud. As Griffin says, "What's more American than good honest fraud? . . . Delusion is a national pastime" (143). Wright does seem to offer alternatives, though. For a while Griffin turns to contemplating stone. He discerns that the whole process of life on earth tends toward all eventually becoming rock—"the whole cycle pointed toward the perfection of stone, the bottom level" (145). He tells Huey, "A new motto: If you can't trans-cend, you might as well des-cend. I'm scoping out the bottom here. . . . Mass, Density. Permanence. Finality. Termination. Rock. Even the word conveys heft, a certain assurance. No loss of focus here" (264). This clearly is a metaphor for death—one alternative for modern man. Extinguishing the self entirely is a fatalistic vision and one that bodes ill for the

individual. Griffin only toys with the idea. Instead, he decides to cultivate a green thumb. This appears more promising since getting closer to nature seems to be something Wright has painted as desirable. But Griffin's idea is to turn his apartment into an indoor opium poppy farm. He seems doomed to addiction, which can only intensify his isolation and reduce his freedom. This second alternative—addiction or escapism—is not much better than the death alternative. It is just another form of "self" destruction. Griffin hopes to erase his memories of the war and to find "that stupid sweet kid who was once me" (89), but in the process he is turning himself into a will-less dependent. There is nothing romantic or redemptive or heroic about opiate addiction.

The last "Meditation in Green" consists of instructions for extracting the opium from poppies and for preparing it for smoking (340). Then, the final pages offer the image of Griffin as a modern Johnny Appleseed, sowing poppy seeds apparently (341). Philip D. Beidler reads this conclusion as "the fruitional green of promise, the peace-green of life and new creation" (7). I fail to see anything so positive in this ending. To me it sounds like another of Griffin's opium pipe dreams—he does say that "At night I carve peace pipes" (341). Also, the final image is of scissors cutting paper into paper poppies "twisted about a metal stem for your lapel" (342). This is a reference to the paper poppies disabled veterans organizations used to sell to fund their activities during my youth. The poppy as a reminder of war and of those who fought goes back to World War I and the image of poppies in Flanders fields.

The poem “In Flanders Fields” by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, on which the symbolism is based, is well known.

> In Flanders fields the poppies blow
>
> Between the crosses, row on row,
>
> That mark our place; . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> We are the Dead. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> If ye break faith with us who die
>
> We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
>
> In Flanders fields. (1-3, 6, 13-15)

This reminder has not served to forestall any subsequent wars, and it really is ironic since poppies, the source of opium, are more associated with forgetfulness than with remembrance. The addicted Griffin and other Vietnam veterans, such as the obsessed and delusional Trips, are themselves reminders of war, which is Wright’s point, I believe. Unfortunately, I see the traumatized Vietnam veterans being virtually ignored by their countrymen—more often portrayed as weak, if not wholly un-American, than as any sort of symbol of war’s evils.

Griffin is another one of those individuals overwhelmed by life that we have seen so often in war novels. He is the spiritual descendant of Boyd’s Hicks, Dos Passos’s Fuselli and Chrisfield, or just about any character in Jones’s novels. Judging from the tenor of his novel as a whole, it appears to me that Wright holds out no hope

for Griffin and, by implication, for all of us who are kept lined up and boxed in by our ordered, technological society. The alternatives that Griffin explores—death and addiction—are unacceptable, and overall, the novel presents no easy or sure way to return to nature. Furthermore, because no good comes to any of the characters in the novel, Wright seems to be saying that a culture that can bring itself to destroy nature—by the use of Agent Orange, for example—will eventually destroy its people by preventing them from recognizing their interconnectedness with nature and, thus, with one another. It is hard to decide whose vision is more bleak, Wright's or James Jones's. For a slightly more optimistic view of the individual, we now turn to our final novel, Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato.

O'Brien's novel brings us full circle with its variation on the separate peace motif that we first encountered in our discussion of Great War novels. It will challenge us to consider how separable self and society really are. Tim O'Brien was drafted in 1968 upon graduation from Macalester College. After much inner debate over whether or not to desert and go to Canada, O'Brien went to Vietnam in 1969 and served a tour of duty as an infantryman. Going After Cacciato is his third published book, and it won the National Book Award in 1978. The novel is a combination of realism and fantasy—some have called it a work of magical realism (McCaffrey 130). The book consists of three distinct types of narrative: the memories of the main character, Paul Berlin; his imaginary, fantasized pursuit of the deserter Cacciato; and

the present reality of the Observation Post,[10] where he is on guard duty. Of Paul Berlin, Robert M. Slabey says, "Sensitive and confused, he is not a disaffiliated youth, but he is still a postmodernist protagonist for whom the lines blur between dream and reality" (208). The story centers on the idea of desertion, the separate peace motif that we have seen so often. Mark Busby observes that "Unlike . . . Frederic Henry, Paul Berlin makes no separate peace. And unlike Yossarian in *Catch-22*, Paul Berlin never learns to see clearly the absurdity in which he is caught. Berlin's relationship to Cacciato parallels Yossarian's to Orr" (64). I would not go so far as to say that Berlin fails to see the absurdity of the war, but he certainly draws a different conclusion from it all than Yossarian does. Edward F. Palm seems to have a shorter memory than Busby when he writes, "O'Brien's novel represents a rejection of a literary response to war which has been dominant now for more than twenty years: the separate peace motif as refined by Heller" (121). Palm is partly correct in that Berlin rejects a separate peace, but those in the novel who choose it are not denounced. There is a sense that O'Brien defers to individual choice in the matter.

Desertion has always been an issue during wartime, and consideration of it is a natural focal point for individuals trying to take responsibility for their own lives. Not surprisingly, given the controversial nature of the Vietnam War, desertion and

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[10] Michael W. Raymond (100) and Jack Slay, Jr. argue that "the Observation Post is as unreal, is as much a work of Berlin's imagination as is the search for the runaway Cacciato" (81). They may be correct, but the distinction is irrelevant to this study.

unauthorized absences were widespread phenomena. Historian Michael Maclear informs us that before 1968

> the desertion rate in the US armed forces was below that of World War II and Korea. But between 1969 and 1971, compared with the three previous years, the number of desertions doubled, then doubled again. . . . These desertions were both in Vietnam and at US bases world-wide indicating the wider military demoralization. . . . [T]he combined desertion and AWOL numbers meant that about one in four of the US world forces had mutinied or were defying military orders. (280)

Turning one's back on the war was something every thoughtful, draft-age, American male had to consider, particularly from 1968 until the war's end. Many found ways to avoid being drafted in the first place, but once one was caught up in the military's web, desertion, dishonor, or death were about the only ways out before one's term of service expired. The war was a distinct challenge to young men to define their values and principles. It is quite appropriate, then, that O'Brien uses the desertion of Cacciato to explore themes of individuality, free will, responsibility, and commitment.

Cacciato himself does not appear much in the novel. His desertion, we are told, occurs in October 1968 (25). The other soldiers consider him to be "brave" (15), but also dumb as "a month-old oyster fart" (2). His one major appearance in the novel finds him fishing in a water-filled bomb crater with string and a paperclip while Berlin tries to convince him to touch a hand grenade as symbolic assent to the

fragging of Lieutenant Martin (238-41). Cacciato does not touch the grenade, though, the only soldier in the squad who declines to do so. No one ever really knows why he decides to leave the war and walk to Paris. None of the troops have any particularly strong political convictions about the war. “They fought the war, but no one took sides” (272). Cacciato appears no different from the others in this respect, so his reason for leaving is probably not political, nor is cowardice a likely motive. Perhaps it has something to do with the death of Lieutenant Martin, but O’Brien never explains Cacciato’s reason. Thus, Cacciato remains an enigma, and John Hellmann identifies the quandary the reader is left to ponder.

> Cacciato is on the one hand the quintessence of the desired American self-concept: a solitary, independent, innocent, optimistic, and determined character who, having set for himself a goal, exhibits on his journey west cunning self-reliance while stripping himself of the baggage of his past identity. . . . [on the other hand] he poses the problem of whether this new man is boldly showing the way to a better world or regressing into the self-indulgence of childhood. (164-65)

This problem, then, expresses the dilemma of self-image that the main character, Paul Berlin, struggles with throughout the novel. As O’Brien himself tells Eric James Schroeder, the “sense of war that I’m trying to get at. . . . [is] Internal war, personal war” (Interviews 143). The question is not only whether or not he should desert, but what will be the effect of his decision on his opinion of himself, on his self-esteem? Is he going to be self-reliant or self-indulgent? Is he going to exercise free will or be

coerced into conformity? Furthermore, can the modern individual's situation even be reduced to an either/or proposition? By examining Berlin's decision, we will be able to ascertain O'Brien's view of the relationship between society and the individual in late twentieth-century America.

The reader quite early in the novel discovers that Paul Berlin has a problem with fear. Berlin presumes he can conquer his fear, though. While on guard in the Observation Post, he ponders fear, "The real issue was the power of will to defeat fear. A matter of figuring a way to do it. Somehow working his way into that secret chamber of the human heart, where, in tangles, lay the circuitry for all that was possible, the full range of what a man might be" (81). He seems to believe in free will, and in this belief he is much like Lieutenant Martin. Martin maintains that for the soldier the important mission is an "inner mission, the mission of every man to learn the important things about himself" (166). The key to accomplishing this, according to Martin, is the "greatest gift of God . . . freedom of will" (168). Martin is musing in this vein while he watches and admires Berlin climbing a mountain, but ironically, he does not realize that Berlin has actually made a conscious decision to quit, to fall down and march no more. However, we read, "The decision was made, but it did not flow down to his legs, which kept climbing the red road. Powerless and powerful . . . Berlin marched toward the mountains without stop or ability to stop" (168). Where is Berlin's free will? Near the end of the novel, Berlin thinks, "The issue was courage, and courage was will power, and this was his failing" (324). It appears that free will is a

nebulous quality in O'Brien's vision, and this becomes even more clear when we examine how much control Berlin has over anything.

Paul Berlin wants to use imagination and memory to shape his future and his self, to have some self-control in the chaotic world in which he is trapped—where soldiers die of fright or are gunned down by their own side. Berlin supposes that he has control, thinking, "True, the war scared him silly, but this was something he hoped to bring under control" (40). Yet, when he is imagining the squad's pursuit of Cacciato and trying to think of a solution to the problem of how to get the Lieutenant to allow the girl, Sarkin Aung Wan, to continue on the journey with them, he is unable to think of anything, "so it simply happened," an earthquake and a fall into a hole in the road (75-76). Similarly, when imagining them on board the Dehli Express, Berlin says, "it was out of control. Events taking their own track" (136), and after their miraculous imaginary escape from Iran, Berlin muses, "Out of control, and maybe it always had been. One thing leading to the next, and pretty soon there was no guiding it, and things happened out of other things" (248). Not only has he no control over his own imagination, but when thinking about the fragging death of Lieutenant Martin, he realizes that "The way events led to events, and the way they got out of human control" is an all too real phenomenon (248). Of course, being "out of control," lacking control, is the infantryman's lot and is an apt metaphor for the whole war. As the imaginary VC major Li Van Hgoc puts it, "No way out. That is the puzzle. We are prisoners, all of us POWs" (96). In this they are much like Mailer's and Jones's soldiers

imprisoned on islands. This lack of individual control is further exacerbated by uncertainty.

Doc Peret likens the war's uncertainties to a vacuum. As he colorfully puts it, "Can't have order in a vacuum. For order you got to have substance, matériel. So here we are—nothing to order, no substance. Aimless, that's what it is: a bunch of kids trying to pin the tail on the Asian donkey. But no fuckin tail. No fuckin donkey" (105). O'Brien goes on to catalogue all the things they do not know: "a sense of victory, or satisfaction, or necessary sacrifice," "the feeling of taking a place and keeping it," "if it was a war of ideology or economics or hegemony or spite," "good from evil." Furthermore, they have "No front, no rear, no trenches laid out in neat parallels. . . . They did not have targets. They did not have a cause" (272-73). The uncertainties even extend to one another. For example, Oscar Johnson claims to be from "center-city Detroit," but "his mail went to Bangor, Maine" (142), and no one ever knows Doc Peret's real first name (145-46). Identity is somewhat amorphous, and "What they were called was in some ways a measure of who they were, in other ways a measure of who they preferred to be" (146). The uncertainties contribute to the attractiveness of desertion, for the soldiers are without a clear purpose in the war. The imaginary Iranian Captain, Fahyi Rhallon, believes that "Without purpose men will run" (200). This lack of purpose is something Edward F. Palm sees as pervasive at the time. Palm contends that Paul Berlin

> is representative of a great many men who actually fought the war. Paul Berlin suffers from the perplexing state of anomie that was pervasive throughout the sixties. He finds the traditional values by which he has

> been raised challenged by a world that is changing too rapidly for comprehension. He is caught up in the confusing immediacy of events, leaving him, as O'Brien's narrator says of the platoon at large, unable to distinguish good and evil with any degree of finality. (124-25)

In a world full of uncertainty and in which the individual lacks fundamental control over his life, the temptation to run away, to escape, can be very strong. Whether it be in a form similar to Cacciato's insane plan to walk to Paris or in the form of drug or alcohol abuse, such as depicted in Meditations in Green, the route of escape has been chosen by many beleaguered individuals in our technologically-oriented culture.

The crux of the novel is Paul Berlin's decision to stay in the war and not follow Cacciato's example. Like Heller's Yossarian, Berlin realizes that responsibility is involved in his decision. He says, "Responsibility. That was what was needed—somebody to take it as a solemn vow" (136). As Eric James Schroeder maintains, Paul Berlin "learns eventually that events do have meaning, but that he himself must impose it" (Dialectic 133). He imaginatively explores the possibilities of desertion and ultimately discovers that the meaning of his presence in the war is a matter of obligation; he says, "I *feel* obliged" (285). Sarkin Aung Wan tries to convince him that his responsibility is only to himself, to his own peace of mind (320-21). The girl is espousing the argument used by Dos Passos's John Andrews. Palm sees a more distant antecedent for Berlin's position, though, arguing that "In the final analysis, what motivates a character like Paul Berlin is precisely what motivates Crane's Henry Fleming: neither abstract ideas nor principles, but the natural pull of kinship and camaraderie and the fear

of social ostracism balanced by the instinct for self preservation" (127). Berlin's reasoning is also akin to Yossarian's in that he takes into consideration the effect his actions will have on others. Yet, he and Yossarian draw opposite conclusions. Let's look at Berlin's reasoning.

In the first place, Berlin argues that obligation is built upon "many prior acts of consent," both explicit and implicit. Added to these were "tacit promises" made to family, community, and country. He feels that he gave his consent and made his promises with his eyes wide open and freely. Yet he says, "True, the moral climate was imperfect; there were pressures, constraints, but nonetheless I made binding choices." There seems to be some acknowledgment of social coercion playing a part in his "free" choices, but he declines to use that as an excuse for reneging on them. Why? He reasons that his "obligation is to people, not to principle or politics or justice" (322). He goes on to explain,

> An idea, when violated, cannot make reprisals. A principle cannot refuse to shake my hand. Only people can do that. And it is this social power, the threat of social consequences, that stops me from making a full and complete break. Peace of mind is not a simple matter of pursuing one's own pleasure; rather, it is inextricably linked to the attitudes of other human beings, to what they want, to what they expect. (323)

Dean McWilliams examines Berlin's reasoning and concludes that its "implications are deterministic" (253). O'Brien does seem to be acknowledging social determinism but without claiming that it is necessarily a bad thing. One at least believes that one is making

free choices. The Lockean notion of a social contract wins out here over a Hobbesean every-man-for-himself attitude toward life. Busby contends that Berlin's decision "denies the possibility of individual fulfillment as presented by Hemingway and Heller" (63). I have argued that individual fulfillment can only occur within a social context, and I have previously pointed out that context, the care for others demonstrated by Frederic Henry in A Farewell to Arms and Yossarian in Catch-22, among others. Berlin is aware of a social context, but his emphasis is on the consequences for himself, not on care for others. Therefore, I agree with Busby because Berlin makes a choice, but it is hard to see him as accepting the responsibility of his own freedom.

Owen W. Gilman, Jr. contends that "The community of homeland America placed Paul Berlin in Vietnam. That action was a misstep, but the idea of community is still worth pursuing. . . . The first step is a vision, work of the imagination." He goes on to say that Going After Cacciato "reaffirms the spirit that vitalized" John Winthrop's vision of the ideal community in "Modell of Christian Charity" (Community 139). It seems to me that he is reading too much into the novel. Outside of his father, Berlin's connection to any community at home is little in evidence, other than showing him having a fairly typical middle-class upbringing. He may feel obligated to the larger community, but it seems more of an abstract notion than something deeply and personally felt. As for the community of his squad in Vietnam, Berlin himself says that he plans to "Stay aloof. Follow the herd but don't join it" (212). I do not get the feeling that these men are particularly close. They are thrown together and work together as a matter

of survival. The genuine community we find in Del Vecchio's novel is not present in O'Brien's work.

O'Brien, like Mailer and Jones, sees a socially determined world in which individuals lack control over much of what happens to them. Yet, he does posit a certain amount of free will. Each individual is faced with choices. One can abide by the social contract and live up to perceived obligations, or one can choose to find those obligations non-binding. In Berlin's imagination, Lieutenant Corson does desert and Berlin seems to feel that that choice is one that Corson has the right to make, although he does not desert in reality. Cacciato's decision is likewise not denounced; it is merely considered dumb. The individual, though, must accept the responsibility for choices made and must realize that choices often incur further obligations. I think we can infer that O'Brien sees late twentieth-century society with all its uncertainties as bewildering to individuals, but he feels that individuals have the right and even the responsibility to choose what is best for themselves. It is a position that I believe Heller and Del Vecchio would recognize as kin to their own.

All in all, I think Palm states the case quite well when he writes,

> With the literature of our most bitter and divisive war, the emphasis of modern literature ironically seems to be shifting from the existential plight of the doomed individual struggling futilely against both impersonal institutions and an indifferent universe to the compromises and

> accommodations the great majority of men make quite readily in order to survive and even prosper. (128)

This can be seen quite clearly in O'Brien's novel in the case of Paul Berlin, and in Del Vecchio's work the soldiers are also able to make accommodations, putting aside personal desires and needs in the interest of group survival. Furthermore, both of these novels emphasize individual responsibility and a sense of community, although Del Vecchio's conception of community appears much more vibrant. I think both novels are cautiously optimistic about the future, of both the individual and of modern society, but only if the lessons of the war are learned. It was a divisive time, and many of the wounds incurred then remain unhealed today. Wright, on the other hand, does not seem to hold much hope for the future. There is no happy ending to his novel, but there is a strong message. I do not believe that Wright deems the culture as a whole to be redeemable. But individuals, if they will only reconnect themselves to nature, may have a chance at a viable, fulfilling, and peaceful life. Most people, in Wright's world, appear to be doomed to hopeless escapism, to insanity, or to lives in which they are "graphed," "charted," and "data processed." I think the jury is still out as to which, if any, of these authors' visions will ultimately prevail.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The battlefields of the twentieth century have provided some of America's best authors with fertile ground in which to sow the seeds of their concern about the plight of the individual overwhelmed by the mass culture of our modern technological society. The novels I have examined were chosen because they all have literary merit and treat men at war as a microcosm of, an allegory for individuals in the world at large rather than concerning themselves with patriotism, the fate of nations, and the shape of history. Most of the authors discussed in this study regard the world as absurd and meaningless, and the individual as isolated, alienated, and impotent. Some, though, perceive a ray of hope for the future of the individual, either through the exercise of a responsible existential freedom or by embracing the traditional value of caring for others or a combination of both. We also have seen that the role of community in identity formation and maintenance has come under scrutiny in these novels, as has the tension that exists between the individual's desire to be autonomous and his or her communal obligations, yearning on the one hand for independence and on the other for true fellowship. Some authors view community as merely the agent of social determinism, while two, Heller and Del Vecchio, posit the possibility of cooperative communities that support individuality.

In World War I novels that use the battlefield experience as a microcosm of modern society, we observe soldiers such as Dos Passos's Andrews and Fuselli, Trumbo's Bonham, and Boyd's Hicks reduced to little more than machine parts by

the dehumanizing experience of warfare and by the regimentation of military life in general. In this sense, the novels reflect the plight of individuals in modern mass culture who are pressured to conform and are treated as commodities rather than as unique human beings. Any real sense of community is lacking in the Great War novels while the individual struggles to avoid becoming nothing more than an automaton. Here, the equation of society with the battlefield reveals a stark naturalism and a despair about the possibility of any social or political solutions. The separate peace motif advanced by Dos Passos and Hemingway derives from the desire of individuals to be free and conscious human beings, and some individuals in the novels do manage to achieve a degree of liberty and find a certain existential freedom. When an individual has shown a Sartrean good faith, it has usually been accompanied by concern for others—for example, Frederic Henry's concern for Catherine and Joe Bonham's concern for the "little guy." To me, this suggests that existential authenticity cannot be arrived at without recognizing one's own humanity, one's place in and solidarity with the human family. Still, as I have noted, the gestures toward freedom made by individuals are frequently quixotic—John Andrews is imprisoned and Joe Bonham is ignored, for example. Nonetheless, they are more positive and hopeful models for individuals to emulate than the likes of the frustrated and impotent Hicks and Chrisfield.

The same polarity between individual soldiers who are overwhelmed by circumstance and those who find existential authenticity that we see in the Great War novels is still with us in the World War II novels. The theme of the individual as merely

a cog in a machine introduced by Dos Passos and Boyd is unfolded in excruciating detail in the works of Norman Mailer and James Jones. In the naturalistic worlds created by these two authors, only the faintest suggestion of hope for the individual can be detected, and in Jones's The Thin Red Line I find no hope at all since the individual has been reduced to total insignificance. Mailer's Goldstein and Ridges display a heroic care for an "other" in their attempt to evacuate Wilson, but it is difficult to attribute any real existential awareness to them. Still, Mailer seems to be suggesting that a place exists for positive values in a deterministic universe that is otherwise filled with futility and impotence. Jones's Prewitt makes a stand for individual integrity which some find admirable, although Jones probably did not mean for him to be viewed in a positive light. However, his stand nets him a stay in the stockade and eventually death, so his story is difficult to see as offering any hope for the individual. On the other hand, Joseph Heller in Catch-22 gives us Yossarian, a genuine existential hero who accepts the responsibility of his own freedom and demonstrates concern for others too. Heller's novel is in the tradition of the separate peace motif and offers a world as absurd and meaningless as any we have examined. But Yossarian, unlike the soldiers in Mailer's and Jones's work, resists the notion that he is a cog in a machine and takes positive action for freedom. Heller also gives us our first glimpse of what a true community might look like. The three individuals that gather together at the close of the novel form what I would call an embryonic community, not yet a fully developed one, since they lack shared practices and have only just begun to act like a community. Nonetheless, they appear to truly care about

one another, are capable of communicating among themselves, and are able to decide upon a mutually beneficial course of action. This contrasts starkly with the divisive and dysfunctional military units that pass as communities in the novels of Mailer and Jones.

Finally, in the Vietnam War novels I have discussed, we once again run across the separate peace motif, images of individuals as automatons, and an absurd and meaningless universe. Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green presents a view of late twentieth-century America as bleak as anything we find in Jones. Most of his characters appear to be hopelessly and futilely trying to escape, condemned to insanity, or living lives in which they are "graphed," "charted," and "data processed." While on the whole not a hopeful novel, Meditations in Green does suggest that the individual can find redemption by becoming more attuned to nature and less destructive of it. On the other hand, I detect cautious optimism in the novels of John Del Vecchio and Tim O'Brien. Del Vecchio portrays the only genuine community we have seen in this study. His Alpha Company is interdependent, has shared practices, and holds discussions prior to decision-making. The characters in The 13th Valley are every bit as socially determined as Mailer's and Jones's soldiers, but Del Vecchio suggests, through the Vietnamese scout Minh, that the individual who has and follows inner principles and realizes his or her interdependence with the universe can gain some degree of self-control. Del Vecchio encourages people to recognize their own individuality first and then recognize their own humanity, their place in and solidarity with the human condition. Going After Cacciato by Tim O'Brien takes a somewhat different slant on the theme of a separate peace. O'Brien does not denounce the notion of a separate

peace, but he does offer the alternative choice of staying and living up to one's obligation to the social contract. Although the world he depicts is absurd and socially determined, O'Brien believes individuals do possess a certain amount of free will and must use it to make responsible choices for themselves. Choices often do incur obligations, though, so there seems to be no way for the individual to sever himself from relations with others, and I do not believe that O'Brien sees that as a bad thing at all. The existential idea of the solitary individual accepting the responsibility of his or her own freedom is conspicuously missing from the Vietnam War novels, replaced by a suggestion that interdependence constitutes a more valid understanding of the human condition.

The novelists I have discussed all seem to believe that our modern technological society tends to diminish and reify individuals, thus alienating them from one another. To combat this tendency many of the authors are searching their materials for any signs that our society might be capable of achieving better communication between individuals, more cooperation, and a recognition of the interdependence that binds humanity together while affirming the value of the individual. If any trend is discernible in the novels in this study, it is toward a recognition that people are not alone in this world, that individuals need to acknowledge that they are social beings and start showing concern for others if any redemption for society and the individual is ever to be found. The consensus of the novels, I believe, is that this can happen only if the individual accepts the responsibility of her or his freedom, in existential terms, or at least recognizes the social contract. In

other words, although the novelists often view the world in Hobbesean terms, I believe they would like to see a Sartrean or Lockean response to life from the individual. The exceptions to this appear to be Thomas Boyd and James Jones, whose individuals fade into unredeemed insignificance and meaninglessness. Ultimately, though, a significant amount of hope for the future of the individual can be found in twentieth-century American war novels. Beleaguered individuals are portrayed holding positive values and taking positive action often enough to give the discerning reader something to ponder and perhaps emulate. Amidst the despair, horror, alienation, and dehumanization of the battlefield experience that the war novelists depict, seeds of hope have been sown. Individual readers can now choose to tend and nurture those seeds in their own lives or abandon them to the weeds of conformity and irresponsibility. Regardless, for the authors and for the future of American culture, the sowing is neither a meaningless nor an idle act.

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