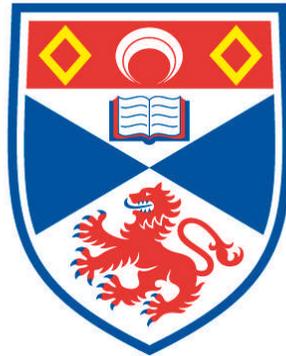


**JAMES JONES AND JOSEPH HELLER: AN ESSAY IN
CONTRASTS**

Allen Dillard Boyer

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS

JAMES JONES AND JOSEPH HELLER:
AN ESSAY IN CONTRASTS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND DIVINITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY
ALLEN DILLARD BOYER

CLEVELAND, OHIO
MARCH 1984



ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

"James Jones and Joseph Heller: An Essay in Contrasts"

This dissertation has two purposes. One is to discuss the ideas of James Jones and Joseph Heller on the interrelation of the individual and society. Both of these writers locate their characters within the context of larger orders and institutions, and deal with the question of how an individual can and should balance his personal interests against his interests as a member of a social organization.

The dissertation's second focus is on technique: Jones' and Heller's fictional focus and creative relationship with characters and the reader. This contrast is traced through modes of narration, organization, characterization, and plotting.

Chapter I establishes the basic contrasts: between Jones' acceptance of military life, in his Army trilogy of From Here to Eternity, The Thin Red Line, and Whistle, and his willingness to portray this as comprehensible; and Heller's treatment of the military as absurd in Catch-22.

Chapter II discusses the substance of Jones' fiction. It locates Jones, through his anti-aestheticism, sensationalist focus on the sordid, and treatment of men as social animals, individuals within a collective, as a contemporary follower of the Naturalist tradition. The discussion traces Jones' links to other writers, among them Stendhal, Conrad, Crane, and London.

Chapter III deals with Jones' style. It follows Jones' transition from a consciously eccentric idiom, marked by deliberately violent metaphors and idiosyncratic punctuation, toward a goal of colloquiality.

Chapter IV covers the Absurdist rhetoric of Heller's Catch-22, discussing the rhetorical devices which create the novel's tone of confusion and absurdity and the realistic detail and humor which sustain its narrative.

Chapter V traces through Heller's novels the development of their author's understanding of the idea of society. In Catch-22, Heller rejects outright the idea that "society" exists; in Something Happened he demonstrates again the absurdity of conforming to what one believes are social bonds. In Good As Gold his protagonist discovers that to be true to one's own family and background is also to be true to oneself.

Chapter VI contrasts Heller's means of characterization, which define characters for the reader through biography and physical description, with Jones' preference for using dramatization to present a character for the reader's assessment.

Chapter VII deals with plotting, comparing Heller's view of the novel as a working-out of preconceived ideas with Jones' treatment of the novel as an exploration of characters' interaction.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation has two purposes. One is to discuss the ideas of James Jones and Joseph Heller on the interrelation of the individual and society. Both Jones and Heller locate their characters within the context of larger orders and institutions, beginning with the military and expanding to include other areas of society. Each writer deals with the question of how an individual can and should balance his personal interests against his interests as a member of a social organization -- military unit, family, ethnic group, or nation. At the end of From Here to Eternity, for example, Prewitt accepts being killed by the Military Police as the price of belonging to the social aggregate of the Army. In The Thin Red Line, the major character is an infantry company; Jones' individual characters compromise their individual lives to preserve the existence of this human collective. In Catch-22, by contrast, Heller presents "society" as a false idea -- Yossarian, having learned that the only real interest is self-interest, takes off running at the novel's end, in order to save his own life. At the conclusion of Good As Gold, however, Bruce Gold renounces his personal ambitions to return to his family and Jewish background, and Heller presents as legitimate the idea of belonging to a group.

The dissertation's second focus is on technique. Jones' and Heller's respective attitudes toward the interrelation of the individual and society are reflected in their novels' form and content -- in their creative relationship with characters, their fictional focus, and their relationship with the reader. The dissertation traces this contrast through their modes of narration, organization, characterization, and plotting.

Chapter I lays out the basic elements of the contrast: between Jones' acceptance of the military life, with his corresponding emphasis on detail and procedure, and willingness to portray this world as real and comprehensible; and Heller's refusal to treat the armed services as anything but absurd, which is expressed in his portrayal of it as bizarre and surreal.

Chapter II discusses the substance of Jones' fiction. It is organized as an answer to a review of From Here to Eternity by V. S. Pritchett, which is remarkable for raising every objection ever to be made to Jones' writing. It responds to Pritchett's criticism by (1) pointing out the aesthetic (or anti-aesthetic) views that formed the basis of Jones' work; (2) locating Jones, through his anti-aestheticism, sensationalist focus on the sordid, and treatment of man as a social animal dominated by physiology, herd instinct, and subjection to circumstance, as a contemporary follower of the Naturalist tradition; and (3) demonstrating Jones' links to other writers, among them Stendhal, Joseph Conrad, and Stephen Crane.

Chapter III deals with Jones' style. It shows how, after beginning with a deliberately idiosyncratic style, Jones moved toward an ideal of colloquial expression -- eliminating expository digression, lyrical passages, unorthodox punctuation, and authorial intervention.

Chapter IV, a counterpart to Chapter III, covers the Absurdist rhetoric Heller used to write Catch-22. It discusses the devices responsible for the novel's tone of confusion and absurdity: superimposition of different plot structures, splintering and interspersal of scenes, deliberately anti-coherent linking methods, and satire, against which is balanced Catch-22's authenticating detail.

Chapter V traces through Heller's novels the development of their author's understanding of "society." In Catch-22, Heller rejects any suggestion that a man should risk his personal life when such a sacrifice will not obtain him personal benefit; when the war is de facto won, he argues, patriotism and nationalism are insufficient reasons for an airman to continue flying missions. Something Happened offers a converse proof of the same point. Bob Slocum, its protagonist, is a thoroughly despicable character; and he is despicable because he rejects inclinations and opportunities to live for himself, choosing instead a neurotic adherence to what he believes are social conventions. In Good As Gold, while Bruce Gold ultimately rejects the ambitions toward societal assimilation that have led him to seek government

service, he discovers authentic social bonds. When he accepts and celebrates the Jewish tradition of his family, he is true to an integral part of himself.

Chapter VI contrasts Jones and Heller's differing methods of characterization. Heller himself defines his characters, using them to make allegorical and satirical points; whereas Jones dramatizes, leaving the ultimate definition and assessment of character to the reader.

Chapter VII deals with the writers' contrasting methods of plotting. Heller uses his characters to act out pre-conceived ideas, working toward initial conclusions only slightly altered over the course of the novel's being written. Jones, on the other hand, worked out his books through the interaction of characters.

Chapter I

JAMES JONES AND JOSEPH HELLER: AN OUTLINE OF CONTRASTS

Overture

When he was eighteen years old, for what he termed personal and financial reasons, and choosing from among the careers opening to young men at the end of the Great Depression, James Jones enlisted in the United States Army. He served in Hawaii and on Guadalcanal, was wounded and received for his services two medals, was invalided out, and commenced writing. From Here to Eternity, The Thin Red Line, and Whistle, the trilogy Jones based on his military service, represents the heart as well as the bulk of Jones' fiction. While he is remembered, it will be for these books.

Jones never released an Army novel without at least three epigraphs and dedications. Some of these prefatory notes interpreted the title, some explained the book; and some hinted at why the novel had been written.

"I have eaten your bread and salt.
I have drunk your water and wine.
The deaths ye died I have watched beside,
And the lives ye led were mine."

These lines of Kipling's, opening From Here to Eternity, are the most sentimental comment Jones ever made on the Army. He was in

his late twenties when he selected them -- a young man who had spent years in a barracks instead of a college hall, stirred by a camaraderie that might in time have become nostalgia.

Thirteen years later Jones published his second Army novel, The Thin Red Line. He claimed to dedicate the book to war and warfare, and before its text one epigram floated acridly:

Then it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that,
An' Tommy 'ow's yer soul?
But it's 'Thin red line of 'eroes,'
When the drums begin to roll --

The quatrain might easily have prefaced From Here to Eternity or Whistle. The former novel recounts how civilian Hawaii shunned its military guardians. In the latter book, set in wartime America, invalided soldiers find opened to them every bar, restaurant, hotel, bedroom. But the original poem, in its entirety, explains both the epigram and its placement before this particular novel. Neither in peace nor in wartime, Kipling observes, do civilians treat as human the man inside a uniform. Whether denied entrance to respectable theatres, or shunted front-ward on special trains, soldiers are always excluded.

The year before, in 1961, the American public had begun buying the first of what would be more than a million copies of Catch-22. The year The Thin Red Line appeared, there occurred the first American casualties of the Vietnam War. The 1960's were beginning. Pacifism would develop (as corollary) a peculiarly personal anti-militarism. In America as in Kipling's Britain, as Jones foresaw when he fired off that solitary epi-

graph in defense of his Army, soldiers would end as butts of derision.

During the next fourteen years, as he worked on in Paris (where he witnessed what happened in May, 1968) there grew in Jones the realization that he might be the last and only champion of the Army's cause.

This book is dedicated to every man who served in the US Armed Forces in World War II -- whether he survived or not; whether he made a fortune serving, or not; whether he did time or not; whether he went crazy, or didn't.

Jones' affection was not blind. If his characters were heroes, he detailed their flaws. He had never forgotten to describe fatigue duty as well as payday, to mention incompetents, sadists, and cowards alongside good soldiers. He distrusted officers and showed a veteran's disdain for those who had not been combat infantrymen. In Jones' personal canon, moreover, the greatest sin was to profit from war. (He would remember in WW II how he almost swung his crutches at a defense-plant riveteer who had observed that two more years of war would set him up for life.) This outlook notwithstanding, Jones used this benediction to open Whistle.

The war was now thirty years past, and Jones knew that he was dying. He may have grown fondly nostalgic. Whistle, however, is hardly sentimental: its hellish debauches recall Hieronymus Bosch more than Norman Rockwell. Jones' motive was not nostalgia, but forgiveness. Whistle was, according to its

author, to be "everything I have ever had to say, or will ever have to say, on the human condition of war and what it means to us." He meant the book to be his monument; but not his alone, not any more than the black marble slab and eternal flame at Arlington commemorate only the Unknown Soldier.

The man who wrote Catch-22, Joseph Heller, had also served in the Second World War. A New Yorker drawn away from college by the conflict, he served in the United States Army Air Corps, in the Mediterranean, and thereafter returned to universities and publishing. To his novel he gave three introductory notes:

There was only one catch . . . and that was Catch-22.

The island of Pianosa lies in the Mediterranean Sea eight miles south of Elba. It is very small and obviously could not accommodate all of the actions described. Like the setting of this novel, the characters, too, are fictitious.

To my mother
and to my wife, Shirley
and my children, Erica and Ted

The first of these notes implies an unlooked-for complication, an aberration in the middle of a rational scheme. The second, though on its face a quick, casual salute to the defamation laws, by its eschewal of legal formulae becomes more -- becomes a note explaining that Heller, in order to recreate what he had experienced in the Air Corps, chose to employ un-real characters in an imaginary setting.

Heller's second novel, Something Happened, was published

in 1974. The book is the long interior monologue of a business executive, a man who -- believing he is following the dictates of society -- chooses to misunderstand himself, his family, and his culture. What results is nothing: an absence of love, an absence of action. Accordingly, Something Happened contains no preface or epigram.

Catch-22 pictures a society that has gone haywire. Its characters are grotesques and caricatures, and its protagonist ultimately breaks away from all he has known. Something Happened offers a static tableau of insecure, unhappy, awkward people. With this background, the reader who goes chronologically through Heller's work will be surprised at the first sentence printed in Heller's third novel, Good As Gold.

I dedicate this book
to
The several gallant families
and
Numerous unwitting friends
whose
Help, conversations, and experiences
play
so large a part.

This dedication returns to a theme last touched on in the dedication to Catch-22, the idea that close associations can be healthy. It fits the story before which it stands. Good as Gold is the tale of a Jew who decides to abandon his roots in order to enter the world of money and power. Bruce Gold does try to shake off his background; he does go to Washington; he even believes himself assimilated; but he ends by returning gladly to

his family and traditon. Equally important, the dedication embodies Heller's conclusions about the individual and society. The individual (the writer) draws material from, and is therefore aided by, his family and friends. In return, he celebrates them. Man and mass can exist symbiotically.

Fundamental Contrasts

The contrasting ways in which Jones and Heller launch their fiction suggest a fundamental contrast between these writers. This contrast is between a writer who identified himself with an institution and another who has resisted the idea that the individual can legitimately be held subordinate to any larger social order. Jones treated man as a social animal; the individual, he believed, was part of the collective. Heller, by contrast, has argued that there is no such thing as "society." The individual human is not subject to social bonds; his only loyalty is to himself.

This contrast is equally manifest in these writers' relationship with the reader -- in how Jones and Heller handle their novelistic rhetoric, in how they present to the reader the elements of their fiction. Jones attempted to track reality in his fiction, telling his story in a deliberately deglamourized manner and in an colloquial style. He sought to deemphasize his own role in presenting the story by avoiding literary artifice and other aspects of positive style which might imply an authorial presence. He developed the plots of his novels by establishing characters and

estimating what their interaction would produce.

Heller, on the other hand, has never hesitated to splinter his fiction's realistic components in order to reassemble them. He distorts grammar, diction, and time, frustrates the reader's expectation, and orchestrates his characters' roles. The effect is to establish the presence of an author, separate from and superior to his materials, who organizes them and presents them to the reader.

The Regular and the Citizen Soldier

It would go too far to suggest that a writer's vision derives from the kind of military service that he saw. But with that limitation in mind, the differences between Jones' and Heller's fiction can be approached through a discussion of their authors' backgrounds and military service. This contrast is between James Jones, who chose to enlist in the Regular Army, serving in the infantry, and Joseph Heller, a civilian soldier who served in the Air Corps.

To Jones, who had enlisted, soldiering was a way to earn a living. It was a blue-collar occupation, like stevedoring or construction; more regimented than most others, and sometimes more hazardous, but fundamentally merely another trade. The fact that an enlistee is a soldier by choice, that he has made soldiering his profession, points out his identification with the institution within which he serves. By definition, a man who enlists (like Jones) is part of the Regular Army.

Heller, on the other hand, was what the Regular Army recognized as a citizen soldier. A citizen soldier is a civilian in uniform, a man who would not be in uniform had not the war (or his government) required him to don it. By definition, he is not part of the Regular services. He has been pulled away from his ordinary routine and customary society and arbitrarily placed within another. There he is ordered to live by rules in whose making he has no part and which (presumably) he would never ordinarily have chosen to live under. He is thrown into close contact with people he would never have met, men whose likes he has seen represented by stereotypes of varying accuracy. Some of these, with whom he ordinarily would never have worked or wanted to work, he is required to obey absolutely. Equally important, he is obliged to forget his customary orientation toward constructive activity and to concentrate instead on destruction. He is an outsider, an individual alone in a country of strangers.

Contrasts in Jones' and Heller's Fiction

One contrast between these two writers' fiction lies in the specificity of their depictions of the military. Here the contrast between the regular and the citizen soldier describes the contrast. The detail in Jones' Army novels suggests that they were written from an insider's perspective, while the generality of Heller's episodes suggests that their author's viewpoint on the military was that of an outside observer.

In Catch-22, the problems of military life are depicted

in general terms. There are pointless rituals -- Lieutenant Scheisskopf's mania for parades, for example. There is excessive paperwork, which may result in a live man being declared dead while a dead man is numbered among the living. Authority is abused and the unpopular are prosecuted unjustly.

Such indictments are unspecific. Their key words, never particularized, are drill, red tape, tyranny, and injustice. On the evidence of Catch-22, it cannot be deduced that its author must necessarily have served in the military, for such reports are general enough to have been concocted from second-hand information. They do not prove that Heller ever grew familiar enough with the Air Corps to understand the injustices peculiar to the military. Furthermore, the complaints Heller makes about the armed services can be brought with equal ease against civilian life. Concerned on the abstract level with the evils that men inflict upon each other, which are carried on in the name of society, Heller seized on the military as a medium for illustrating his points.

For Jones, by contrast, particularity was all. There was a joke that there were three ways to do things: the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way. As a former company clerk, Jones was well versed in the Army way. He sought to show exactly how the Army functioned and ran awry, emphasizing not only the result but also the procedure responsible for creating it.

The persecutions of Yossarian and Prewitt offer one

example. The former, for refusing to fly additional missions, is threatened with a court-martial and wooed with promises of a return to the United States. The latter, when he refuses to go out for boxing, is given "the treatment" by his noncoms. He is criticized undeservedly for inattention during map-reading lectures, ordered to run laps with his rifle at high port, given the messiest jobs on the fatigue roster. When he rebels, it is not just the threat of court-martial that hangs over him: Captain Holmes has to decide whether to let him off with a Summary Court-martial, or hit him with the heavier penalties of a Special.

Another example is provided by Jones' and Heller's treatments of how the Army disposes of its dead. Heller's example is the case of Doc Daneeka, declared dead after he fails to bale out of a crashing plane in which he is listed as a passenger. Letters of condolence go out to his wife; his will is probated; insurance dividends arrive to be cashed. In Heller's narration of these events, these benefits appear magically, automatically, without paperwork of any sort. They are the products of blind social organization. A counterpart is offered by the aftermath of Bloom's suicide in From Here to Eternity. Bloom's death presents Milt Warden with the challenge of trying to close out the inquiry within a week. Warden accepts and succeeds: he runs through the loose-leaf Army Regulations, fires off the requisite telegrams, and finally arranges for the burial party and bugler. Jones' attentive specification of these de-

tails shows his concern to illustrate the rules by which the social collective of the Army functions.

Jones' interest in procedure and Heller's focus on result is also reflected in the different effects they achieve. Much of Catch-22's irony depends on the presentation of effects without explanation of causes.

The day before Yossarian met the chaplain, a stove exploded in the mess hall and set fire to one side of the kitchen. An intense heat flashed through the area. Even in Yossarian's ward, almost three hundred feet away, they could hear the roar of the blaze and the sharp cracks of flaming timber. Smoke sped past the orange-tinted windows. In about fifteen minutes the crash trucks from the airfield arrived to fight the fire. For a frantic half hour it was touch and go. Then the firemen began to get the upper hand. Suddenly there was the monotonous old drone of bombers returning from a mission, and the firemen had to roll up their hoses and speed back to the field in case one of the planes crashed and caught fire. The planes landed safely. As soon as the last one was down, the firemen wheeled their trucks around and raced back up the hill to resume their fight with the fire at the hospital [mess hall?]. When they got there, the blaze was out. It had died of its own accord, expired completely without even an ember to be watered down, and there was nothing for the disappointed firemen to do but drink tepid coffee and hang around trying to screw the nurses.(1)

What happened is clear: the mess hall burned because the firemen trying to save it were hurried away to watch the returning bombers. The episode is ridiculous, absurd, anticly funny in the manner of Monty Python or the Keystone Kops. But because Heller emphasizes the frantic haste of the firemen, and the ironic result of their efforts, the reader may easily overlook the reason -- a valid reason -- for the firemen's rush to the air-

field. If one of the bombers crashes and burns, and cannot be quickly extinguished and dragged to one side of the landing-strip, every plane lined up behind it will be blocked from landing. Their crews will have to bale out, leaving each plane to crash blindly. Aircraft will be wasted, lives imperiled; for want of a fire-engine a whole squadron could be lost.* Under these circumstances, it would be illogical and negligent not to leave the mess hall to burn. Heller acknowledges this necessity, but only at a very cursory level. As the detail in Catch-22 shows, he has observed military life carefully; but to set forth a full explanation would demonstrate more understanding and acceptance of the military's operating procedures than he is prepared to reveal. Instead, he chooses to gloss it over to create the impression of misranked priorities.

Jones' Army novels are dotted with incidents ripe for similar treatment. To Jones, however, the Army ran in explicable, comprehensible channels. The worst and the most ridiculous things might indeed occur. Jones treated such things, however, as perversions of norms or ideals, not inexplicable grotesqueries. The best example is his explanation of the slough of incompetence in which Witt finds himself in The Thin Red Line.

Existing first on paper as a directive from the War Department, and dreamed up for reasons largely technical and uninteresting to anyone not a student of tactics,

* As occurred at Saidor, New Guinea, on the night of April 16, 1944, when at one time eight bombers were burning on the runway. Recollection of Roscoe A. Boyer, Col (then Capt) USAAC.

this new unit [into which Witt is transferred unwillingly by Captain Stein] was called the Cannon Company. There already was an Anti-Tank Company. But in addition to using its new type guns as antitank defense, Cannon Company was to be able to elevate them for use as artillery, and was to serve as a tiny artillery force within the Regiment, capable of putting heavy fire down quickly onto targets of platoon- or company-size.

Admirably conceived on paper, and existing only on paper, men were still needed to make Cannon Company an actuality. This was accomplished within the Regiment by a strange process which might well have been named "shunting the crud." Fife observed how it worked. A Regimental memorandum was sent out ordering each company commander to donate a certain number of men. The commanders complied and the worst drunkards, worst homosexuals, and worst troublemakers all gathered together under one roof to form Cannon Company. This command was then given to the officer in the Regiment whom the Regimental Commander liked least.(2)

In this passage, explanation accompanies the presented effect.

Consider how Heller might have handled the same passage:

Witt was a former boxer who was one of Fife's two best friends and who several months earlier had been transferred at Captain Stein's request and without wanting it or deserving it into a unit composed of alcoholics, troublemakers, and homosexuals which was known as Cannon Company but which had no cannon.

The facts -- the explanation, the logic -- would still be present, but they would be presented only by implication. A reader would have to read between the clauses, deducing what Jones had stated directly. The explanations Jones gives can be read as the comments of a man who saw the military as a rationally-organized institution -- who, indeed, believed so much in its comprehensibility that he had been willing to enlist in it. Heller's focus on results, and his predilection for depicting these events in the most absurd light, may owe to the experiences of a man who

found himself in an unfamiliar society.

Another crucial difference between Jones and Heller involves acceptance of the risk and self-sacrifice which are potential in military service. In Catch-22, as the war draws to its close, Yossarian protests the risk he is forced to run in flying missions. To risk one's personal life for a national goal is hardly an ideal situation; but Yossarian's situation, nonetheless, could be worse. He could be in the Japanese air force, where airmen go on missions expecting and intending not to return. By Catch-22's standards, nothing is more absurd than a kamikaze mission, and to make flying one sensible seems at first glance impossible. But there was sense behind such attacks, and the writer to point it out was Jones:

It was supposed to be a great privilege (at least, according to the propoganda) for young Japanese fliers to volunteer for the kamikaze suicide missions. . . .

In fact, it was a desperation tactic. Most of Japan's carriers were gone, and so were most of her best airplanes. Under increasing pressure caused by the American advances, neither could be replaced. But what also could never be replaced were the lost pilots. Almost none of Japan's expert combat pilots were left alive to teach the young soldiers; nor was there reason to make expert pilots of the green youngsters. There was not the time, and without the carriers and the expert planes [sic] what could an expert pilot do? So, reasoned the government, better to use obsolete aircraft or to build cheap, poor airplanes (simple flying bombs, most of the later ones were) and teach the youngsters just enough to fly these simple planes into some American ships.(3)

This difference between Jones and Heller is one of willingness to accept personal risk in exchange for benefit to one's group.

Heller's perspective is that of the man who expects to return to normal life as soon as the war ends -- and whose interests, therefore, are threatened absolutely by the risk of being killed. It is that of the outsider who believes he shares no interest with the group. Jones, by contrast, viewed acceptance of this eventuality as a professional ideal toward which a combat soldier had to work.

What it is that makes a man go out into dangerous places and get himself shot at with increasing consistency until finally he dies, is an interesting subject for speculation. And an interesting study. One might entitle it, THE EVOLUTION OF A SOLDIER.(4)

This final phrase, EVOLUTION OF A SOLDIER, Jones worked again and again into his history of the Second World War, always capitalizing it, never varying the phrasing, using it as a nonmetrical refrain to mark off the steps in a recruit's increasing professionalism. The process began with basic training, where the conscript learned to regard himself as part of a group. It was polished off in combat, where the infantryman learned to forget himself altogether. A soldier underwent his evolution unconsciously, Jones held. In combat, an infantryman would learn to slip off safeties and arm grenades with the same unconscious facility with which in peacetime he would learn to pick the key to a new apartment from among a ringful of other keys. More important, such physical techniques would be accompanied by a new psychic orientation:

He has accepted the correctness and rightness of his own death, and has even gone so far as to write himself off

the rolls. He has gone the subtle step further and faced and accepted the anonymity of his death, . . . He has gone through all that, all these successive abandonments of hope; and has come out on the other side into that other bath-to-bath, bottle-to-bottle hope that is the only hope the combat men can have.(5)

Beyond this lay one final metamorphosis. The infantryman would have to remain desperate even when there was hope for him. He would have to be able to press home and risk dying in the war's last battle, in a fight whose outcome was foreseeable and certain, as gamely and coldly as he had faced death on the first beach-head. If soldiers could do that, Jones wrote, "they could fight on forever and victory or defeat meant practically nil. It was better than having to go home and get to know their wives and kids again."⁶

Jones knew that this process involved brutalization. Reluctantly, however, he condoned this ethical degeneration, with its symptoms of "combat numbness" and sociopathic fury, because it saved lives. Winning armies lose fewer men than defeated armies, and to win battles requires men who are willing to risk their lives. Jones best illustrated this in The Thin Red Line. In this novel, the individual members of C-for-Charlie Company intuit the fact that because their survival depends ultimately upon the survival of their unit, they must risk their individual lives to obtain this corporate goal.

This unavoidable compromise of individual interests was a lesson that infantry combat demonstrated in a way an airman's war could not. Jones' belief in the human collective was proba-

bly also shaped by the character of warfare in the Pacific. The war in Europe presented its participants with a war fought among functioning civilization. Indeed, because the air war was waged against many of the centers of those civilizations, it must have contributed to Heller's view of the Air Corps as an absurd society. The poet and critic Randall Jarrell, like Heller a participant in the bombing campaign, summarized the problem in one line of verse: "We bombed the cities we had learned about in school."

The Pacific war followed a different pattern. Its battles resembled animal migrations as much as they did traditional campaigns. In each battle, an army of men swarmed ashore onto an uncivilized island. They fought for possession of this territory, wresting it from the control of another army. As in the insect world, to whose colonies these armies could be compared, specialized groups assumed particular responsibilities. Artillerymen reduced enemy fortifications, engineers built roads and airstrips, airmen brought in planes and flew close-support missions. Finally, with its new territory secured, losses replaced and munitions stored up, the swarm would move on to the next island.

Jones' characters' fears -- of samurai sabers, the exploding gasoline truck, the flesh-stitching bullets of a concealed machine-gun -- reveal the grim particularities of infantry combat. This grimness underlay Jones' preference for colloquially-written, deglamourized fiction: war was too terrible, he

believed, to be written of elegantly. The brutalized sensitivity produced by this kind of war may also have been responsible for pushing Jones' rhetoric beyond -- or, below -- the tone of colloquial discourse.

In the ultimate, absolute end, when your own final extinction is right there only a few yards farther on staring back at you, there may be a sort of penultimate national, and social, and even racial masochism -- a sort of hotly joyous, almost-sexual enjoyment and acceptance -- which keeps you going the last few steps. The ultimate luxury of just not giving a damn anymore.(7)

The desire to shock characterized Jones' fiction. It is found in the squalor of From Here to Eternity's stockade and brothel scenes, the callous violence of The Thin Red Line, and the frantic promiscuity of Whistle. These books draw upon the experiences of an angry young man, scared and brutalized on Guadalcanal and embittered afterward. They deal in raw emotions. With these emotions goes Jones' elemental, coarsened language -- a rhetoric that was shaped by the experiences it communicates.

The role of an aerial bombardier is altogether different. A bombardier's role is passive. He is flown to his target, is shot at there, is flown back. His only function is to press a button when his bomber is directly over its objective. As Heller summed it up: "What preposterous madness to float in thin air two miles high on an inch or two of metal, sustained from death by the meager skill and intelligence of two vapid strangers . . .

."8

Abstraction characterizes even the risk an airman runs

in flying missions. This depends on statistical probabilities: if death comes, it results from the coincidental proximity of his airplane to the explosion of a flak shell, one of hundreds fired across the sky. A bombardier is called out of a place of safety and comfort to risk his life for a purpose of no personal value to him. He is a trained man, usually an educated man, in a highly technical branch of the military, using sophisticated machinery; but his role, nonetheless, is merely to drop high explosives. His targets do not threaten him personally, or directly, so he gains nothing from their destruction. He acts on mere assurances that his work is in some way vital to the war effort. From his personal vantage point, all that is certain is that he is destroying property and risking his life.

The contrast between the non-immediate, non-personal benefits promised the airman -- the assurances that he is helping to win the war -- and the immediate, personal risks which the same flier runs must have influenced Heller toward becoming a satirist. Moreover, it is crazy to trust one's life to the uncertain flying ability of two strangers. It is absurd that death can come with the statistical, geometrical precision of flak explosions. These circumstances of the air war must have taught Heller much of the absurdity his fiction expresses. The airman's struggle, finally, is not to become a better soldier, but to decide whether his activities are worth the risk they entail. It is this question that lies at the core of Catch-22.

Chapter II

REALISM AND ROMANCE IN JAMES JONES' FICTION

Earlier, in the wake of the Second World War, an English politician had expressed the hope that his countrymen would now be to the Americans what the Greeks had been to the Romans. On July 12, 1952, there appeared in The New Statesman and Nation a review that fulfilled that expectation; caricatured it, even. The reviewer was V. S. Pritchett. Pritchett, at the age of 51, was established as a novelist, short-story writer, critic, and editor of literary magazines; he could have personified the English man of letters. The book on which this archetype focused its gaze was the sprawling first novel of an American enlisted man. Pritchett began:

We are reaching the point where the European critic will have to admit that at least one school of American novelists is beyond his modest fishing tackle. One or two recent monsters roll about and sport like whales; if caught and disembowelled, they are remarkable for yielding tons of realism like so much undistinguishable blubber. The poet Clough, noting that the Colosseum in Rome was "big" went on to ask "if this is an idea?" Is it an idea to put down the literal life and obscene talk of an air force camp, to put the whole Pacific campaign into a novel, to describe word by unprintable word the hourly fatigues, promotion hunts, drunken blinds, crap games and fornications of a regular infantry company, stationed near Pearl Harbour? For how long is one going to care if the corporal is busted or the Sergeant wants a piece of ass? If we do care for a moment or two, can we keep it up -- as we are expected to do in a book like James Jones' From Here to Eternity which has "swept" the States -- for seven or eight hundred pages?

"The critic," Pritchett continued, "must hold off novels of this kind until he has first grasped that they are not works of art or even works of entertainment and sensational ambition. They are social phenomena, instrumental recordings of the soldier's life."

Jones' contribution, Pritchett stated, was "social and anthropological rather than literary." What Jones had done was "impose the common man in bulk." From Here to Eternity was news because its dominant figure was this new human sub-species. The common soldier was "an ox, but not a dumb ox." He was "interminably garrulous . . . an indefatigable flogger of his main subjects -- sex, drink, pay, films, food and the devices of the old soldier," with "a quarter-baked mind and an aggressive wit." Yet "another revolutionary sign," Pritchett went on, "is that, as a character, the James Jones neanderthaler lacks pathos or tragedy. He is -- from the point of view of literature -- assertive and earnest." Pritchett ended:

Mr. Jones achieves his mission, which is to supply American literature with the basic material of a missing subject. All his talk is good when taken a page at a time. His general reflections are humdrum and sentimental and there is a fatal underlying streak of self-pity. His main characters are no more than discernible. If we except First Sergeant Milton Warden who has the makings of a considerable character, the rest are types. Mr. Jones has merely an average interest in human nature. For him all roads lead only to sex, and the numberless copulations of this novel are meaningless transactions. He lacks, in every respect, a sense of proportion. Some critics have been repelled by the squalor of this novel, but repetition is its real vice. (1)

Despite the review's uncharacteristic note of testiness, it

stands as a credit to its author. In less than two columns of type, often with preternatural foresight, Pritchett had presented every indictment ever to be brought against Jones' fiction.

The year before Pritchett wrote, another critic had pointed out certain aspects of the novel which Pritchett's review missed; had shown that the book's ponderousness was not unwitting. Leslie Fiedler was the critic; the essay was "Jones Jones' Dead-End Young Werther: The Bum As American Culture Hero." Fiedler concurred with Pritchett on the novel's general merit. "It is the authority of [Jones'] documentation that is forever saving the book from its own ambitions," he wrote. "Its value as literature, slight, intermittent, but undeniable, lies in its redeeming for the imagination aspects of regular army life never before exploited."² Its ambitions was the key phrase. Writing briskly, in an essay pulled back from flippancy by the importance of the points it effortlessly nailed down, Fiedler identified those ambitions: the tradition to which From Here to Eternity belonged and the credo that had shaped its documentation.

Before Fiedler was the following tale. A young man, a hillbilly Kentuckian, enlists in the Army. He is a talented boxer and bugler. He forswears bugling by transferring out of the Bugle Corps because he is unjustly demoted. In his new unit, he refuses to box. His intransigence leads his superiors to persecute him and finally to send him to prison. There he is placed in the toughest cell-block, Ward Two, but from another

prisoner, Jack Malloy, learns the philosophy of passive resistance -- to absorb evil rather than to return it. On his release, he avenges a fellow prisoner's murder by killing the guard responsible. Thereafter, while hiding out as a deserter, he reads novels -- among them, books by Jack London and Thomas Wolfe -- and is able to finish "The Re-enlistment Blues," a folk song for his fellow-soldiers. At the novel's end, he is killed by military police while trying to return to his unit. On these facts, Fiedler concluded:

James Jones's book is a "naturalistic" version of Werther, in which the poète maudit appears as a Bugler. . . . In all the writings in the line of Werther, there is a deep confusion between the class struggle and the inability of a sensitive (artistic or quasi-artistic) young man to adjust to any given world; this is usually reflected in an attempt to find a style that will in itself be a protest against convention; anti-classical in Goethe, anti-"aesthetic" in Jones. (3)

"The essential subject of the Werther novel," Fiedler continued, "is always innocence and decadence -- what is innocence and how can it be preserved in a corrupt world. In From Here to Eternity, one has the sense that the good world, the world of innocents has just passed away."⁴ There was a time (characters remember) when the Wobblies' labor radicalism had not been suppressed; when Hollywood made Westerns instead of musicals; when the red-light districts were riotously and two-fistedly wicked; when Maggio hung out on Brooklyn's sidewalks and Prewitt played Taps at Arlington and Milt Warden won a D.S.C. in China. "Yet even though the Golden Age is gone, the world lost

irrevocably to the middle classes . . . there exists a saving remnant, Noble Savages untouched by the general degeneracy." These are the inhabitants of the demi-monde, of the underworld: "those simply on the bum and in the county jails . . . finally the winnowed few who make (via a solitary confinement [which, Fiedler should have noted, lasts three days]) Ward Two, the quintessential cell of Jones' vision."⁵ The Stockade represents a citadel of enlightened consciousness.

And it is here that the prophet of Jones's book, Jack Malloy, speaks the book's final wisdom: the denial of sin, the belief in reincarnation, the use of passive resistance, . . . What Malloy has finally to offer turns out to be the way of Werther: suicide. . . .

It is in terms of this vision of life that the artist must choose his role and his style; and From Here to Eternity deals centrally with the education of an artist for this choice. (6)

With this vantage point selected, it became possible to point out From Here to Eternity's character as Bildungsroman. Prewitt's refusals to employ his skills for wrongful motives was the first step in his artistic education: learning not to submit. "When the writer has learned to rebel and suffer he is securely joined to those 'who could not fight back and win, so they were very strict in their great pride of losing,' and he must then learn how to speak for them."⁷

Prewitt's rejection of the homosexual writer Tommy's aesthetic (and Warden's contempt for his clerk's discussions of Gauguin) were important, successive stages, for these would-be intellectuals, the clerk and the hack, had lost sight of "the

true folk sources of art." Those sources included the Westerns and Depression-Era on-the-bum movies Prewitt and his squadmates discussed while playing poker, and the novels Prewitt read while over the hill, hiding out at Lorene's. It is absorption of these that make possible Prewitt's completion of "The Re-Enlistment Blues," one of those songs whose "bottomless shallows" give "a sudden flashing picture of all life that [can] never be explained and an understanding of it that [can] never be expressed."⁸

But the book ultimately failed, Fiedler concluded, because of a frustrating consistency on its author's part.

To prove the innocence of his characters' motives (and his own), their utter non-complicity [in decadent, bourgeois culture], Jim Jones has, according to his own theories, to prove also their inarticulateness, the tonguelessness of their art and of his. For this reason he is driven to contrive (or perhaps better, to endure) a style which at once speaks and assures us that its message is unsayable. . . . [H]is ideological position has led him into accepting bad writing as his ideal.

Unhappily, his notion of the nature and role of the artist is, in the end, self-defeating; for it leads to an absence of positive style that makes it possible for the kind of readers Jones most despises to use From Here to Eternity for cheap thrills and illegitimate satisfactions.(9)

The difficulties Pritchett and Fiedler found with From Here to Eternity reflect the difficulties inherent in literary Naturalism. Naturalism suggested that the artist work with the unrefined materials of real life. It also suggested that the artist immerse himself -- and his audience -- in that subject, refusing to take a higher perspective. Norman Mailer had broken the naturalistic flow of The Naked and the Dead with long pas-

sages of characterization, each labeled "The Time Machine," indicating the presence of an author who had shaped the work. In From Here to Eternity the naturalism was unrelieved. Indeed, it was intensified by the novel's scope; any book that devoted eight hundred and fifty-eight pages to ordinary soldiers, uneducated men who lived an existence defined by routine, drew on itself the charges that it had sprawled beyond the bounds of literature.

Jones as a Naturalist

Pritchett had seen in From Here to Eternity little more than interminable squalor. Fiedler had read the novel as a work of the romantic school, "a 'naturalistic' version of Werther." Naturalism he had identified as "any combination of methods the defects of whose qualities are grossness, clumsiness, and the sentimentalizing of the 'brute given' in ourselves and Nature, and of those who live on most intimate terms with it."¹⁰

Although these interpretations -- the romantic and the naturalistic -- seem contradictory, they both are defensible. Moreover, they are not inconsistent. They can be harmonized by a re-definition of Romance. This was provided, a full half-century before From Here to Eternity, by the first of the American Naturalists, Frank Norris. Norris' 1901 essay, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," explains Jones' novel's blend of Naturalism and Romance.

Now, let us understand at once what is meant by Romance and what by Realism. Romance -- I take it -- is the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of variations

from the type of normal life. Realism is the kind of fiction that confines itself to the type of normal life. According to this definition, then, Romance may even treat of the sordid, the unlovely -- as for instance, the novels of M. Zola. (Zola has been dubbed a Realist, but he is, on the contrary, the very head of the Romantics.)

Romance does very well in the castles of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance chateaux, and she has the entree there and is very well received. That is all well and good. But let us protest against limiting her to such places and such times. You will find her, I grant you, in the chatelaine's chamber and the dungeon of the man-at-arms; but, if you choose to look for her, you will find her equally at home in the brownstone house on the corner and in the office building downtown. And this very day, in this very hour, she is sitting among the rags and wretchedness, the dirt and despair of the tenements of the East Side of New York.

"What?" I hear you say, "look for Romance -- the lady of the silken robes and golden crown, our beautiful, chaste maiden of soft voice and gentle eyes -- look for her among the vicious ruffians, male and female, of Allen street and Mulberry Bend?" I tell you she is there, and to your shame be it said you will not know her in those surroundings

She will not always wear the robe of silk, the gold crown, the jeweled shoon, will not always sweep the silver harp. An iron note is hers if so she choose, and coarse garments, and stained hands; . . . Let Realism do the entertaining with its meticulous presentations of teacups, rag carpets, wall paper and haircloth sofas, stopping with these, going no deeper than it sees, choosing the ordinary, the untroubled, the commonplace.

But to Romance belongs the wide world for range, and the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man. (11)

To modernize Norris' language, Romance is anti-bourgeois. It is rebellious and sensation-seeking -- passionate in its devotion to the different, willing to go high or low so long as it avoids the mean. From Here to Eternity featured both forms

of Romance. In Prewitt Jones had created a protagonist of the high-Romance school, an unlettered poet who combined the virtues of Lancelot and Taliesin. He brooded as much (though with more reason) than Werther, and his mountaineer's hardheadedness was a regional form of Romantic individualism. At the same time, Prewitt's environment recalled Zola. The brutality of garrison life and the humid sexuality of the New Congress, as well as the sociopathic turn of Prewitt's career, offered a complement of crude, visceral emotion. The result was, so to speak a pincer attack on bourgeois culture, from below and above.

Norris' definition of Romance points out another link between Jones and earlier naturalists. If Naturalism is fired by a Romantic passion for sensation, it reflects this in a self-conscious sensationalism. Jones meant to shock his readers. This intent can be inferred from his first novel's focus on the sordid. That Jones believed he had succeeded in shocking is evidenced by the "streak of self-pity" Pritchett had found: self-pity assumes an audience will be moved by one's misfortunes. The same desire to affront (and belief that he had affronted) characterized Stephen Crane. "It is inevitable that you will be greatly shocked by the book," he admonished readers of Maggie, "but continue, please, with all possible courage, to the end."¹² A similar tone pervades Norris' criticism. ("'What,' I hear you say, 'look for Romance . . . I tell you she is there . . ."). Jack London's descriptions of Arctic squalor -- his renditions of

starvation, gangrene, scurvy, and cruelty to animals -- showed a similar motive.

"Life, Not Art" -- The Anti-Aesthetic Link

Reviewing From Here to Eternity, Fiedler had reviewed Jones' predecessors -- imagining the host of Naturalism gathered under the banner "Not Art but Life! X (Theodore Dreiser, his mark)." He had also identified in the novel "above all, a Jack-London-hallelujah-I'm-a-bum kind of stance -- 'This ain't art, Jack, it's the real McCoy.'"¹³ Such anti-intellectualism has long characterized American writing. As the critic Donald Pizer has commented:

There [was] always . . . a strong current of primitivistic anti-intellectualism in nineteenth-century American fiction, from Leatherstocking baiting the scientist Obed Bat in The Prairie to Huck Finn deciding to obey his heart rather than his conscience. This faith in the life of action, instinct, and emotion continues as a central force in the American novel, as in the work of Faulkner, Hemingway, and Steinbeck. There is little doubt that it is one of our distinctive national faiths.(14)

With Frank Norris, this anti-intellectualism ceased to be primitivistic. It became, instead, studied and aesthetic. Pizer finds in Norris' criticism a consistent defense of "life" against "literature." "To Norris," Pizer writes,

"Life" included the emotions and the instincts. It incorporated both the world of nature . . . and the kind of life which Norris believed "natural" (the life of passion and violence, and the life of the low and fallen) . . . "Literature," on the other hand, included thought, culture, overeducation, refinement, and excessive spirituality. "Life" was dominated by connotations of masculinity, naturalness, and strength; "literature"

by suggestions of effeminacy, artificiality, and weakness. "Life" was the source of good art . . . whereas from "literature" came imitative and affected art, written entirely for money or for the approval of a cult Norris . . . encouraged writers to respond to a world . . . with their own untaught vision. (15)

Pizer finds "Dying Fires," a short story Norris published in 1902, the best illustration -- an allegory -- of its author's "basic 'life'-'literature' antithesis."¹⁶

"Dying Fires" is the story of Overbeck, a young Californian. Overbeck, twenty-one, writes a novel about his native mining district and its inhabitants: "blacksmiths, traveling peddlers, section-bosses, miners, horse-wranglers, cow-punchers, the stage-drivers, the storekeeper, the hotel-keeper, the ditch-tender, the prospector, the seamstress of the town, the post-mistress, the schoolmistress, the poetess." His insight into these people "so overpowered Overbeck that he had no thought and no care for other people's books."¹⁷

The reason for Overbeck's success, explains Norris, is that Overbeck "lived in the midst of a strenuous, active life . . . a life of passions that were often elemental in their simplicity and directness." Fortunately, "he had not been influenced by a fetich of his choice until his work was a mere replica of some other writer's."¹⁸

The Vision of Bunt McBride, Overbeck's novel, finds a publisher; its success wins Overbeck a job in New York. There he is adopted by a clique which calls itself "the New Bohemians." Forsaking the "sane and healthy animalism" of Bunt McBride, Over-

beck learns from them to speak of "tendencies," "the influence of reaction," "sense of form," and "feeling for word effects." The result is a "city-bred" second novel, Renunciations. Its characters, far from those of Overbeck's first book, are "all of the leisure classes, opera-goers, intriguers, riders of blood horses."¹⁹ The novel fails. Overbeck returns to California, seeking to revive his inspiration. He finds, however, that he cannot: "The fire that the gods had allowed him to snatch . . . had been stamped out beneath the feet of minor and dilettante poets"²⁰

The artistic credo expressed in From Here to Eternity is the same credo Norris formulated. Both insist that true art flows from the people, from "an untutored vision of the raw and violent in experience."²¹ Conversely, both disdain the "literary." The effete dilettantism of New Bohemia is repeated, more explicitly, in Jones' depiction of Hal and Tommy, who are "cultured," materialistic, and actively homosexual. Prewitt differs from Overbeck in that he never succumbs to the blandishments of such litterateurs. When he transfers out of the Bugle Corps, it is because a homosexual sergeant has unjustly promoted his favorite. Because Jones equates sexual perversion with false art -- Tommy writes slick stories for popular magazines -- Prewitt's transfer thus indicates that Prewitt is a devotee of true, folk art even before he himself knows it.

A corollary of Naturalism's Life-not-Art tradition has

been the idea that the greatest writer is the self-educated, self-contained man, who rejects fashion and tradition to follow his own beliefs -- the guy who comes out of nowhere and does it all himself. Even the most mannered American writers have claimed to fit the paradigm. Ernest Hemingway pretended to it by insisting that his radical simplification of style owed to a three-sentence standing order ("Be brief. Be positive. Be specific.") issued to starting reporters at the Kansas City Star. William Faulkner, similarly, denied that he had ever read Joyce (when in fact he worked beside an annotated copy of Ulysses) and asserted "I'm just a farmer who writes." Jones sought to adopt the same persona.

Norman Mailer, writing in Advertisements for Myself, acclaimed From Here to Eternity as "the best American novel since the war." He continued: "What was unique about Jones was that he had come out of nowhere, self-taught, a clunk in his lacks, but the only one of us who had the beer-guts of a broken-glass brawl."²² This was the image Jones initially sought to foster. He reported that on reading Thomas Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel, "I realized I . . . had been a writer all my . . . life without knowing it or having written."²³ Reading Wolfe moved Jones to become a writer. Significantly, Jones describes this decision in the Naturalist manner -- claiming that one can be a writer without having written, and that he himself was such.

Jones evidently believed in as well as played to this

vision of the writer. In the middle 1950's, he founded a writers' colony in Marshall, Illinois, near his hometown of Robinson. At the close of the decade, speaking to The Paris Review, he summarized his experience:

A colony like that had always been one of my dreams. I honestly believed that if you gave guys who wanted to write a place to do it where they could live and eat free, then they would write. Take away the economic worry factor. But it didn't work. It cost me a lot of dough, too. To learn that there was a lot more to it than that. It just doesn't work. I guess we all want to believe people are better than they are. But most of those guys there, even though they all wanted desperately to write, even though they had food and no rent and their utilities, still didn't write. I guess you just can't pick up any Joe off the street and turn him into a writer (24)

The idea that effort alone can make a writer is unsophisticated. Jones is due, however, some credit for consistency. Faulkner and Hemingway, in dispraising their artifice, were disingenuous -- to some extent poseurs. Jones' belief was sincere. He enjoyed playing what Time Magazine labeled him, "the Stanley Kowalski of American letters."²⁵ At the same time, nonetheless, he supported the idea of the writer as "the natural": by financing untried "Joes off the street" who wanted to write, and by creating the character of Robert E. Lee Prewitt, a raw mountaineer with a poet's soul.

Jones as a Disciple of Earlier Naturalists

It seems inappropriate to speak of a "Naturalist tradition," especially when a leading tenet of Naturalism has been that a writer should follow his own inclinations. Nonetheless, a

reason to class Jones among the Naturalists is his debts -- sometimes admitted, sometimes unacknowledged -- to earlier Naturalists.

Naturalism enters From Here to Eternity when Prewitt, hiding out after killing Judson, begins reading. He starts with Georgette's Book-of-the-Month-Club selections and ends with Thomas Wolfe. The middle of his "reading jag," however, is more important:

He remembered one day for no good reason how Jack Malloy had always talked about Jack London all the time, and how he had worshipped him almost as much as Joe Hill [the labor organizer]. The only book of Jack London's he had ever read was The Call of the Wild. So he started Alma to bringing home London and went into him really in earnest.

Although he had to use the dictionary more often with London, he could still seem to read him faster. His writing seemed simpler. One day, when he was along toward the last of them, like John Barleycorn and The Cruise of the Elsinore, he read five in one day. Of them all, he liked Before Adam and The Star Rover the best because for the first time they gave him a clear picture of what Malloy had meant by reincarnation of souls

It was while he was reading Martin Eden that he got the idea to start writing down titles of other books to read, like Martin had done. (26)

Prewitt is not the only character who has read London. In Chapter Nine, Milt Warden breaks office routine for a moment of hardboiled daydreaming.

Warden leveled the pistol at the doorless closet where the filing cabinets were and cocked it. The raising of the hammer made a dull metallic click that was an ominous expectant sound, and Milt Warden banged his other palm down flat on the desk.

"Ha! you son of a bitch," he said out loud.
"Thought I didnt see you."

He stood up, staring at the inoffensive closet, eyes narrowed, brows arched and quivering.

"Re-enlist, will you? I'm Wolf Larsen, see? and nobody re-enlists. Not without answering to old Shark . . . No you dont!" (27)

Fiedler had noticed these references. "It is only the real artist," he had written, summarizing the aesthetic of From Here to Eternity, "the character who has read all the good books (making reading lists of everything mentioned by Tom Wolfe and Jack London) but would rather die than admit it, who can produce 'the song of men who have no place.'"²⁸

Fiedler's tone is unduly caustic. Its observation is indeed accurate: Jones evidently did argue that reading Jack London, and following the self-improvement course London had pioneered, were critical steps in Prewitt's development as an artist. But while Fiedler noted Jones' professions of discipleship, he skimmed over the effects of Jones' apprenticeship. He saw in From Here to Eternity only borrowings of style; the novel owed its "elegaic self-pity" to Look Homeward Angel, its "compulsive rendering of detail and . . . mercilessly uncut reproduction of overheard speech" to Dreiser, its "hard-corny metaphorical descriptions of the orgasm" to Hemingway.²⁹

Such stylistic debts of Jones' are clear. They coexist, however, with substantive appropriations. Jones was patterning his work on that of earlier writers, not least upon that of Jack

London. For Milt Warden -- the brainiest, most cunning, most virile, best soldier of his unit, the toughest brawler, the 34-year-old First Sergeant who has served throughout the Orient, the ex-Catholic who quotes Ecclesiastes and has read most of the books Prewitt plans to read -- is figuratively correct when he announces, "I'm Wolf Larsen, see?" This reverie acknowledges the link between Jones' conception of Warden and Larsen, the character who overshadows London's The Sea Wolf. Wolf Larsen is a "strong," "virile," "massive" man, who (like Warden) "snarls" his orders. He rules his sealing schooner with the amoral absolutism of a Nietzschean individualist who has beaten (literally) all potential rivals. He can recognize literary allusions and discusses Herbert Spencer, from whose works he derived his personal code of might.

Such similarities between Jones' First Sergeant and London's hardbitten ubermensch continue throughout Jones' Army trilogy. Fate breaks both characters; but not through external causes, for both are too tough to be killed. Instead, their own psyches break them down. Larsen goes blind, ravages his boat with nihilistic fury, then dies of a brain tumor. Mart Winch, in Whistle, has survived Guadalcanal and the changes of wartime America -- but even he cannot escape insanity.

The View of Man as Mechanism

A cornerstone of Naturalism has been the belief that human beings are physical organisms which belong to and are

fatally shaped by an environment; that Man is matter, his actions to be explained less by attribution to a psyche than by the operation of physical law. One notable definition was furnished by Jack London:

Here am I, a little animal called a man -- a bit of vitalized matter, one hundred and sixty-five pounds of meat and blood, nerve, sinew, bones and brain, -- all of it soft and tender, susceptible to hurt, fallible and frail I put my head under the water for five minutes, and I am drowned. I fall twenty feet through the air, and I am smashed A splinter of lead from a rifle enters my head, and I am wrapped around in the eternal blackness. (30)

Stephen Crane reached the same definition indirectly. The tragedy of his first heroine was explained in the title of her story: Maggie, A Girl of the Streets. A young woman who lives in the slums cannot help being the victim of the experiences she suffers; the harshness and squalor of her environment ensure her decline into prostitution.

Crane also portrays the individual human as a mechanism, as a part of a larger unit of society. On a battlefield in Northern Virginia, Pvt. Henry Fleming observes a Confederate assault on his regiment.

He got the one glance at the foe-swarming field in front of him, and instantly ceased to debate the question of his piece being loaded. Before he was ready to begin -- before he had announced to himself that he was about to fight -- he threw the obedient, well-balanced, rifle into position and fired a wild first shot. Directly he was working at his weapon like an automatic affair.

He suddenly lost concern for himself, and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part -- a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country -- was in

a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire. For some moments he could not flee no more than a little finger can commit a revolution from a hand. (31)

This analysis of human behavior characterizes Jones. Eighty years after The War Between the States, on Guadalcanal:

"Go in! Go in!" Gaff cried, and in a moment all of them were on their feet running. No longer did they have to fret and stew, or worry about being brave or being cowardly. Their systems pumped full of adrenaline to constrict the peripheral blood vessels, elevate the blood pressure, make the heart beat more rapidly, and aid coagulation, they were about as near to automatons without courage or cowardice as flesh and blood can get. Numbly, they did the necessary. (32)

When it came to giving motives for physical action, both writers preferred the physical to the transcendental. Crane used the physiological metaphor, Jones the physiological explanation; neither accorded a role to the individual mind or conscience. To act was to respond, to answer stimulus with unwitting reflex; reacting to that stimulus alongside other men, who as members of the same species were both physically identical and psychically linked. Further along this theoretical spectrum lay the beliefs of Jack London in instinct and historical determinism.

Individual and Aggregate: Jones' View of Man as a Social Animal

The characteristic that distinguishes Jones from other Naturalist writers -- writers who have treated Man not as the being next below the angels, but as the highest species of animal -- is his exploration of Man's existence as a social animal. To Jones, humans were inextricably social beings. The individual

and the collective were functions of each other, different expressions linked by an equals sign. A delphic hint to this theory of human interrelation is given by the epigram from Emerson which opens From Here to Eternity: "If the whole of history is in one man, it is all to be explained from individual experience."

The interrelation of individual and society is the dominant theme of Jones' fiction. In From Here to Eternity, he presented his views by having them preached by characters. In The Thin Red Line he demonstrated it by treating a group of men, an infantry company, as a single character, and his individual characters as members of this single entity. Finally, in Whistle, he argued the point by concentrating on the passage of four individual characters through similar experiences toward a common end.

Preaching and Practice in "From Here to Eternity."

The story of Robert E. Lee Prewitt can be read in two ways. On one level, as outlined by Fiedler, Prewitt's story is that of the development of an artist. On another, it is the story of an individual learning to define his relationship with society.

Prewitt's interaction with the Army is an intense, turbulent one; it would be cliched but accurate to call it a love-hate relationship. His affection for what he calls "the Profession" shows itself in scenes built around his art: when he

plays Taps in the barracks quadrangle, writes the Re-Enlistment Blues, says that even Bloom deserved a good bugler at his funeral. Such moments aside, the rest of his story is a chronicle of his conflict with the military. Only as he confronts the MP's does he achieve some kind of accord, a contentment with the role he and his comrades play in each other's lives. When he is stopped by the MP's, however, he does not fight back. He succumbs to the temptation to run; but halts, on the verge of escape, when he hears the MP sergeant comment, "This guy wasnt no soldier." This challenge to prove his identity as part of the Army makes Prewitt turn around, into the blast of a Thompson gun. He dies in order to prove himself part of the group.

From Here to Eternity narrates the process by which Prewitt -- the artist, individualist, and rebel, who refuses to go out for boxing and even refuses the assistance offered him by Milt Warden -- grows able to accept death at the hands of other soldiers. The individual steps have been identified by Lt. Col. Peter Jones, author of War and the Novelist: Appraising the American War Novel.

Peter Jones points out that the principle upon which Prewitt ultimately acts, the subordination of the personal self to a larger order, is initially suggested to Prewitt by Mess Sergeant Maylon Stark. Explaining why he so throws himself into his kitchen duties, Stark explains: "In a world like [this], theres only one thing a man can do; and thats to find something

that his, sam, really his and will never let him down, and then work hard at it and for it and it will pay him back. With me its my kitchen . . . and thats all I can take care of. As long as I do that I don't have to be ashamed."³³

Peter Jones finds that:

Malloy completes Prewitt's education. Teacher to the stockade elite, his philosophy is a scrambled blend of Epictetus, Thoreau, Marx, Darwin, Jack London, and the Bible; his God is "growth and evolution." Hebrew vengeance and Christian forgiveness have given way to the modern God of acceptance

Jones introduces Spinoza into the novel Malloy emphasizes the idea of resignation with a loose reshuffling of a line from Spinoza's "Of Human Blessedness.": "He said," quotes Malloy, "Because a man loves God he must not expect God to love him in return." Just before his own departure from the stockade, Malloy [adds] this crucial gloss: "When a man has found something he really loves, he must always hang on to it, no matter what happens, whether it loves him or not. And . . . if it finally kills him, he should be grateful to it, for having just had the chance." (34)

This doctrine reflects another belief of Malloy's: that God is a being who, beyond forgiving sins, accepts all actions. His teaching of passive resistance is a corollary of the first doctrine and a parallel to the second. The disciple who does not return evil shows love for his persecutors, thereby following the example of God.*

*The way in which such doctrines shape the novel cuts against Pritchett's conclusion that From Here to Eternity was a novel without ideas, an "instrumental recording." This holds true despite flaws in Jones' attempt to synthesize Malloy's reading. For example, Peter Jones writes: "[Malloy] confides to Prewitt that his present run of bad luck is the result of some terrible thing done in ages past. (This from the new God of acceptance!)." Peter Jones continues:

It is after such instruction that Prewitt faces the MP's.

Standing there, in that couple of seconds, he could have fired twice with the .38 and killed two of them, Fred and the Cpl, standing there in the light of the headlights, they were perfect targets, but he did not shoot. He did not even want to shoot. He hardly even thought about shooting. They were the Army, too. And how could a man kill a soldier for just simply doing a sound competent job? It was still the rottenest word in the language. He had killed once. It did not do any good. Even though it was justified, and he did not regret it, it still did not do any good. Maybe it never did any good. . . . And these were the Army, too. It was not true that all men killed the things they loved. What was true was that all things killed the men who loved them. Which, after all, was as it should be. (36)

Prewitt's final realization is on two levels, abstract and particular. He accepts the ideal of a man sacrificing himself to a cause as he realizes that he faces death at the hands of other soldiers. It also confirms his dedication to an art authenticated by its tough-guy folk aesthetic, by rejecting once more the declaration of a homosexual: note how the three closing sentences mock and deny "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." "Well, I learned it, Jack. I learned it," he thinks as three bullets tear

(cont.)

"Malloy undoubtedly misses the point of 'because' in the [Spinoza] quotation The same passage from 'Of Human Blessedness' has this central statement: 'He who loves God cannot strive that God should love him in return. If a man were to strive after this, he would desire that God, whom he loves, should not be God, and consequently he would desire to be sad, which is absurd.' Spinoza insists that nothing in the world is contingent, that human prayer asks the perfect being to alter His ways to accommodate human understanding, a thesis in direct opposition to Malloy's." (35)

through him, seeing beyond this death "an endless chain of new decidings. That made him feel good, the being right."³⁷

The belief for which Prewitt dies is the idea that all soldiers are part of the Army, that all men belong to society. This idea is accepted throughout From Here to Eternity. No character ever holds that the Army itself should be abolished. Even Jack Malloy -- who escapes from the stockade and deserts to the mainland, to civilian life -- believes that he will eventually re-enlist. The issue is what form that social aggregate will take.

One of the alternatives -- understood by Prewitt and accepted as a modus operandi by Milt Warden, as Peter Jones observes -- is that of the Army -- of society -- as an organism. Warden's avowed aim is to shape up G Company into a smoothly running unit. His goal, thus, is by doing his job to make all his associates do theirs. Although he surpasses the men he works with -- he represents the entire regiment at rifle meets, can do paperwork more efficiently than his clerk Mazzioli, and runs mental rings around Pete Karelsen the company intellectual -- his concern is to improve each soldier's performance. He is a smooth operator because he deals with each man as an individual. Warden remains, moreover, part of the unit he deals with -- senior enlisted man, but an enlisted man nonetheless.

Warden's loathing is reserved for the adherents of

another concept of the Army -- those who believe it should be a machine or hierarchy.

Warden watched [Holmes] plowing his way back across the rainswept deserted quad, realizing suddenly why he hated Holmes. It was because he had always feared him, not him personally, not his physique or mind, but what he stood for. Dynamite would make a good general someday, if he got the breaks. Good generals ran to a certain type, and Dynamite was it. Good generals had to have the type of mind that saw all men as masses, as numerical groups of Infantry, Artillery, and mortars that could be added and subtracted and understood on paper. They had to be able to see men as abstractions that they worked on paper with. (38)

Holmes stands apart from his men. To him they matter only as units of labor whose activities can be used to further his career. He ambitiously observes the protocol of rank, serving those above him and exacting obedience from his coterie of jockstrap NCO's. And just as Prewitt encounters Jack Malloy, so Holmes apprentices himself to an intellectual master, Brigadier General Sam Slater. Slater has formulated an ideology of social mechanism:

"In the past," Sam Slater said carefully, "this fear of authority was only the negative side of a positive moral code of 'Honor, Patriotism, and Service.' In the past, men sought to achieve the positives of the code, rather than simply to avoid its negatives. . . .

"But the advent of materialism and the machine age changed all that, see? We have seen the world change . . . in our time. The machine has destroyed the meaning of the old positive moral code. Obviously you cannot make a man voluntarily chain himself to a machine because it's 'Honorable.' The man knows better. . . .

"All that is left . . . is the standardized negative side of the code as expressed in Law. The fear of authority which was once only a side issue but today is the main issue, because it's the only issue left. . . .

"In the Civil War the machine won its first inevitable major victory over the individual. 'Honor' died

"And in our present time we must have complete control, because the majority of men must be subservient to the machine, which is society. . . .

"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.' It is his destiny for several centuries to come, until control can become stabilized." (39)

In the presence of such an outlook, Jones' insistence on the social value of the sociopathic bum and convict becomes comprehensible. If Law exists only to allow men like Slater to run society, if fear is their principal tool, then to resist such fascists implies fearlessness and law-breaking. At both of these the inmates of Ward Two excel.

Both Malloy and Slater are consciously didactic. Even among the many conversations that make up From Here to Eternity, their discourses stand out as sermons. Other characters act, or think as they act; Slater and Malloy preach. This demonstrates what may be a weakness in From Here to Eternity, if only because Jones handled the issue better in subsequent novels. Tagged to the appearances of Slater and Malloy, the book's essential concepts enter the novel as excess baggage. Jones had chosen to lecture twice in making his points, stopping short of integrating narrative and theory.

Demonstration Through Characterization:
"The Thin Red Line"

In his second Army novel Jones succeeded in fusing idea and action. The Thin Red Line is a novel about men who find their individuality compromised. Each exists only as part of the aggregate, as a member of the infantry company. But while this process depersonalizes, it offers consolation, for a chance for survival lies in statistification and collectivization. Individuals may die, but C-for-Charlie Company will endure. Man thus exists in the mass. "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 technological for any one individual man to count in it. Only collections of men counted, only communities of men, only numbers of men." So Jones, speaking through John Bell.⁴⁰

"Jones's first novel describes the heroic struggle of an individual to retain his integrity, but his later work contains no hero; the individual has been absorbed into the organization."⁴¹ So observed the critic Edmond Volpe, as he opened a succinct essay on Jones' second Army novel.

The Thin Red Line has no protagonist. The story concerns an infantry company fighting in the jungles and hills of Guadalcanal. If a single character comes into focus momentarily, he quickly recedes into the background as Jones shifts attention to another soldier. The company encompasses the individuals that make it up. It is an abstract unit with a table of organization designating a variety of positions which human beings fill

. . .By shifting from character to character, [Jones] gradually creates the impression that the individual is not only of little importance within the organization but he is of little importance to anyone but himself. When the men see wounded and dead for the first time they are shocked and horrified. During their first battle, they react intensely to the suffering and death of their comrades. But as the fighting continues, the dead bodies of their fellow soldiers no longer really bother them, and they lose all compunction about killing enemy soldiers. The starving Japanese prisoners are treated inhumanly, but only because the combat situation has revealed to their captors the insignificance of the individual human life except to the being who possesses it. . . .

The ultimate insignificance of individual man is conveyed at the end of the novel. . . . Most of the men who made up the company are dead or dispersed. The dead and the evacuated wounded are replaced to fill out the table of organization. The individual men may live or die, come or go, but the abstraction C-for-Charlie Company remains. (42)

Volpe had identified both Jones' theme and his two chief means of conveying it. Jones did continually shift the focus of the narrative from character. One minor problem in detailed discussion of The Thin Red Line is distinguishing -- or, better said, explaining how one has distinguished -- major characters from minor.* A tentative roster of the former category might include Welsh, Witt, and Storm (Jones' First Sergeant, Infantryman, and Mess Sergeant characters); Fife, Stein, and Bell (characters who provide viewpoints and make realizations); Dale, Doll, Tall, Band and Bead (characters whose individual actions

* A fuller discussion of characterization is provided in Chapter V, infra.

play important roles); and Queen, Cash and Mazzi and Tills (characters of symbolic importance).

Perhaps the only way to class a character as major is by whether the events of the story are ever seen from his viewpoint. Very minor characters are developed to an extent limited only by the length of their appearance. A man may figure in the story only once, exiting in the same sentence that introduces him, but that one sentence is enough for Jones to slip in a characterization. An example is one of the two casualties of Keck's assault on the Japanese lines: "Of these one, a Mississippi farmer 'boy' of nearly forty named Catt, about whom nobody in the company knew anything for the simple reason that he never talked, was killed outright."⁴³

Even characters uninvolved in the main plot-line receive a prodigal share of development. Take Sgt. James, whom Tall sends rearward to get water:

As [Tall] continued to talk, his sergeant's face had changed from a groaning look to a surprised smile, and finally to an open grin: He was going to get to spend the next few very important hours haranguing the Regimental Commander in appreciably greater physical safety than existed here. He would have to be a little careful, because the Old Man could be ornery, but James knew the Great White Father's idiosyncrasies pretty well and was sure he could take care of himself, as Tall well knew.

"Well, it's a hard job, Sir, but I'll do the best I can," the sergeant grinned. (44)

So many characters appear that the list Jones provides in the front endpapers of the novel serves a purely functional purpose,

aiding comprehension as do as the endpaper maps illustrating the terrain of The Dancing Elephant. But the maps serve a literary purpose, foreshadowing; they reveal at the onset the deaths of Keck and Cash, and stir in the reader uneasy suspense about some yet-to-come event remembered as the Roadblock Massacre. The company roster has a similar function. It points out how, in Volpe's words, individuals exist as part of a table of organization, an abstract called C-for-Charlie Company.

This points the way to Jones' second means of demonstrating the human collective; which was to treat C-for-Charlie not only as an aggregate but as an entity in se. This had been foreshadowed in From Here to Eternity. On the night of the transfer, Prewitt had found, "G Company was a single personality formed by many men, but he was not a part of it."⁴⁵ In The Thin Red Line, however, the infantry unit emerged as a separate character. An infantry company comprises one hundred and sixty officers and men. Only seventy-one of these were named, but as part of C-for-Charlie Jones dealt equally with them all.

C-for-Charlie Company in the fact had no need of Colonel Tall's solicitude. They did not even have need of the runner Witt he had sent after them to pep them up. They had had a little firefight of their own, in which they demolished a four-man heavy MG outpost with only one casualty, and they were moving along quite well. Whether some of the excitement of the fight on the hill had seeped down to them through the humid air, whether the mere survival of yesterday had stiffened them into veterans, whether the progressive numbness they all felt had finally submerged their fear, whether their own successful little firefight had sparked them to enthusiasm, they now passed along the ample trail with alacrity and dispatch. After the firefight they

left the wounded scout, who was not too upset by this, alone along the trail where Witt later found him. Although they had no water, it was shady in the jungle, not like the fierce dusty heat on the ridge; and in that murky humidity it seemed that their dehydrated bodies actually sucked in moisture through their pores out of the air, even while they sweated. Witt, as he trailed cautiously along behind them, discovered the same unexpected relief. (46)

"Adapting Gresham's theorem to the literary situation, one might say that public life drives private life into hiding," Saul Bellow wrote. "The fixed points seem to be disappearing. Even the Self is losing its firm outline." Noting then one book's precise recording of "the fluctuation in the value of the life of the individual," he concluded: "One recent American novel deals openly and consciously with these problems: The Thin Red Line."⁴⁷

Such an observation places The Thin Red Line among a contemporary fiction concerned with the uneasy coexistence of Man and man. At the same time, these group-action passages (and title) point out the kinship between The Thin Red Line and the first great American combat novel. One can compare C-for-Charlie's march toward the front --

There had been companies marching both in front of and behind them. Now there were none. The one in front had gone on, the one behind evidently some other way. There had been jeeps loaded with supplies bucking through the mud. There was now nothing, not a vehicle. The road stretched before them totally deserted. And nothing came along it either. Even sound seemed to have ceased. Except for the normal jungle noises, they seemed to have dropped into a vacuum; and the only sound they could hear, one which their ears gradually became aware of, was the distant splashing and faint voices of men moving something up or down the river somewhere off behind the screen of jungle. (48)

with the march of Crane's 304th New York:

From their position as they again faced toward the place of the fighting, they could of course comprehend a greater portion of the battle than when their visions had been blurred by the hurling smoke of the line. They could see dark stretches winding along the land, and on one cleared space there was a row of guns making gray clouds, which were filled with large flashes of orange-colored flame. Over some foliage they could see the roof of a house. One window, glowing a deep murder red, shone squarely through the leaves. From the edifice a tall leaning column of smoke went far into the sky. (49)

The operative pronouns in both passages is they. The subject in both is a human mass. In Crane's view of man as a social animal, this was the natural state of man, a condition in which (by association with others) he was most himself. The correspondent in "The Open Boat," a character patterned on Crane himself, comes to understand what it is to act in unison in a threatening environment:

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him. They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends -- friends in a more curiously iron-bound degree than may be common. The hurt captain, lying against the water-jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly; but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motley three of the dinghy. It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heart-felt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat, there was this comradeship, that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life. (50)

Each passage reflects this belief, defining the moment it presents as a joint perception of a group of observers.

Later Writings

The full extent of Jones' concern with the risky interplay of individual and society can be judged by his comments on two novels he did not write -- at least, never published. At the time of The Paris Review interview, when he was still at work on The Thin Red Line, he explained that he had come to Paris (picking up a thought touched on in From Here to Eternity) to write a novel about Django Reinhardt, the gypsy jazz guitarist.

I've always loved his [Reinhardt's] music, better than any other single jazz musician I've heard. Because of that, I got fascinated by what I read and heard about him. He seems to have been a really total individualist, in the sense that gypsies often are: without loyalty of any sort to any country; I mean totally amoral in any political sense. And the jazz part of it fits in here too, you see, because jazz and the jazz life are, after all, semi-illegal. . . . Jazz and jazz-men live pretty much on the edge of the law -- no matter how much the propagandists of any country try to drag them by the hair into the national morality. They are never really outlaws, or outlawed, but they can always be found somewhere on that amorphous fringe. So what I want to explore in this novel is whether Django's type of individuality can exist today in any form. And I think that if it can survive it will be there, in jazz and that type of life, in near-illegality if you will, that we will have to look for it. (51)

Fiedler, this passage shows, had been right: Jones had envisioned Ward Two's hardbitten inmates as the world's last individuals. And in a later interview (done on radio for the New American Library) Jones mentioned another intended exploration of this theme. When he had finished Go to the Widowmaker, he said,

he had several books under consideration.

. . . One is a modern Western novel, about American individualism in the West today and how it's necessary to destroy it in order for our society to continue to exist, while at the same time we're giving lip service to individuality. That's one. I've got another about . . . well it's a very complicated business, but it will be laid in Paris, and it will have to do with Americans living there, jazz musicians mainly. (52)

Jones' last novel picked up this thread again. What two characters in From Here to Eternity had preached, what The Thin Red Line had done by treating a man-mass as individuals and gathered individuals as a collective, Whistle illustrated even more subtly. It lacked the numerous cast of the second book, and its characters, when they talked of ideas, offered explanations instead of expounding truths. Nonetheless, the same theory motivated the novel. Human interrelation was demonstrated by the interdependence of the four major characters and by the way Jones chose to shift the narrative among them.

It found two forms of expression. The first was represented by the most persistent fear of Jones' characters: being shipped out as a replacement. As Winch puts it, "You got any idea what it's like to be shipped overseas like that? I don't have to go into it, do I? A new outfit? You don't know anybody? The dirtiest jobs. The most dangerous assignments. You'll be on probation. No rewards, or thanks. No fucking Medals of Honor. You're a marked man."⁵³ All risks real enough, and all flowing from one fact: a replacement is not accepted by the unit he joins.

Not to be part of the social organism literally means death. The second expression is the converse of this relationship and is set out by Landers: "It's like we were investors. And each of us invested his tiny bit of capital in all the others. When we lose one of us, we all of us lose a little of our capital. And we none of us ever really had that much to invest, you see."⁵⁴ Here the pronouns convey the message: Landers speaks not of I, or even we, but we all of us. Malloy's belief in human unity had found its most succinct explication.

Fact, Form, Symbol, and Structure

Fact is never far below the surface of Jones' fiction. Pritchett's comment that Jones' writing presented "literal life" is an accurate if incomplete assessment. WW II corroborates it with its first-person revisitation of scenes Jones had earlier narrated through the personae of Sergeants Fife and Landers. The literalness of From Here to Eternity, moreover, has been legally noted.

The case in question was People ex rel. Maggio v. Charles Scribner's Sons, which was brought in the City Magistrates' Court of New York (Borough of Brooklyn) in 1954, and is reported at 130 New York Supplement (2d) 514. The instigator was one Joseph Anthony Maggio, a postal worker, who sued under a New York statute prohibiting the use in trade of "the name, portrait, or likeness of any living person" without the prior written consent of that individual. Charles Scribner's Sons, Maggio

charged, had violated this law by publishing From Here to Eternity with its character Angelo Maggio.

The complainant offered testimony [the trial judge opined] that he was in the same company [Company F, 27th Infantry] as the author, which company was stationed in Hawaii during the period covered by the book; that the author was the company clerk and was familiar with the names of the soldiers in the company and that several of the other names used incidentally in the book were the names of other soldiers in the company, although their correct full names were not used but only their last names with a different first name or nickname or no first name at all. . . .

It is generally understood that novels are written out of the background and experiences of the novelist. . . . The end result may be so fictional as to seem wholly imaginary, but the acorn of fact is usually the progenitor of the oak, which when fully grown no longer has any resemblance to the acorn. In order to disguise the acorn and to preserve the fiction, the novelist disguises the names of the actual persons who inspired the characters in his book. . . . So long as the author does not use the true name of the character he may have had in mind, there is no basis for complaint. . . .

We are thus required to determine whether by proof of the use of the name "Angelo Maggio" in a setting in the Army in Hawaii just before Pearl Harbor, together with an incidental reference, also by partial use of the last name only, to several other soldiers in the same outfit, the complainant, Joseph A. Maggio, has made out a violation.(55)

The names were not identical. The deeds of Angelo Maggio, it was determined at trial, did not correspond to those of Joseph A. Maggio. The plaintiff's suit was dismissed.

Because of the statute's penal nature, the trial judge had observed, it was to be construed strictly. This was fortunate for the defendants, for by a less rigorous standard of proof, From Here to Eternity copies life. Asked to estimate how

much of the novel had actually taken place, Frank Grzebinski, another member of Company F, estimates eighty percent. Ninety percent is the figure given by Frank Marshall, who testified for Jones at the Maggio trial. Marshall, an Italian whose family name was written down by immigration clerks with a rough sense of the idem sonans doctrine, was a bugler in Company F. His mess-mates nicknamed him "Friday." Jones confirmed to Marshall that he was the model for "Friday" Clark, the company bugler who over a poker hand explains that his surname is really Ciolla. "A lot of the incidents were changed around," Marshall explains of Jones' fictionalization. "For instance, it was really Stewart who hit Blum with a pool cue one time, but in the book it was Maggio."⁵⁶

Further confirmation of this ninety-per-cent estimate can be found in the northwestern corner of the United States. In Seattle, Washington, managing a tire warehouse, lives another veteran of Company F. He is a native of Letcher County, Kentucky; in Company F he was a recruit instructor and a bugler. In the first capacity he met Jones, whom he took along on trips to the roller rink, Chinese restaurant, and beer garden of Wahliawa village. Jones, in turn, showed him the stories he had typed on his company clerk's typewriter. Both men served together on Guadalcanal. After Jones was evacuated from New Georgia, this man went on to the Philippines. There, in March of 1945, he was wounded in both legs. Only his insistence -- one brother had

lost a leg in a mining accident -- kept the doctors from amputating. When he read From Here to Eternity, his first thought was to sue for invasion of privacy. His second was that keeping friendship with an old friend was more important. This choice probably saved him fruitless litigation; for, as with Maggio, Jones had altered a name when writing his novel.⁵⁷

Such is the history of Robert Lee Stewart, known to his friends as Stew.

Structure

"If I may flatter myself a little in this interview without making too many enemies," Jones told The Paris Review, "I would like to say that I believe I have a knack, or whatever you want to call it, for structural organization."⁵⁸ He was at that moment defending the sprawl of Some Came Running, whose excesses he had just admitted. To someone who has not read From Here to Eternity with the aim of figuring out its chronology, Jones' confession seems sounder than his apologia. The novel is indeed of substantial length. It repeatedly concentrates on the same locales: there are two poker-playing scenes and three scenes set in the New Congress. Such repetition may be appropriate in a book about soldiers who are ordered to duty in certain places and permitted after duty to visit others. Nonetheless, the first-time reader would not be unreasonable in agreeing with Pritchett; From Here to Eternity seems afflicted with the vices of formlessness and repetition. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that

even in his first novel Jones had displayed considerable structural skill.

The difficulty in recognizing the structure of From Here to Eternity's segments is that its ostensible and functional schema are not synchronized. The novel's fifty-seven chapters are divided into five books. Although this is not the book's actual structure, there is considerable logic to this segmentation.

Book One, "The Transfer," comprising Chapters One through Eight, carries the story of Prewitt from his departure from the Bugle Corps to his break-up with Violet Ogure, which marks his submersion into G Company. This section also sees Milt Warden meet Karen Holmes. Book Two, "The Company," begins with Warden's seduction of his commander's wife and ends with Prewitt's Taps. Between these episodes, Chapters Nine through Fifteen introduce Maylon Stark and a host of minor characters who will surround Prewitt and Warden for the rest of the novel. "The Women" is an apt title for Book Three, for it opens with Prewitt meeting Lorene and includes the scene in which Warden reveals to Karen that he knows of her past affair with Stark. This book ends with Maggio's arrest. Book Four is rightly called "The Stockade." Its chapters, Twenty-Eight through Forty-Four, cover Maggio's trial, Prewitt's conviction, Bloom's suicide, and finally Prewitt's assassination of Fatso Judson, while Warden dallies with Karen and entertains the thought of seeking a commis-

sion. What remains (Chapters Forty-Five through Fifty-Seven) is Book Five, "The Re-enlistment Blues," after the tune Prewitt completes, and which is found by Warden on his body.

The books' endpoints are carefully placed, but they demarcate; they do not determine. From Here to Eternity's action runs on a different schedule. The plot develops through a series of dramatic peaks and intervals. Over these the narrative leaps and lingers, summarizing weeks and months to focus on a handful of days. From the beginning of the book to its technical climax at the end of Chapter Twenty-Seven, most of the plot events are concentrated in three separate one-day periods. In these days, the plot advances in one (usually both) of two ways. One subplot may leap forward in a linked series of episodes; or, in a quasi-Joycean conjunction, crucial moments in different subplots may occupy the same moment in time.

The first important day is the day of Prewitt's transfer, the events of which are reported in Chapters One through Seven, one chapter short of the end of Book One. In less than twelve hours in February, 1941, Prewitt arrives in Company G, meeting Angelo Maggio and exchanging looks of recognition with Milt Warden; the First Sergeant and the Captain's wife meet as Milt Warden and Karen Holmes; Captain Holmes learns of the pressures on him to produce another boxing title. This short period suffices for Jones to set in motion the conflicts that will coalesce into the novel's main action.

The second important day occurs some weeks later. It opens with Prewitt realizing the inexorably fatal flow of his actions -- that leaving the Bugle Corps led to his refusal to box, which in turn led to his current resistance and disfavor. Later, in the kitchen, he listens to Stark state his belief in vocation. That afternoon, Bloom and Maggio quarrel. After dinner, Prewitt plays Taps. He then accompanies Stark on a visit to the New Congress, where he meets Lorene. These events run from Chapter Fourteen through Chapter Seventeen, spilling over from "The Company" into "The Women."

The third important day is Payday, covered in Chapters Twenty through Twenty-Seven. On this evening, several important transactions occur. Warden confronts Karen Holmes with his knowledge of her affair with Stark; she replies by revealing her hysterectomy. Captain Holmes listens to the predictions of General Sam Slater. Bloom (it is revealed later, in Chapter Thirty-Eight) sees Maggio and Prewitt with the homosexuals Tommy and Hal, and phones in an anonymous tip that touches off the "queer investigation" -- one result of which, because he is among those questioned, will be his suicide. Prewitt refutes Tommy's aesthetic platitudes -- another step in the artistic education Fiedler noted. Maggio is arrested, becoming the first character to be linked to the Stockade, which hereafter overshadows the novel. Just before dawn, Prewitt wheedles out of Tommy and Hal the forty dollars with which he will seduce Lorene; thus setting in motion

a cause-in-fact of his desertion, and hence of his death.

The parallels established in the novel are not uniformly fruitful. At the same time Prewitt is planning to murder Fatso Judson, Warden toys with Karen's idea that he apply for a commission: the two main characters thus are simultaneously tempted toward false goals. This is an appropriate parallel; but what exactly does it mean that Prewitt is released from the Stockade's Black Hole on the day Bloom is buried? Even such misses, however, manifest an authorial intent to structure the narrative, an intelligence that stood back from the facts it worked from, seeking proportion. They demonstrate the deliberate formfulness of the novel.

The Complexity of "The Thin Red Line"

Jones carried his concern for structure forward into The Thin Red Line. "Because of the nature of the book I'm working on now," he explained to The Paris Review, "I'm doing it in . . . well, in sections, very long chapters of around a hundred pages, which will be interlarded with what I call interchapters, very short pieces from another time and viewpoint."⁵⁹

An examination of Chapter Eight, the book's last, shows what Jones meant. The impression left by this chapter is of a chronological progression from C-for-Charlie's return to bivouac to its embarkation for New Georgia. This in fact is the general route of the narrative. Along the way, however, the story line repeatedly jumps forward and back in time. "Band was relieved

three days later," the chapter opens; but this is revealed by the next sentence, ("but before that happened . . .") as a mere preview. The first topic fully dealt with is an overview of C-for-Charlie's twenty-eight-hour drinking binge. An omniscient overview of this lasts one page, before Jones introduces the high point of the bacchanal: Private Mazzi's drunken upbraiding of his commander, Captain Band. Here the viewpoint is Mazzi's; the episode runs for four pages. Enclosed within it is an incident that leaps back to the fight at Boola Boola village, Mazzi's catching himself on the branches and being freed by Tills.

At this point the narrative returns to the bacchanal, to Corporal (recently Sergeant) Fife. Three pages, told from this soldier's point of view, cover Fife's fistfight with Weld. Then Fife sits down with Don Doll, and the story drops back perhaps ten minutes; to report, as understood by Doll, Doll's half-witting homosexual pass at Carrie Arbre. There follows a milestone sentence ("when Band was relieved a day and a half later, the liquor problem still had not been solved . . .") and a brief, omniscient glance at the suggestions put forward in those thirty-six hours. Then, from Band's viewpoint, is shown the scene of his deposition.

At this point the story unfolds, in normal temporal order, for six days -- as John Bell conjectures that it takes this long for the company's "combat numbness" to wear off. Then, for an unmeasured period of time, C-for-Charlie experiments with

brewing alcohol -- a period of time ended by the transfer back to the company of Witt. This is dealt with by an omniscient relation of how approval of the transfer was won by Lieutenant Culp, in a section that concludes, "It was almost the last act of any consequence Culp was to perform in C-for-Charlie. Two days later he blew most of his right hand off fishing." This episode narrated, the story then momentarily leaps ahead: "It took three weeks for Witt's transfer to go through." Here, as at the first of the chapter, the narrative then recoils to tell what occurred in those three weeks -- the arrival of Captain Bosche. Bosche's appearance is set down from an omniscient viewpoint. In a scene set "two days after Bosche arrived," the farewell speech of the regimental commander, the viewpoint switches to John Bell. This leads to a general, directly-forward flow of the narrative: first via a retelling of how C-for-Charlie lost its beards, then via the Fife-centered account of how Fife and Doll have repeatedly stolen fruit from supply dumps.

The next section opens again in leap-and-recoil fashion, with a note that "perhaps it was that [Fife's doubts of his own courage] that made him take advantage of the loophole when it appeared," followed by a summary of what had happened "over the weeks" before Fife's medical evacuation. Written from an omniscient viewpoint, this deals with such significant episodes as Queen's brief return and Welsh's sneering refusal to be evacuated. Then this phase of C-for-Charlie's life cycle is individ-

ualized by Fife's experience of being cleared for evacuation. On the same day, in the last scene to center on an individual, Bell receives his long-anticipated "Dear John" letter and confers about it with Bosche. Hereafter C-for-Charlie begins preparing to leave for New Georgia -- passing on rumors, receiving medals. And at the end, as a unit, they file aboard the landing craft that will take them to the transports.

Three weeks later, but before that; meantime back at the bivouac -- the conjunctions of differently timed, geographically scattered events form a pattern as complex as Catch-22. They do not confuse the reader as do the conjunctions of the latter book, however, because each is anchored in the narrative present. Each digression from the present occurs within the consciousness, or within the context of, a present actor. The multiplicity of story lines minimizes confusion when point-of-view shifts. C-for-Charlie embraces all the characters; their perceptions embrace C-for-Charlie.

The problem is not to identify the interchapters and determine how they link different times, places, and characters. It is to find any narrative that is not an interchapter. Even the passages written from an omniscient point-of-view meet Jones' definition.

The boundary of interchapter is indefinite. It is easy to identify the interchapters comprising the story centered on Fife, but within these episodes lie single sentences reflecting

different viewpoints. Consider how one miniature interchapter fits within the description of Weld:

Somebody helped Weld up. His nose was broken and bleeding. Both eyes were puffed almost shut. Blood ran from his mouth between his broken lips but it was impossible to tell whether he had lost any teeth; however, later, it was found that he had not. He was still groggy and he looked bewildered. (60)

Such comments support Jones' conception of C-for-Charlie as an entity in se by adding a fourth, temporal dimension to his portrayal of the unit. Each man not only exists as part of the conceptions of his coevals, as a member of a class of all men present at one moment; he also exists in relation to men who deal with him at different moments.

Irony in Jones' Fiction

The irony that pervades Jones' fiction further demonstrates his intention to proportion his novels. Like the coordination of subplots, it shows an author conscious of the increments of data he reveals -- aware while writing one episode how its ostensible meaning will be altered by something to be said later.

In From Here to Eternity the ironies are subtle and few. One leading example occurs in the Stockade, when Prewitt and Maggio talk of Bloom's suicide. "'My personal opinion,' Maggio [says] sagaciously, 'is that he was afraid he had gone queer.' 'Hell, Bloom was no queer,'" Prewitt replies, and they continue discussing the enigma. "They sat silent, looking at each other,

neither one of them able to put their finger on just exactly what it was Bloom's death made them feel."⁶¹ They feel that their understanding is inadequate. Hence arises the irony, for they do not know what the reader does, Bloom's last self-accusation: "You did it, and you liked it, and that makes you a queer. And everybody knows you are a queer. You dont deserve to live."⁶² Unknowingly, inappropriately -- because Bloom was not his friend and psychology was never his forte -- Maggio is right.

Irony was one of Jones' conscious objectives in The Thin Red Line. "In this book," he told Leslie Hanscom and a radio audience, "almost always the use of strength, human strength in one form or other, becomes . . . comes up as an ironic cropper in the end."⁶³

They had just spoken of the scene in which Big Queen, with grim, hesitant bravado, pulls a Japanese soldier's corpse through the soil covering a mass grave. This scene's purpose, Jones explained, was to show "the misuse and the ridiculous misuse of human strength which can include many subjects, not only physical strength, but technology, and all of the things that we live by."⁶⁴ He had indeed put into the book many other well-intentioned failures. Captain Stein's hesitancy to send his men against dug-in well-armed Japanese is the ultimate cause of his removal -- which puts C-for-Charlie under Lieutenant Band, a spectre of literal if inchoate sadism. Sergeant Welsh, when he has run through machine-gun fire to reach the fatally-wounded

soldier Alfredo Tella, finds his heroism of no avail; there is nothing he can do for Tella, except to push morphine syrettes into his hand. His attempt to carry Tella behind cover only increases the man's pain. Lieutenant Colonel Tall sincerely tries to bring water forward to C-for-Charlie, but along the way, in the fever of the attack he has orchestrated, other soldiers drink up the water, turning his gesture into a betrayal.

In one other way the book piled irony on irony.

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. . . . Occasionally courage is psychologically explicable; most often it is not. . . . No cause and effect relationship exists between virtue and destiny. The spattering mortar fragments slash the brave and the cowardly. (65)

In what it specifically observes, the inexplicability of courage, this thesis of Volpe's is open to disputation. Courage often is explicable. John Bell may wonder why he rushes uphill into machine-gun fire. It is a random, hysterical impulse that makes Don Doll dash toward the Japanese strongpoint, firing his rifle and shrieking "Mama! Mama!" But Witt knows why he fights -- to save his friends. Fife, likewise, fights because he does not want to be thought a coward, and most of the time Doll knows his motive, which is to keep up with Charlie Dale.

Volpe's general observation, however, is entirely correct: the characters of The Thin Red Line are ruled more by chance than causality. Only chance keeps C-for-Charlie from

being the unit caught disembarking by the Japanese bombers. The greatest risk the company endures comes from mortar attacks, from randomly flung shards of metal. What makes possible the storming of the Dancing Elephant is that the Japanese have overlooked to guard the ridge along which Gaff's assault group crawl.

Fate finds ways to undo the most careful plans. The patrol Band places astride the Ding-Dong Trail choose their defenses carefully, choosing a site where they can concentrate their firepower on a spot wide enough for only one man. The result is the Roadblock Massacre, because that one man is a Japanese veteran with a machine-gun strapped along his spine. Kow-towing and wiggling his shoulders, this soldier (fated himself to die the next afternoon at Boola Boola) fires from the apex of a triangle and sweeps clear its base. Witt escapes into the jungle, but cannot take action against the Japanese he counts filing past him -- because he has forgotten to borrow any grenades.

Whistle also has its share of ironies. So subtle are these that they operate almost on the level of subconsciousness -- stirring dim recollections that can be confirmed only by a conscious search of the earlier books. One example is what the events of Whistle make of an earlier declaration by Jones' First Sergeant. On Payday night, before keeping his rendezvous with Karen Holmes, Milt Warden is urged to join a group of NCO's on a visit to Big Sue's, a competitor of Mrs. Kipfer's New Congress.

"Hell no," he answers, contemptuously. "When I have to buy it, I quit."⁶⁶ Five hundred and sixteen pages intervene between this episode and the penultimate chapter of the book, the chapter detailing Warden and Stark's rampaging night on the town. This starts in a bar and turns to a brawl and ends with the two sergeants being given sanctuary by Mrs. Kipfer. "I got two hundred and six bucks here, Gert," Warden offers. "I'll give you a hundred and fifty of it, if you'll go out front and get me and my pal two of your lovely young ladies and bring them back here to us and let us have this place the rest of the day."⁶⁷

The deal fits seamlessly into the satyr-play that lightens the book's past tragedies. It is splendiferous, riotous. But Warden is paying for sex, meeting the condition, and Whistle fulfills the prophecy. Mart Winch is a sick man, failing simultaneously in both brain and heart, half-seeking the defeats he finds. His New Congress orgy was the prelude to Guadalcanal and the Army hospitals. When he had bought it -- and perhaps there is a pun there -- it was finished for him.

It was such passages that called forth a dustjacket comment from Romain Gary. "Touched by a weird, resigned and yet lighthearted, ironic, and even optimistic acceptance of our animal nature," he wrote, "with constant flashes of a sly, dark, peculiar humor, written with a deceptive facility . . . this extraordinary novel achieves epic proportions through the magic of a joyful love of life and humanity."⁶⁸ He spoke of The Thin

Red Line -- of which V. S. Pritchett, writing once more in The New Statesman, made several more-specific observations.

The Thin Red Line is simpler and faster than its predecessor. The narrative takes one in a calm, orderly manner into the confusion of battle and never leaves us not knowing where we are. This is a great accomplishment. To a watchful eye Mr. Jones adds a watchful mind -- the combination is uncommon. He has had the sense to concentrate on one subject: the reduction, piece by piece, of a complex of hills in Guadalcanal called the Elephant. We know a small set of characters from the moment they land on the beach -- that is to say from the point of innocence.

. . .The 'Line' may be the thin line of the blood in the veins, the military line of the company lying out on Elephant Hill in Guadalcanal, or the line that precariously separates ordinary human nature from animal ferocity. I don't think Mr Jones is as keen on symbolism as M. Romain Gary supposes in a note on the book-jacket; but he is interested in what adrenalin does and, if his observation of the physical effects of combat leads him to a theory, it is possibly that war is a form of sexual perversion.

. . .It adds to the force of the tale that the men drag so little of their peacetime life with them. Such character as they have is not character in the conventional sense, but a collection of changing psychological states discerned from time to time on the spot . . . [true] to [Jones'] theory that the men are only 'individuals within a collective' -- in peace, perhaps, as well as war.

Guadalcanal is already out of date and Mr. Jones's book could be the last account of conventional war. His manner is a clean, grave mixture of irony, warmth and even gaiety -- he understands, as all artists of any experience must, that the face of experience is seductive, even if it also repels. There is a wilful animal glitter that fades most unwillingly from our eyes, the wary glint of the will to assert, survive, whatever our judgment tells us. This perception is something worth having in the literature of war.(69)

Symbolism

Gary had called The Thin Red Line "a realistic fable, symbolic without symbols." Pritchett had responded by supposing the book's author not keen on symbolism. What Jones said about the matter shows that both were right. "Gene Baro [Jones' editor] says there are some symbols in here, and I'm taking them out," he told a friend who surprised him at work on The Thin Red Line's galleys.⁷⁰ Later he spoke deprecatingly about the entire topic. "The Pistol was an attempt at a short symbolic novel, you know," he said over the radio. "I mean a deliberately symbolic novel, consciously symbolic, which is the way that the Europeans write, just a sort of exercise."⁷¹ He added: "It's okay, for an easy job, an easy out."⁷² For all these disclaimers, however, Jones used symbols. He did not take them out; he dug them in.

The Pistol, Jones' third novel, is the most complete illustration. The book emerges as a symbolic novel once one is alerted to look for symbolism in it. The weapon of the title represents to Private Richard Mast a chance for physical safety -- to defend himself in hand-to-hand combat. Every other member of Mast's company, likewise, sees in the pistol a chance for his own survival: the combat scout, the assistant squad leader, the company runner, each points out to Mast their special need for it. So far, this is nothing extraordinary -- another example of Jones the anthropologist exploring military sub-castes. But add his explanation --

In The Pistol, Mast and the other characters are deliberately symbolic of various aspects of humanity, all hunting for some kind of salvation, which is symbolized by the pistol itself, and the story itself is a symbol of all the ridiculous, outrageous cruelties people will perpetrate upon each other when they think they can acquire salvation for themselves by doing so. (73)

-- and one peers into the novel along an unexpected dimension. The Pistol shares the theme of From Here to Eternity and Whistle. It revisits the earlier book's brooding, angry, Naturalistic conclusions: Man's search for any sort of salvation is in vain, because there is no escape from the laws of the physical world. No matter who can get his hands on the pistol, the weapon is not really capable of being reduced to possession. It is there by chance, a fluke, and -- for all the schemes and fantasies surrounding it -- will inevitably be retrieved by the quartermaster. The idea presented by the pistol and "Salvation" are both delusions, fond imaginings of Man about things he cannot control.

The Pistol anticipates Whistle because of what emerges from its characters' struggles. "The pistol, source of so much strife within the platoon, ultimately became, by that very fact, a mystic symbol of unity," Jones summarized.⁷⁴ The men of Mast's platoon have had a talisman flung into their midst. They have no more voice in choosing with whom they share it than Whistle's soldiers have in determining with whom their individual human capital is shared. And although the pistol itself is a mere idol, it engenders something true: the joint personality of the platoon, manifested by the men's attempts to possess it. Salva-

tion, in the supernatural sense, is false, but something does enfold and outlast the individual: that part of his life he shares with others.

In The Thin Red Line, symbols abound. Mortarmen Tills and Mazzi carry on a comic subplot with choric overtones. As a rural bumpkin and a hep bustling New York City Italian, they stand in for their comrades as Everymen. The ups and downs of their relationship illustrate the increases and releases of tension within C-for-Charlie. Similar symbolic underlining, as discussed later in this chapter, is manifest in Jones' handling of Cash and Queen, two personifications of heroic ideals.

In Whistle, the symbolism is quietly but undeniably Christian. This was the first time Jones had waxed religious; he may have used this to enhance the pathos of his characters' suffering at their society's hands. The unity of his main characters was emphasized and heightened by their injuries. Prell has been wounded in the legs, Strange in the hand, Winch (because of his madness and hypertension) in the head and side.

Of these, the one who emerges as a Christ figure is the Mess Sergeant. In From Here to Eternity he was called Maylon Stark, a specifically Texan name. Now he is called John Strange. In this appellation's coupling of the common and the mysterious there is a suggestion that its bearer is the unknown familiar man, that least of brethren whose person is equated with that of Christ.

This identification is supported by the Mess Sergeant's history. Maylon Stark, the man whose face was perpetually caught between sneer, smile, or sorrow, was moved during Prewitt's Taps to shame that circumstance had dealt good luck to him and dismissal to Preem, his predecessor as Mess Sergeant. John Storm, in The Thin Red Line, knew and stuck to his job: to feed troops, any troops, even if doing it properly meant burning his hand. Strange, in wartime Luxor, is the only one of Jones' evacuees to ponder the morality of their sexual indulgence. These actions point out the resolution the Mess Sergeant eventually finds to the quandary shown in his set, ambivalent expression. At the novel's end, pressed over the transport ship's side by the weight of what he has learned about war, as he treads water in the freezing North Atlantic:

. . .[Strange] can feel the cold beginning to swell his hands. And from this, in a sort of semihallucination, all of him begins to seem to swell and he gets bigger and bigger, until he can see the ship moving away or thinks he can. And then he goes on getting bigger and bigger and swelling and swelling until he's bigger than the ocean, bigger than the planet, bigger than the solar system, bigger than the galaxy out in the universe.

And as he swells and grows this picture of a fully clothed soldier with his helmet, his boots, and his GI woolen gloves seems to be taking into himself all of the pain and anguish and sorrow and misery that is the lot of all soldiers, taking it into himself and into the universe as well.

And then still in the hallucination he begins to shrink(75)

The narration is hurried and rough, the transcription of a tape Jones literally propped himself up on his deathbed to record.⁷⁶

It was the last passage he ever wrote. While he never refined it, its twofold representation is clear. Strange's death, like that of Prewitt before him, is an example of a man refusing to participate in wrongdoing, even at the cost of his own life. Strange's final vision, additionally, casts his death as an apotheosis.

Pressed by time, Jones may have tried to add too much too late. He seems to have realized only at the end of Whistle exactly what he meant to do with his Mess Sergeant character. Stark cries at another's misfortune, Storm burns his hand to feed his unit; but at the end of The Thin Red Line, it is also Storm who realizes that "many many more people were going to live through this war than got killed in it," and seeks evacuation.⁷⁷ This represents either a temporary succumbing to temptation or vacillating characterization. But while the effect is ultimately uncertain, the intention is definite. With this ironic Ascension, by treating Christ as an enlisted man and imagining an enlisted man as Christ, Jones positions himself as the most recent follower of a tradition begun with The Dream of the Rood. No matter that he probably would have disclaimed this.

Predecessors and Their Influence:
Stendhal, Crane, and Conrad

Another way to illustrate the qualities of Jones' fiction is to examine his novels in the context of their influences. The Paris Review asked Jones to name the authors who had influ-

enced him, and he replied:

I guess the same writers that have influenced most of my generation: Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Steinbeck. The older writers, too: James, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson. What do you want, a list? Joyce, too, of course. In a more profound way, I think first Stendhal and secondly Dostoevski have influenced me a great deal in the direction I've taken and my idea of what I'd like to accomplish. More than anybody else.
(78)

A study of these influences shows that Jones read with a student's eye.

Stendhal and Jones

The mention of Stendhal seems peculiar. Stendhal and James Jones are not novelists whom one would ordinarily name in the same breath. The gap between them is both temporal and geographic. Jones was born twelve decades after Stendhal, and on a different continent. They wrote of different classes of men and women, and in the context of different societies. Jones' writing, moreover, at first glance bears no resemblance, stylistically or thematically, to that of Stendhal.

The only apparent reason to connect the two writers is a passage that occurs near the end of From Here to Eternity. Milt Warden, stationed on the Oahu beaches, arranges a rendezvous with Karen Holmes. The resulting meeting is, in Jones' phrase, "an ecstasy of sexual love that was sexless," and part of the reason seems to have been the incident's prelude:

. . .When Milt came, she had been reading about Stendhal's philosophy of happiness. It was not a moral philosophy; it was a very materialistic philosophy.

Many people probably would not approve of it. Its only purpose was to deduce and plan ahead of time rationally, how to make life completely interesting and fully happy. The good thing about that Stendhal, he understood the very important place that misery and tragedy played in the making of a full happiness. She had never thought about that, any more than she had never thought of a philosophy constructed for the sole purpose of making life happy.(79)

Warden and Karen's meeting is (and they understand it is) their last. That it can also be the apex of their love affair owes to their acceptance -- here, an echo of Jack Malloy -- of their parting. This lets their emotions unite in an ecstatic peak, rather than cancelling themselves as anger, sadness, love, and joy. Jones keys the reader into this conclusion by citing Stendhal. In legal terms, this is called incorporation by reference: using as part of one document the substance of another, not by repeating its terms, but by explicitly referring to and adopting them. This is done to save duplication and ensure conformity. As such, this reference to Stendhal suggests one way in which Jones is indebted to the earlier novelist.

Its only disguise is the frank admission of its borrower. It is so explicit a reference that it might be taken for a false clue, a book Karen just happened to be reading, rather than a point being made by Jones. It is improbable, however, that a treatise on Beylism would be found in the hands of an Army wife on the island of Oahu, in early 1942 (especially in the hands of Karen Holmes, who has shown less interest in literature than Lorene and Georgette of the New Congress, who subscribe to

the Book-of-the-Month Club). Another conclusion becomes compelling: that the book was placed there and summarized by Jones to make a point. Its philosophy is his own, as if he had simply appropriated, without footnoting, the original.*

This is Jones' only overt reference to Stendhal, but the date of Jones' talk with The Paris Review suggests another connection. At the time of the interview, Jones was working on The Thin Red Line. Dave Hirsh, the novelist hero of Some Came Running, had undertaken to write a "comic war novel," which The Thin Red Line intermittently would be. Stendhal offered a precedent, for the French ex-dragoon had himself written what might be called a comic war novella; the opening chapters of The Charterhouse of Parma, which narrate Fabrizio del Dongo's part in the battle of Waterloo.

Fabrizio's intent to fight is ardent, but his role in the fighting is peripheral. He manages to catch up with part of Napoleon's army as it marches toward the front. Buying a horse, he gallops along with a squadron of hussars; he sees a group of officers, among them Marshal Ney; he sees cannonballs kicking up mud; and then the hussars steal his horse and leave him. He runs away, finally joining up with a corporal named Aubry and his

* Interestingly, this technique may be one of those Jones learned from Dostoevski; whose characters, to make their points, cite sources ranging from Schiller to the geometrician Nikolai Lobachevski.

squad of stragglers. At dusk Fabrizio, waiting with these men in a wood, fires at a cavalryman. This is what he experiences at Waterloo. The next day, "his chief sorrow was that he had not asked Corporal Aubry the question, 'Have I really taken part in a battle?' It seemed to him that he had, and he would have been supremely happy if he could have been certain of this."⁸⁰

Nicola Chiaromonte has pointed out how Stendhal's presentation of Waterloo is designed to demonstrate the difference of participants in a historical event and the ordered narrative of a historian (or a novelist like Victor Hugo, who devoted eighteen chapters of Les Miserables to depicting the battle, ultimately ascribing its outcome to Providence).

This picture of Waterloo has nothing to do with a view of battle as one great whole animated by a single spirit. Fabrizio's Waterloo is a battle that does not exist; it dissolves altogether naturally, not only into a host of apparently incoherent . . . episodes but also into the completely disconnected encounters, impulses, and impressions of the hero. Fabrizio, wrapped in the spell of dreams of personal glory and historical grandeur, incessantly tries to give epic dimensions to every episode of his adventure, however prosaic, incongruous or senseless it may be. But in the end he is forced to admit defeat

. . . The great saga does not exist, even history does not exist. All that exists are single incidents, single individuals, the fleeting impressions of the mind, and -- what is very important -- the youthful dream of the Napoleonic saga. And then there is the swarming mass of so-called 'objective facts.'⁽⁸¹⁾

Even if every participant's experiences could be aggregated, they could never be synthesized. There can never be one unifying, absolute viewpoint.

Certainly the battle of Waterloo that Napoleon saw and directed (or thought he directed) is not the same event Fabrizio wanders into. Nor is the explosion of incidents in which Fabrizio finds himself the same event as the mortal engagement of the soldiers who jeer at him. And this engagement bears no resemblance to the battle fought by Marshal Ney or the one witnessed by Fabrizio's helpful cantinière. The battle of Waterloo was all of these, separately and together, . . . It was also the fateful event that brought down Napoleon's empire. Stendhal, who followed the Grande Armée to Moscow and saw battles at much closer range than Fabrizio saw the fighting at Waterloo, was deeply aware of this inexhaustible multiplicity and final unity.(82)

The Thin Red Line, like The Charterhouse of Parma, deals with war from the individual's viewpoint. How limited this viewpoint is is shown by Jones' narration of the start of Gaff's assault on the Japanese strongpoint: "Five scrawny bedraggled Japanese men popped up out of the ground holding dark round objects which they lobbed up the hill at them. Fortunately only one of the five grenades exploded."⁸³

Gaff's men know that their attack is to be supported by B-for-Baker Company, but this is coincidental with their experience of the attack -- and with Jones' treatment of it. Combat is represented from the characters' viewpoint, a perspective so limited that hand-grenades take time to be recognized. Even when Jones' focus is on C-for-Charlie, this limitation remains. The company often knows that other companies will be doing, but the narrative concerns itself exclusively with what C-for-Charlie encounters as it moves through the jungle or attacks a ridge. To the extent that Jones mentions the role of other companies, this

is to demonstrate the non-uniqueness of C-for-Charlie and to portray the army as a vast organism -- a unit made of units which in turn are made of even smaller units.⁸⁴

Stendhal and Jones, in depicting war from the individual soldier's vantage point, shared a definite aim. As Chiaromonte observes:

[Stendhal] shows us that the impulses of Fabrizio's soul are nothing but dreams, illusions and errors, and that the fragmentary and random incidents which make up a battle are the only incontrovertible reality, . . .

. . . His object in creating his fable is not to 'mirror' reality . . . but to expose the discrepancy between so-called 'real' facts and the daydreams of the innocent and pure individual.(85)

Jones' purpose was also to reveal the gap between the intellectualized or emotionalized idea of war and its reality. It is significant that when his characters become fully-evolved soldiers, their mental state is that of "combat numbness" -- an absence not only of feeling but also of complex or abstract thought, an automatic concentration on the immediate situation. For Jones, this limited perspective can also be interpreted in the context of Naturalism; it presents Jones' characters as beings for whom reality is limited to what they personally experience.

From Here to Eternity offers thematic and structural parallels with Stendhal's fiction. For Prewitt and Landers, military stockades are what prison was to Fabrizio and Julien Sorel: places of contemplation and resolution. In both From

Here to Eternity and The Charterhouse of Parma, the true heroes are outlaws. It is John Dillinger whom Prewitt emulates when he rebels -- Dillinger the bank robber, the archetypal inmate of Ward Two. The only man to strike a sincere, effective blow against Parmesan reaction is the proscribed radical apothecary, Ferrante Palla, who assassinates the reigning Prince.

There is some similarity, as well, in what one might take as flaws in the characterization of Stendhal's characters and Prewitt. Fabrizio and Julien, it often seems, are less individuals in their own right than blank protagonists who can respond to the situations their creator decides to place them in. Taken overall, their actions are inconsistent. Fabrizio is from time to time a naif, lover, antiquary, mystic, brawler, victorious duellist, and courtier. Helpless in some situations (at Waterloo, in the Citadel of Parma) he is masterful in others -- for example, when he preaches. One never knows, similarly, whether to regard Julien Sorel as a fiery Romantic republican, an ambitious and fast-learning social climber, or a peasant's son shrewd enough to parlay mere mnemonic skill into intellectual renown. Prewitt, likewise, is by turns bugler, boxer, soldier, untutored sage, poet, rebel, and sacrificial victim.

More importantly, Jones shared with Stendhal (as well as Crane) a focus on man as a social animal. The heroes of Faulkner or Hemingway concentrate on entirely personal issues, on resolving the immediate problem posed within a static social environ-

ment. Stendhal's characters, on the other hand, find themselves perpetually confronted with managing independent roles in different relationships with different people. The same is true for Jones' characters. Both novelists' plots may be said to consist of interlocking subplots. At the same time Julien Sorel is carrying on his affair with Mathilde de la Mole, he is carrying out secret missions for her father's cabal and gaining entry to the aristocratic circles of Paris. The Duchesa de Sanseverina forms the center of three interlocking ellipses of intrigues, romantic and political, with Fabrizio, Mosca, and Ernesto the Fifth. With these may be compared the relationships maintained by Welsh in The Thin Red Line: cold war with Witt, "armed truce" with Storm, respectful insolence toward his superior officers, co-existing concern and disdain for the men he commands.

This understanding of human society corresponds with the approach both Jones and Stendhal took in relating with the interaction of their characters. For both men, a conversation was not an exchange of viewpoints, in which the participants voiced their opinions and parted. A conversation, rather, consisted of statements and responses. In a quasi-Heisenbergian way, the characters' perceptions of what they were saying, of the direction the talk was taking had the power to alter what they said. What a character said was situationally determined, not preordained. In narrating dialogue, both writers specialized at reporting more than the mere spoken words -- at recording the way the speakers

monitored what they uttered.

Mathilde was plunged in all the agony of extreme shyness. She was horrified at her position.

"What have you done with my letters?" she said at length.

What a fine opportunity of foiling these gentlemen's schemes if they're listening, and so avoiding a fight! thought Julien.

"The first is hidden in a bulky Protestant Bible," he said, "which last night's mail is carrying off a long way from here."

He spoke very distinctly as he entered on these details, and in such a way as to be overheard by any persons who might be concealed in two large mahogany wardrobes he had not dared to examine.

"The other two are in the post, and are following the same route as the first."

"Good gracious, but why all these precautions?" asked Mathilde in consternation.

Is there any reason I should tell her a lie? thought Julien; and he confessed to her all his suspicions.

"So that accounts for the coldness of your letters, my dear!" cried Mathilde, in a tone of wild excitement rather than of tenderness.

Julien did not notice this fine distinction. Her use of the words my dear made him lose his head, or at least his suspicions vanished. He ventured to clasp in his arms the girl who was so beautiful and inspired such respect in him. (86)

In this manner Stendhal reports Julien Sorel's rendezvous with Mathilde de la Mole. It bears comparison with another conversation, in From Here to Eternity, between Warden and Pete Karelson:

"Where do you think Holmes got his wife? Right out

of a bargain basement in Washington that specializes in young ingenues, right out of Baltimore, political family with a private fortune. Only Dynamite miscalculated, and this family went broke. Before Holmes could get anything but his four polo ponies and that goddamned pair of sterling silver spurs."

In the midst of his harangue, like a man in the calm center of a hurricane, seeing the curiosity brightening Pete's eyes, he coolly warned himself away from Holmes's wife and calmly steered it back to where he wanted it, on the things Pete already knew, and began on Sgt Henderson who had not pulled one day's drill in almost two years because he was the nursemaid to Holmes's ponies up at the Packtrain. (87)

This view of the individual as part of society influenced Jones and Stendhal in another way. There are two ways, at least, in which soldiers are like priests or courtiers. One is that each of these crafts' practice necessarily involves other people, whether as enemies, sovereigns, or parishioners. Second is that the practitioner of these crafts -- the man who earns his living flattering nobles, clearing consciences, or commanding troops -- relies for his livelihood on his ability to provoke particular emotional responses in those with whom he deals.

Jones and Stendhal realized this. They understood that in such occupations, much owes to technique -- to creating an appearance that will cause the desired response. Their characters struggle to acquire and maintain such images. Don Doll forces himself to play out the role of the brave, cynical soldier. He cheerily admits wrongdoing when caught stealing a pistol; he volunteers to run messages and join assault parties; and he gets his pistol, is promoted to sergeant, and is rewarded

with the Silver Star. Doll's role-playing is paralleled by that of Fabrizio, who during the retreat from Waterloo, to avoid the Prussian cavalry, walks out into the middle of a wheatfield, because he has seen Corporal Aubry do the same. Other characters know the importance of appearing pious or brave, and the keys to maintaining such a facade. The Bishop of Agdes, when encountered by Julien, is carefully repeating benedictions before a mirror, in a last-minute rehearsal for that afternoon's ceremonies. When he speaks, he voices concern about the appearance of his damaged mitre. Such professionalism would have been understood by Lieutenant Colonel Tall (and his understudy, Captain Gaff). At the foot of a hill held by the Japanese, under fire from small arms, machine-guns, and heavy mortars, Tall refuses to crouch or lie flat. Standing erect, he assesses the situation and calls for volunteers. His posture reinforces the crispness of his authority; but, as John Bell observes, Tall stands close against the hillside, where a ridge keeps him from being seen by the enemy.

Such attitudes and observations Jones shared with Stendhal. In at least one respect, furthermore, he owed Stendhal a debt with regard to technique. "Instead of having this character tell his part of the story, just take his best quotes and use them and tell the rest in third person," Jones advised one young writer. "It saves half the space."⁸⁸ An example from The Thin Red Line illustrates:

Succinctly, efficiently, missing no smallest detail or advantage, he planned their tactics. It was impossible

not to admire both his ability and his command of it. Stein for one, and he was sure he was not alone, was forced to admit that here in Tall was a talent and an authority which he himself just simply did not possess.

"Almost certainly you will find the bunker guarded by smaller MG posts around it. But I think it is better to ignore these and go for the strongpoint itself if you possibly can. The little posts will fall of themselves if the big one is taken; remember that.

"That's all, gentlemen," Tall said with a sudden smile. (89)

In Le Rouge et Le Noir one finds passages that are clearly the ancestors of the above:

In the days of his blindness, this course was one of those in which Julien found himself most frequently top of the class. Father Chas had taken this as an excuse for showing his friendship, and when they came out of his lectures would readily take his arm for a turn or two round the garden.

What's his idea? Julien would ask himself. He was surprised to find the abbe talking to him for hours on end about the vestments, etc., belonging to the cathedral. There were seventeen chasubles, trimmed with braid, not to mention the vestments worn at funerals. They had great hopes of the aged Madame de Rubempre, the President's widow. This lady, who was ninety years old, had, for the past seventy years at least, been carefully keeping the gowns that were made for her wedding, of magnificent Lyons silk, brocaded with gold.

"Just imagine it, my dear boy," Father Chas would say, stopping short in his walk and opening his eyes very wide, "these stuffs stand upright of themselves, there's so much gold in them. It's generally believed in Besancon that under Madame de Rubempre's will the cathedral treasure will be increased to the extent of more than ten chasubles, without counting in five or six copes for high festivals." (90)

Such similarities show that Stendhal's influence upon Jones was technical as well as thematic.

Jones' Links to Crane and Conrad

Jones' acknowledgement of his debt to Stendhal makes this connection easy to show. It is more difficult to demonstrate affinities with other writers when these figures' importance is unacknowledged. Especially in The Thin Red Line, however, one can trace the influence of two earlier novels: The Red Badge of Courage and The Nigger of the Narcissus.

Pritchett was the first to note the resemblance between The Thin Red Line and The Red Badge of Courage. "As [The Thin Red Line]'s title and one or two episodes suggest," he observed, "there is a back-glance at Stephen Crane."⁹¹ The similarity of title is obvious. The two writers' treatment of individuals as part of a human unit is also similar. One of the subplots of Jones' novel, moreover, recalls The Red Badge of Courage. Behind Corporal Geoffrey Fife, as James Giles has noted in his survey of Jones' fiction, marches the paradigm of Henry Fleming.⁹²

Each soldier is a youth, insecure, only tentatively able to reconcile himself to combat's un-gloriousness, danger, and anonymity. Fleming, Crane begins, "had, of course, dreamed of battles all his life -- of vague and bloody conflicts that had thrilled him with their sweep and fire. In visions he had seen himself in many struggles. He had imagined peoples secure in the shadows of his eagle-eyed prowess."⁹³ Fife starts from melancholy, sending his girlfriend "appropriately tragic letters for a young infantryman about to die soon."⁹⁴

Glory and tragedy: both soldiers are soon disabused of these notions. Fleming runs away from his first battle. Fife learns that in combat, one man's death arouses neither fear nor pity; the cause is likely to be blind chance, and no one else cares. In the end, Fleming smiles:

He saw that the world was a world for him, though many discovered it to be made of oaths and walking sticks. He had rid himself of the red sickness of battle. The sultry nightmare was in the past. He had been an animal blistered and sweating in the heat and pain of war. He turned now with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks -- an existence of soft and eternal peace. (95)

So too Fife, at Boola Boola, "[scampers] along with Jenks's squad shooting every Japanese he [can] see, filled with both terror and elation to a point where he [cannot] separate one from the other."⁹⁶ More important, he feels the combat numbness. As Pritchett had observed, Crane treated the evolution in spiritual terms, Jones in psychological. Fleming exchanges naive infatuation with glory for an appreciation of real pleasure -- the countryside of his upstate New York, whence he enlisted. Fife abandons his concern for his own life -- his fear of the risks awaiting it, his pity for its all-but-inescapable death. His feelings so mixed they cancel into numbness, he acts as part of an infantry squad -- forgetting self in its joint anonymity.⁹⁷

There is additionally, one parallel of episode between the books. In The Thin Red Line, this was the scene in which Queen disinters a Japanese corpse. An interviewer pressed him: was this consciously symbolic, a prophecy -- one man acting out a

charade of bravery, and summoning up a spectre of death? "It wasn't intended to be that," Jones replied.⁹⁸

This was the scene Pritchett had called the book's most important sequence. It may have been one of the scenes he felt were modelled on Crane. For in The Red Badge of Courage, one finds another soldier playing tug-of-war with a dead man.

In the mad scramble [Fleming] was aware that the color sergeant flinched suddenly, as if struck by a bludgeon. He faltered, and then became motionless, save for his quivering knees.

He made a spring and a clutch at the pole. At the same instant his friend grabbed it from the other side. They jerked at it, stout and furious, but the color sergeant was dead, and the corpse would not relinquish its trust. For a moment there was a grim encounter. The dead man, swinging with bended back, seemed to be obstinately tugging, in ludicrous and awful ways, for the possession of the flag.

It was past in an instant of time. They wrenched the flag furiously from the dead man, and, as they turned again, the corpse swayed forward with bowed head. One arm swung high, and the curved hand fell with heavy protest on the friend's unheeding shoulder.(99)

Both scenes make the same equation of glory and death, revealing beneath the false first the inevitable second.

Just as a common vision of the human aggregate links The Thin Red Line to The Red Badge of Courage, so does a similar narrative point-of-view link The Thin Red Line and The Nigger of the Narcissus. Conrad tells the bulk of his tale from an objective, omniscient, first-person viewpoint -- and in a declension not singular, but plural. This omniscient "we" floats freely across the decks of the Narcissus, following crewmen at work,

listening to their discussions in the forecastle. It identifies itself so much with the joint perceptions of the crew that it slips easily into the third person -- to describe the Bombay steam-tug vanishing over the horizon, Captain Allistoun rising from the poop-deck hatch in his fluttering nightshirt, or the spectators welcoming the ship at the London docks.

No observer, or observers, are credited with these observations. The use of "we saw" and "we heard," however, accustoms the reader to the idea of perceptions shared among the crew, so that he accepts these as being made by some sailor -- any sailor, or any number. And then, on the novel's third-from-last page, the pronoun "I" makes its first appearance. The switch communicates the dispersal of the crew, who are splitting away into taverns, solitary depressions, and mothers' arms. It allows Conrad to step from behind his persona to bestow a novelist's valediction: "Goodbye brothers! You were a good crowd. As good a crowd as ever fisted with wild cries the beating canvas of a heavy foresail; or tossing aloft, invisible in the night, gave back yell for yell to a westerly gale."¹⁰⁰

The narrative viewpoint of The Thin Red Line follows an identical pattern. No first-person pronouns are used to carry the narrative, but the effect is the same. The use of several individual observing characters duplicates the sharing of viewpoint indicated by the use of "we," and adding to the sensation of shared experience are the passages explaining the way C-for-

Charlie prized its beards, or valued war booty in cases of Australian whiskey. And again, in the novel's last scene, the novelist appears. As C-for-Charlie marches in column along the beach, toward the ships that will take them to New Georgia, they pass underneath the prow of a wrecked Japanese barge, whereon sits an unidentified soldier eating an apple. "Had he known them, this stranger, he could have ticked off their names as they passed below him in macabre review," Jones writes, listing his soldiers as they pass, and the point becomes clear. The stranger is Jones, or perhaps Jones, marching below with the rest of his company, is looking down at his characters through this stranger's eyes. "One day one of their number would write a book about all this," the author finishes, "but none of them would believe it, because none of them would remember it that way."¹⁰¹

The second similarity between the two novels lies in their symbolic technique. In each book, the main symbolic element is personification of the plot's main concern. Jim Wait embodies the unrestful, mutinous impulses of the crew. Hale when Donkin challenges Mr. Baker's authority, he is found utterly helpless as the crew work together to save their half-capsized ship, and dies as approaching land-fall instills camaraderie among his shipmates. His counterparts in Jones' novel, Queen and Cash, personify different aspects of heroism, the topic debated in The Thin Red Line.

Queen personifies the popular, idealized conception of

combat herosim. Described as "amiable," and bound by his physical predominance in the company to a code that forbids bullying, he figures prominently in the book's early chapters. In these pages, C-for-Charlie has yet to see combat. Its men explore the old Japanese positions (Queen leading) anticipating the fighting ahead. When C-for-Charlie moves up into the front lines, the reader learns for the first time of the company's other physical giant, the man whose foxhole is next to Queen's -- Private Cash.

Two words define Cash: brute and murderous. Hard and silent, a man whose only real companion is the steadfastly professional combat soldier Witt, he dominates the narrative as C-for-Charlie takes The Dancing Elephant. He represents a rough, merciless, cruel sort of courage -- the sort behind the physical actions of shooting or bayoneting other men, of uncaringly taking other lives to save one's own. Queen's courage is naive and ideal; Cash's is amoral, at best tribal. His presence underlines the brutalization of C-for-Charlie. Queen only appears once, in this section: in the scene where Stein's men over-run a Japanese bivouac, whooping and shooting, in a display of comic-book heroism.

The two men's fates drive home Jones' conclusions about the ultimate wastefulness of war. Cash is shot down by a Japanese machinegun. The rest of C-for-Charlie pass beyond the combat numbness; or rather, the combat numbness supplants their normal emotions. They kill Japanese with the same callous detachment

with which they drink raw home-brewed alcohol. They have become coarse, brutalized, fully-evolved soldiers. Among such men, Queen, when he returns from an Australian hospital, is out of place. He finds the company changed beyond recognition and belief; finds it uncongenial, unreceptive. He leaves, almost slinking away. In such a way Jones communicates the final effect of combat: that it not only drives out men's willingness to accept ideals and aspirations, but also deprives its victims of the basic animal thrills and sensations. C-for-Charlie's men have lost their human qualities; they retain only their physical abilities and chemical properties. They have devolved from idealism through savagery to reflex.

Names provide another link. A suggestion of christening-by-rote arises from the names Jones gives to the men of C-for-Charlie: Ash, Bell, Catch, Catt, Coombs, Crown, Darl, Drake, Gluck, Gooch, Griggs, Gwenne . . . on through Till, Tind, Train, Weld, Wills, and Wynn. The roster is a tally of monosyllabic gutturals, its occasional bisyllables mere gestures toward ethnicity: Mazzi, Sico, Tella. Collected in a list, these names are too simplified to be accurate. No group of American infantry ever bore names so flat, curt, and grotesquely clipped.

The names represent an artistic choice by Jones. He may have used them as a reaction against the picturesque names typical of American war films. In such films, every bomber crew,

every infantry squad, every group of volunteers was composed of ethnic types -- the drawling Southerner, the Pole from the Chicago steelyards, the Boston Irishman, the WASP lieutenant, the street-wise Italian, the philosophical Jew from Brooklyn. Each man was tagged with an instantly recognizable surname. Jones had included such types in From Here to Eternity (as had Norman Mailer in The Naked and the Dead); but in The Thin Red Line, determined to deflate the genre of the war novel and to demonstrate the suppression of individual identity, he rejected them. Or, Jones may have used such names because he had learned from Conrad to name systematically characters who were members of a group. For the major characters of The Nigger of the Narcissus are named in alphabetical fashion: Allistoun, Baker, Creighton, Archie, Belfast, Charley, Donkin; Wait and Wamibo.

The final parallel between The Nigger of the Narcissus and The Thin Red Line is found in their authors' understandings of the sub-societies in which the novels are set. Conrad had spent years as a seaman; Jones had served years among soldiers. Both knew acutely that each of these occupations -- as is true of any occupation -- is divisible into units and specialities, different castes, each alert to its boundaries, duties, and prerogatives. A ship's crew, Conrad knew, is composed of officers, sailors, and stokers. The Narcissus' two watches know that they are responsible only to their respective officer-of-the-watch; while Donkin spreads sedition throughout the crew, the

real trouble is manifested only in the watch of Mr. Baker. Sailors are not fungible workers: they have their hierarchy of ratings and classes.

Equally stratified is Jones' Army. The first soldiers' gripe heard in The Thin Red Line is that C-for-Charlie, "the third company of the first regiment," has "been set down among strangers." The problem is that

Except for one other company far away in the stern C-for-Charlie was the only company of the first regiment to be assigned to the first ship, with the result that they did not know a single soul in the companies on either side of them, and this was resented too. (102)

Captain Stein and his officers converse among themselves, their approximate equality of rank permitting the use of first names. Their men await disembarcation in squad- or platoon-based clusters. First Sergeant Welsh, liaison man between the two groups, stands alone.

Once the troops are ashore, other distinctions emerge. Lieutenant Colonel Tall, with his visiting admirals and aides-de-camp, represents the Regular-Army officer corps, which looks down on Reserve officers like Stein as imposing poor relations. Of the men who make the first assault on the Japanese strong-point, only C-for-Charlie's members are named: the other is remembered only as a sergeant from Baker Company. Charlie Dale's conspicuous braveries earn him escape from the company kitchen.

These are the similarities between The Thin Red Line and The Nigger of the Narcissus. On the evidence of the two books

alone, the derivation of one from the other cannot be claimed; the likeness is substantial, but the link is not certifiable. That connection Jones supplied, however, in Viet Journal, when he noted the associations he sensed in the Vietnamese capital:

Conrad was never in Saigon. . . . It is claimed that Mr. Maugham stayed in the Continental Palace just as it is claimed that Conrad stayed at the old Oriental in Bangkok. Actually, when Conrad was in Bangkok, while taking over command of the Otago, he stayed on board his ship. Because of a cholera epidemic. (103)

On the next page, Jones recalled a scene "somewhere" in Conrad's fiction: "A vivid picture of two ship's officers sitting on a hotel veranda smoking 'cheroots' and looking out over a broad Eastern river." Like Milt Warden, he had found himself telling more than he wanted, and sought to disguise what he had said. But the generality of this reference, and the casual tone of the first passage, do not quite conceal Jones' knowledge of details. Those lines betray a familiarity with Conrad's life and work. And this suggestion finds confirmation -- from William Styron, whom Jones told that he had read Conrad extensively.¹⁰⁴ This familiarity is sufficient to suggest that The Nigger of the Narcissus served as a model, deliberate or unconscious, for The Thin Red Line.

Jones' Focus on the Sordid

One cannot discuss the philosophical and literary qualities of Jones' fiction while ignoring what shadows them: violence, crudeness, and boiler-room sexuality. Time Magazine was

led -- or repulsed sufficiently -- to class Jones as a realist of the "feces-on-the-barroom-floor" school.¹⁰⁵ Another commentator, with more restraint, used the phrase "last of the red-hot naturalists."¹⁰⁶ Much of From Here to Eternity's impact flowed from its sordid brutality. It was the first novel to make repeated use of the spelled-out sexual expletive; it did abound in drunken poker games and sexual binges; it was punctuated with suicide, beatings, and murder. No one, however impressed with the novel, was able to ignore these elements. Time Magazine's response was illustrative. "An important American novel hit the bookstores this week," its review opened; but then went on to describe the novel as laced with hatred. "It has one major virtue: no United States writer has ever before put down so many appalling details of the seamy underside of Army life."¹⁰⁷

Jones was well aware that single men in barracks did not grow into plaster saints. His infantrymen use obscenities as verbal punctuation. They swig down cases of beer and guzzle whiskey straight. They start fights in bars. They prey on homosexuals, flirting with them for the price of a meal or knocking them down in unlit alleys. They patronize brothels. When enough women are available, they carry on orgies. Witness Whistle, where rollaway cots are added to each hotel bedroom, the better to adapt space to many couples' time.

It is not a life one would like to lead, but an animal vitality fuels it. Or, to pose more precisely the difficulty

this creates for Jones' readership: even though an animal vitality fuels this life, it is not a life one would like to lead. To accept Jones' characters as fellow humans whose lives are worth sharing and studying -- in short, not to dismiss them as riff-raff -- requires that the reader not reject their violence, drunkenness, and lust. He must suspend condemnation of activities proscribed by both state and Church. He must deal with a way of life far less refined and educated than his own. Perhaps most unpleasant, he must enter a world in which he would almost certainly be at a disadvantage and face considerable physical danger.

Jones began concentrating on this fringe subculture because, as Fiedler observed and he himself admitted, he saw in it a refuge for self-assertion. A related reason, and one that affected him longer -- after Some Came Running, he never focused on the demi-monde -- was that he recognized in sex something close to the roots of combat. The connection can be described variously: by the observation that the ancestor of the English language's sexual expletive was the Old German verb to strike, or that the chemical responsible for manliness -- the muscular appearance, the martial attitude -- is testosterone.

Jones equated the breaking of the taboo against killing with the breaking of the taboo against sexual activity. It is likely that he made this connection at the time he enlisted. It was at this time, when he was undergoing military training, that

he first found himself freed of the Midwestern, middle-class mores under which he had been reared. This connection showed itself in a passage near the start of WW II (phrased in the violently pungent language Jones preferred for such exposition).

Mothers, at least American mothers, are a weird lot. Some sea-change seems to happen in a woman as soon as she becomes a mother. If she gives up enjoying sex with her boyfriend when she finally marries him and becomes a wife, she gives up even dreaming about it when she becomes a mother I am not at all sure this is not equally true today [1975], for the vast majority of American mothers. But it was certainly true then. While most other nations were spending young fortunes preparing for wars, and indeed often already engaging in them . . . we were teaching our young that war was immoral, and evil, and that, in fact, it was so costly in both treasure and spirit that mankind could no longer afford it

Thus, to teach a young American male to love war and to enjoy killing his fellow man -- even a Jap or a Nazi -- was about comparable to teaching his fresh, dewy-eyed, virginal sister to love the physical aspects of simple fucking (108)

"I knew a lot of heroes in the Army," Jones once commented. "I mean real heroes. Guys who didn't care about risking their ass. And they all had some sexual hang-up."¹⁰⁹ He expounded:

In our own way, we Americans have our own tradition of and private obsession with blood and violence and manhood, which somewhere way down deep in us ought to make us at least intuitively understand the Japanese obsession. Certainly sexuality and sexual taboos and myths are bound up with and tied into both obsessions. And although we try to put ours in the closet and lock the door, it certainly helped us in our war with the Japanese. But this is something the Japanese never understood about us. (110)

This belief repeatedly affects Jones' fiction. Private Bead, shocked and ashamed at having killed a Japanese soldier,

"with a sudden half-flashing of miserable insight" connects the guilt he feels to that he once felt at being whipped for masturbating. John Bell, crawling toward the Japanese strongpoint, unaccountably begins to ponder whether his wife is faithful, anticipating illicit sex instead of the firefight awaiting him -- thus equating the two. Recall, too, the command next issued by Gaff, and its Freudian ambiguity: "Go in! Go in!" *

Interestingly, psychological studies suggest that Jones' focus on squalor and violence both flows from and represents an accurate assessment of his military subject. The military is an area where deindividuation, the process of an individual's losing his distinctiveness or individuality, is actively encouraged. Many of the variables which are associated with deindividuation have been listed in a 1964 study which was funded, probably not coincidentally, by the United States Army.

Necessarily, each member of a group is depersonalized or deindividuated to some extent; that is, each member is required to surrender a modicum of his idiosyncratic characteristics in order to facilitate functional fusion within the group In general, high deindividuation groups are bureaucratic in structure. . . . Among these are included agencies of the federal government, branches of the United States armed forces, large business organizations, religious orders, prisons, and perhaps some nations of the world. All these organizations may be characterized by one or more of the following variables, which are presumed to induce depersonalization: homogeneity of composition and external appearance; use of categorical appellative rather than individual names

* Unsuspected support for this view is provided by Paul Fussell's study of British writing of the First World War. Fussell addresses this issue, and even cites The Thin Red Line:

There are numerous testimonies associating masturbation and exhibitionism with the fears and excitements of infantry fighting.... Wilfred Owen seems to hint that there is something ambiguously exhibitionistic about exposing the body to bullets and shellfire when he describes the sensation of "going over the top".... There was extraordinary exultation," he says, "in the act of slowly walking forward, showing ourselves openly." What he seems to imply is explored exhaustively and honestly in James Jones's underrated novel of the Guadalcanal campaign, The Thin Red Line.... Jones's hero John Bell wonders why he has actually felt pleased to "expose himself" to mortal danger. Immediately he remembers occasions during his adolescence at home when he openly risked discovery while masturbating.... He begins wondering... "Could it be that all war was basically sexual? ... A sort of sexual perversion? Or a complex of sexual perversions? That would make a funny thesis and God help the race."

Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 271.

(i.e. the use of "brother" in a monastery) [or the use of "captain," "sergeant," and "private" in the military]; high rate of personnel turnover (communicating that the position rather than the person is primary)...; random assignment as opposed to assignment on the basis of test scores or interview ratings; interchangeable positions; minimizing personal relationships outside the organization; large groups...; minimizing privacy...; denial of property ownership; rigid adherence to formal rules; similarity among subgroups; limited choice of alternatives of decision-making situations; limited criteria of success; an impoverished environment or lack of novel stimuli; group as opposed to individual evaluations; lack of personal records...; dominant leadership; pressure toward uniformity; group as opposed to individual products; similarity of equipment and tools, or the joint operation of one unit of equipment (such as a 155 mm howitzer);... (111)

Jones' characters, as infantrymen, are subject to nearly all of these deindividuating factors. The result, surmised intuitively by Jones, has also been clinically described.

According to one view, nonnormative behavior such as aggression, sexual deviance, and vandalism is held in check when the person is a discriminable stimulus in the social environment. Deindividuating inputs reduce moral restraints and may unleash a contagion of random, irrational, and destructive behavior

. . . Several theorists have predicted that conditions reducing one's self-perceived uniqueness . . . motivate behavior in the direction of establishing or maintaining a sense of self. If the search involves violence, it is a retaliation against the source of the deindividuation and a reaffirmation of identity

Theorists have predicted that the loss of identity resulting from participation in a crowd causes a diffusion of responsibility and increases individual and group willingness to take risks. In partial confirmation of this hypothesis [it has been found] that shifts toward risk on the Choice Dilemmas Questionnaire increased as measured identifiability within the group decreased. (112)

The last sentence of the first of these paragraphs could stand as a psychologist's summary of Whistle. The second paragraph covers the same ground as From Here to Eternity, in which Prewitt's dogged endurance of "the Treatment" (which is intended to make

him drop his personal resolution never to box) makes him in turn a rebel, a murderer, and eventually a successful artist. The last paragraph explains The Thin Red Line. Together, they indicate that Jones spoke true.

Ultimately, in Jones' fiction, the violation of the taboos bears consequences. A dark tone edges in. The first hint comes in Cash's actions after he is fatally wounded. Bleeding to death, he slouches against a tree-trunk, hands pressed between his legs. It is a gesture defensive of both sexuality and physical integrity -- and doubly pathetic, for the bullets have already torn open his groin. In Whistle, Strange remembers how a comrade likened the tiny wound between his fingers -- the mortar-fragment wound that will eventually cost Strange his life -- to female genitalia. Thus there was method to Jones' apparent sexual obsession, a significance over-subtle for those critics who saw gross sexuality and no more.

This was especially true of Whistle. When it appeared, the novel drew critics' fire for ascribing to women of the 1940's the sexual tastes of women of the 1970's -- in particular, a predilection for oral sex.¹¹³ No one considered that this might be a deliberate anachronism -- a conclusion which the book's symbolic overtones compel. In Whistle, Jones was seeking to illustrate the corruption the war had engendered. He needed a metaphor for the debasement of love. This he found in oral sex, which, being literally the licking of genitals, represented

sexuality in its most elemental form. Against Jones' reputation for steaminess, this particular symbolism played chameleon, capable of being confused with its background.

The seduction of Mess Sergeant Strange provides the final expression of Jones' belief in the way to transcendence. Jones had seen a link between sexual maladjustment and physical bravery -- which he called a "pernicious virtue," another form of psychological disorder.¹¹⁴ In From Here to Eternity, Prewitt had learned that to find peace one had to reject violent, vengeful self-assertion: only through accepting and absorbing mistreatment could one prevent it from escalating -- and thus transcend it. His story was one of psychic adjustment, in the context of bravery. Whistle offers an alternate proof of the theorem, phrasing adjustment in the context of sexual taboo. Strange, when he first rents the Peabody Hotel suite, holds a prejudice against performing oral sex upon a woman. This attitude is closer to irrationality than to genuine sexual puritanism, for Strange has no scruples against the reverse. The story of Strange's sexual encounters is the account of the relaxation, finally the rejection, of this taboo. Eventually he settles, with the woman who first insisted upon this means of gratification, into a love affair as permanent as the times allow. And the terminus of this route to adjustment is the same as the route taken by Prewitt: a suicidal death, accepted as the price of integrity.

Jones' Obscurity

Irwin Shaw, who like Jones began his career as a member of the young, immediately-post-war generation of writers, has remarked that a writer is considered serious if his novels are reviewed in The New York Review of Books. Shaw's first books were reviewed in that journal; his later books have not been so favored. Jones was more fortunate. Whistle was reviewed in The New York Review -- months later than in other publications, but reviewed nonetheless.¹¹⁵ Time Magazine (to cite the mass-market viewpoint alongside that of the court circular) gave Jones a two-thirds-page obituary, with photograph. The article's dominant tone, however, was embodied in one sentence: "In writing, as in soldiering, advancement seemed somehow beyond him."¹¹⁶ Those three phrases, taken together, told of a career perceived as a long, lesser echo of From Here to Eternity. Taken separately, they gave the reasons for that perception. First, a faithful concentration by Jones upon the subject of the military; second, because of the pun in advancement, a received idea among belletrists that (the obituary continued) "the finer points of writing did not matter that much to his work."

Like Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberly, Jones had become diabolus in the scales -- out of key with his times. One elegist noted his role as "a self-willed anachronism," and explained:

After 1945, when other ex-soldiers lusting for literary glory began spinning the ephemeral exploits of war into the relative permanence of fiction, Jones doggedly set

out, in From Here to Eternity, to write not about combat but about the pre-war, peacetime Regular Army, . . . Not until 1962 did Jones get around to publishing The Thin Red Line, . . .

. . . [Jones was] oblivious to all the signs that the advance guard of intellectual opinion about war and venerable American ideals had begun to turn with radical hostility against the exultant mood of victory now more than fifteen years in the past. Only a year earlier, Joseph Heller, in Catch-22, had provided the decade with a startling new attitude toward the World War and all war. No longer proudly remembered as heroism deployed in a noble cause, World War II became the bitter black joke behind Heller's antic flagellation of the military mind. Yet while Heller's savage mockery of army bureaucracy and the shibboleths of war became the absurdist epiphany [catechism?] of the 1960's, Jones was choosing to celebrate such old-fashioned virtues as bravery under fire and the warm solidarity of men at arms. . . . (117)

Before Jones finished his chronicle of the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam had come and gone. One cannot call Jones' books pro-war. On the other hand, in terms of what the age demanded, one cannot call them anti-war, in the contemporary sense of that adjective; they do not follow the convention of depicting the Army as madhouse. The accepted intellectual attitude toward the military was one of hostile flippancy, and a writer who insisted on treating soldiers not as lunatics, sadists, or fools thereby placed himself out of fashion. Jones' sexual attitudes, also, were called into question; Germaine Greer used a passage from Go to the Widowmaker, his fifth novel, to exemplify one variety of sexism.¹¹⁸

From Here to Eternity has continued to overshadow Jones' career. It was a first novel that was the most financially successful novel in American history, a novel that was made into one of the great-

est films of the 1950's. Jones' reputation will probably rest upon the Army trilogy as a whole, but his notoriety comes from the success of his first novel alone. His two other Army novels, published eleven and twenty-six years later, seemed follow-ups rather than sequels. Much of the standing Jones had gained with From Here to Eternity, also, he lost with his second book, Some Came Running. Some Came Running ran for 1266 pages, and Jones accurately described its critical reception with the phrase, "bombed and strafed and shot off at the ankles."¹¹⁹ He consoled himself with the thought that the same treatment had befallen Le Rouge et Le Noir, but he was right to regret this loss of momentum.¹²⁰

The biography of Joseph Heller, with its citation of grants, fellowships, and academic positions, pointed out the trend of the literary life -- away from the publishing-house, toward the university. Jones, meantime, first in Paris and later on Long Island, was leading a life of unseemly glitter, likely to feature in gossip columns. The Jones apartment was less a salon than a running party, crowded with writers, artists, hangers-on, and movie stars.¹²¹

It was this image that Jones chose to perpetuate in his interview with The Paris Review. He could have done otherwise; the stated purpose of these interviews is to allow the author interviewed the chance to give posterity the self-image he wishes preserved. The draft Jones authorized began by noting the location of the Jones apartment, that the family's Burmese cat was

expecting an expensive litter of kittens, that the walls were covered with paintings, and that "Jones was on this occasion as generous with his time as he is always with his whiskey." The introduction concluded, "By way of a warm-up he suggested a game of darts, but in spite of Jones's anxious coaching, the interviewer proved an indifferent player, and the session was quickly elevated to a discussion of less serious matters." The interview ended with Jones offering, "Let's go somewhere and have a drink."¹²²

The only hint at sober literary endeavor was the facsimile of a typescript page of The Thin Red Line. On this Jones had penciled in no fewer than fourteen changes. Describing the Guadalcanal jungle, he typed: "green lava which had rolled down from some volcano." Rolled he circled; he substituted for it, then crossed out, vomited and coughed. Finally he felt comfortable with "green lava flow laid down by some volcano centuries ago." Or so it seemed he excised. The next sentence, still speaking of the jungle, he lengthened. "Almost invisible in the rain at times, it loomed there, alien, supremely confident . . ." -- completing the impression. Unconquerable and ominous were not quite what he meant. The naturalist in him wrote "Stet" and left the description of the jungle in its original terms: "A fact of nature like a mountain or an ocean and equally as deflating to the human ego."¹²³

The story of Viet Journal showed how far Jones and the

times had diverged. In 1974 Jones visited post-ceasefire South Vietnam. He ate in officers' messes, was ferried about in a general's helicopter, took sympathetic notes while talking with soldiers. There were more opportunistic things he could have done. When he reported on the mass executions the North Vietnamese had carried out during their occupation of Hue, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania wrote the New York Times to explain that the Vietnamese People's Provisional Government did not commit acts of terrorism.¹²⁴

William Styron, Irwin Shaw, and Peter Matthiessen, however, maintained their belief in Jones' merit. So did Esquire Magazine, which published Jones' occasional non-fiction, and eventually part of Whistle. The armed forces of the United States, too, kept faith. When Jones died, Esquire sent Joan Didion to Hawaii. At Schofield Barracks, she found, everyone had read From Here to Eternity; officers and enlisted men alike, anticipating her inquiries, told her what she should see and the changes she would find there.¹²⁵ Like a peasantry handing on folktales, the United States Army, in its post libraries and commissary bookstalls, preserved the memory of the ex-private who had dedicated to it his novels.

Conclusion

Such are the influences and techniques that shaped Jones' fiction. Alongside these literary virtues stands the human virtue that sustains Jones' novels. His characters are men

who choose to be destroyed rather than corrupted. At the core of their irreducibility lies a particular quality which may be called honor or loyalty, or heroism. This outweighs their flaws. It relieves the overall pessimism of the trilogy, transcending Naturalistic pathos with the nobility of a last stand against long odds. This insistence on the value of heroism is by no means the least of Jones' virtues, for he championed it in the age of the anti-hero, the protagonist whose career is a catalogue of ironies, sins, and petty crime. To this paradigm Jones' characters provide a positive contrast. They work, they learn, they care, they grapple with things they know are larger than themselves. At a time when other writers settled for creating heroes who were only flawed men, Jones wrote of flawed men who managed to be heroes.

Chapter III

"INELEGANT SENTENCES WITH MEANING": JONES' COLLOQUIAL STYLE

Every morning, before starting the day's dictation of what would become The Charterhouse of Parma, Stendhal read one page of the Code Napoleon. He did this, he explained, to set the tone for his own sentences. Whether he was writing of Parmesan courtiers or the provincial bourgeoisie, the language of the Emperor's statutes was appropriate. The Code Napoleon, proclaimed by the Emperor of the French and never revoked by his Bourbon successors, was a landmark of imperial splendor, but it was also an attempt to bring law down to the republican mean. Written in an elegantly precise vernacular, the Code was intended to be printed in duodecimo so that every citizen could carry a copy for immediate reference.

The style adopted by Jones was intended to achieve a similar harmonization of language with subject. Fiedler had noted in Jones' writing "an absence of positive style."¹ Jones' idiom was vernacular; it relied upon the syntax and vocabulary of spoken American English. "The lower middle class American boy-man, not soldiers as such, was Jones' subject," David Bazelon observed in an elegy for Jones.² The vernacular was the most consonant language for this subject. It also avoided eloquence,

which Jones eschewed for two reasons. He felt that consciously elegant expression -- fine writing, positive style -- inherently tended toward glibness and insensitivity. In Jones' view, moreover, it hampered the reader's ability to involve himself with the story.

Joseph Heller adopted in Catch-22 a narrative technique which deliberately sought to baffle the reader. The author's presence became an identifiable part of the novel: it was he who chopped up events, whirled the story from scene to scene, and employed a frustratingly confusing vocabulary. Jones sought the opposite -- to move the reader within the action of the story by eliminating the author's mediating presence. His colloquial style was characteristic of this attempt to narrow the distance between reader and subject. Over the course of his career, Jones progressively trimmed from his prose personal eccentricities of vocabulary and punctuation. He altered the structure of his books to eliminate lyrical digressions and interludes of dialogue, things which impeded the overall impact of the story being told. He worked to reduce his novels' dramatic tension. Although he carefully structured his novels, in Whistle he succeeded in making the narrative focus depend on the actions of the characters -- in effect, turning the book over to them. The last remove Jones sought to eliminate between reader and subject was all evidence that his sentences had been written by one James

Jones. He sought to eliminate, so to speak, the presence of an author.

The Vernacular Mean

What Jones had witnessed as a combat infantryman had convinced him that war had to be written of without the slightest pretense. The conventional "war story," written not to demonstrate how war is Hell but to excite heroic fantasies, was essentially pornography. War could not be glorified, mysticized, romanticized, or joked about; it had caused too much suffering. Jones' condemnation included not only writers who wrote such shallow fiction. It focused particularly on writers who used war as an excuse to wax eloquent. To use war as a topic for aphorisms was a particularly despicable brand of profiteering.

The writer whose pronouncements Jones most resented was Ernest Hemingway. "My God, if you surely dont sound like a page out of Hemingway," Karen Holmes tells her husband at From Here to Eternity's close -- thereby dealing the coup de grace to their marriage.³ Jones himself would explain his preference for living comfortably, instead of playing to a stereotype of the artist, with the comment: "There are many roles and it is permissible to act them out in a novel, but it is dishonest to do so in real life. Hemingway did it in how he lived and how he wrote. But I consider this a terrible loss in human integrity."⁴ The most pointed rebuke, however, comes from Prewitt, when he responds to the foolish court-martial defense proposed by Lieutenant

Culpepper: that he plead guilty to striking Sergeant Galovitch and argue that drunkenness mitigates his punishment.

"Why, getting drunk and running wild is not only a soldier's nature, its almost his sacred duty; just like the way Ernest Hemingway said that syph was the occupational disease of bullfighters and soldiers. Its the same damn thing."

"Did you ever have it, Lootenant?"

"Have what?"

"The syph."

"Who? Me? Hell, no. Whats that got to do with it?"

"Well, I've never had it either," Prewitt said grimly. "But I've had the clap. And if syph and clap are the occupational diseases of soldiers, then I'll get out and be a garage mechanic."(5)

Jones plainly dislikes Hemingway's indifference -- the elder writer's smug implication that syphilis is such a commonplace that soldiers who contract it do not really suffer. What Jones resents even more, however, is Hemingway's epigrammatic expression of this view in a facile bon mot that the unwounded will use to jest at scars. Hemingway's writing is essentially epigrammatic -- a conclusion that can be inferred from its self-conscious reliance upon a simplified sentence structure and select vocabulary even without Hemingway's statement that he specifically aimed at this level of writing by urging himself, "Write the truest sentence that you know."⁶ Given Jones' apparent view of himself as an anti-Hemingway, it is likely that Jones chose to use an unrefined, colloquial grammar and vocabulary as a

reaction against Hemingway.*

In Jones' last novel he implicitly attacked the merit of positive style. Midway through Whistle, Landers attempts to explain to a surgeon why the other old-company men in the Luxor hospital support Prell in his fight to save his legs from amputation.

"I don't guess we any of us give much of a sh about anything, except each other. It's not so much that we think a lot of Prell. It's like we were investors. And each of us invested his tiny bit of capital in all the others. When we lose one of us, we all of us lose a little of our capital. And we none of us ever really had that much to invest, you see

* Such passages provoked Hemingway into a crude and downright vicious response. Writing to the publisher he and Jones shared, he called Jones "an enormously skillful fuck-up," and commented that he would not reread From Here To Eternity because "I do not have to eat an entire bowl of scabs to know they are scabs; In his next letter he went on:

"If it costs any sizeable amount of money to take my name out of Jones book [sic] let it ride until you can take it out without cost. But it gripes me every day to have the jerk use it.

"If he had any brains he would have known how many professional soldiers have had syphilis, I could write from now until the end of next week case histories of soldiers and bull fighters I have known who had what we called the old rale (a name for it that goes back nearly to Chaucer's time). From the time I was a kid I had to distinguish between soft and hard chancres and courageous Jones comes along and says he has had the clap and it was horrible. . . .

"All I hope is that you can make all the money in the world out of him before he takes that over-dose of sleeping pills or whatever other exit he elects or is forced into."(7)

"John Donne, sure But that's shit. And that's not what it is with us. That's abstract. And it's poetry. That's all of humanity. We're not all of humanity. And we don't give a shit about all humanity. We probably don't give much of a shit about each other, really. It's just that that's all the capital we have."(8)

On the novel's next page, however, when Landers tells Strange of this interview, "he left out only his metaphor of the investors, which now sounded high-toned and dumb to him."⁹

This passage shows the circumscribed extent of Jones' social community. As expressed by Landers, the social bond does not extend to "all of humanity," or even to country. It is limited to the area of immediate human contact. It also takes a final swipe at Hemingway -- and at John Donne, and at the idea of a writer working within a literary tradition. Most important, however, is its implicit argument. "High-toned" writing, Jones suggests, is "dumb" purely because it adopts the higher tone. The limits on the writer's language derive from the limits on the social community. High-toned writing is "abstract" or "poetry," something that attempts to say too much, generalize, or prettify, instead of sticking to concrete cases and personal experience. The result is dumb by either definition of the term. High-toned writing may be stupid because it is inappropriate to its subject and therefore unable to comprehend it. It may also be termed mute because it cannot describe its subject adequately. The writer who uses high-toned language either works with tools too delicate for his task or has become over-ambitious.

A second, positive reason led Jones to employ the vernacular. Of the attention a reader focused on a novel, he concluded, that amount was wasted which went to figuring out what was being said. To make his point, an author needed to minimize such friction -- to concentrate the reader's attention on the events of the story rather than on the intricacies of the language relating it. He explained to The Paris Review:

I think that a classic style in writing tends to remove the reader one level from the immediacy of the experience. For any normal reader, I think a colloquial style makes him feel more as though he is within the action, instead of just reading about it I think the writer ought to help the reader as much as he can without damaging what he has to say(10)

Later he elaborated:

A well-turned phrase communicates itself as such and not the thought it contains. It becomes an end in itself. I prefer an inelegant sentence with meaning to an elegant one at the price of meaning. (11)

Jones believed that the writer should translate his artist's vision into ordinary terms.

Bell did not know exactly when -- he had ceased to feel human. So much of so many different emotions had been drained from him that his emotional reservoir was empty. He still felt fear, but even that was so dulled by emotional apathy (as distinct from physical apathy) that it was hardly more than vaguely unpleasant. And instead of impairing his ability to function, it enhanced it, this sense of no longer feeling human. When the others came up, he crawled on whistling over to himself a song called I Am An Automaton to the tune of God Bless America.

They thought they were men. They all thought they were real people. They really did. How funny.(12)

These rhythms identify a passage as Jones' work. By casting the narrative in a character's idiom, Jones makes the reader's thoughts duplicate those of the character, thereby drawing him into the story. His paragraphs are built not of full, subject-and-predicated sentences but of separate thoughts. Sentences and phrases alike are dignified with periods, the full stops placed not by grammar but by the elocutional sense of the passage, each marking the completion of a distinct unit of the narrative. In both the ordinary and the grammatical sense, the sentences are not complex. Their components flow linearly; there are no introductory or parenthetical phrases to break the narrative flow by making the reader refer to an earlier section of the sentence, or await its conclusion.

Overall, Jones' style can best be described as colloquial. Its words and structure are those of the spoken vernacular, those a middle-class American would use in everyday conversation. They adapt to prose Ezra Pound's dictum on verse, that nothing should be set down as poetry that someone might not actually say. Here Jones has written nothing that his characters, or his "any normal reader," might not say or hear.

That Jones believed this to represent the spoken idiom finds support in the way he chose to transcribe his own conversation. Telling The Paris Review how he wrote, he narrated:

I get up earlier than most guys -- between seven and eight -- but only because I like to go out in the afternoons while there's still sun. After I get up it takes me an hour and a half of fiddling around before I can

get up the courage and nerve to go to work. I smoke half a pack of cigarettes, drink six or seven cups of coffee, read over what I wrote the day before. Finally there's no further excuse. I go to the type-writer. Four to six hours of it. Then I quit and we go out. Or stay home and read.(13)

Jones' conversation draws on the same vocabulary as his fiction. The rhythm is identical to that of his fiction. There is no attempt to grammaticize, to fit links in the chain of thought into the patterns of standard punctuation. There is no attempt to refine. In narrating how he spent his work-day, Jones was content to talk to posterity in the words he might have used with any acquaintance.

Jones could use other tones. He was not forced, by lack of creativity, to rely on this style. This is demonstrable only on the evidence of the infrequent occasions when Jones in fact wrote in another style.

This book is cheerfully dedicated to those greatest and most heroic of all human endeavors, WAR and WARFARE; may they never cease to give us the pleasure, excitement and adrenal stimulation that we need, or provide us with the heroes, the presidents and leaders, the monuments and museums which we erect to them in the name of PEACE.(14)

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THE PISTOL

As the first bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, Private Richard Mast came off guard duty wearing a pistol which was issued to him for that purpose. Since in the excitement no one claimed it he kept it, and very soon became almost obsessively attached to it. At nineteen it made him feel important, particularly as no other member of his platoon wore such a weapon; also he fondly fancied it as the best possible retort to the Japanese major who would presently bear down upon him preparing to cut him in two with a Samurai sword. Unfortunately

his comrades in arms quickly came to share his obsession, and endeavoured to obtain possession by every possible device including purchase, theft, violence, and promises of soft jobs from his immediate superiors. To all material inducements Mast remained obdurate; theft and violence he answered in kind and the pistol, source of so much strife within the platoon, ultimately became, by that very fact, a mystic symbol of unity by the time it returned to its proper place.(15)

The first of these passages, recalling the time of Pepys and Defoe in its tone and typography, dedicates The Thin Red Line. The second stands as argument to The Pistol. Their existence shows that Jones, early in his career, had mastered tones other than the colloquial one he most often employed, and that Jones was prepared and able to heighten his usual tone in places calling for an epic or lapidary style. When necessary, these passages prove, Jones could be eloquent.

By relying on a standard, colloquial style, Jones forewent the opportunity to be innovative or eloquent. The proof of his talent is to be found, rather, in his ability to modulate this colloquial style, varying it subtly to fit different moods in the same story.

There was little for them to do but talk. During the half hour it took the middle platoon of B Company to fail and come tumbling and sobbing back over the ledge with drawn faces and white eyes, the six of them lay a few yards back down the slope behind B's right platoon which in addition to holding the right of the line along the ledge was also acting as the reserve. It was amazing how the longer one lasted in this business, the less sympathy one felt for others who were getting shot up as long as oneself was in safety. Sometimes the difference was a matter of only a very few yards. But terror became increasingly limited to those moments when you yourself were in actual danger. So, while B's middle platoon shot and were shot, fought and sobbed thirty

yards away beyond the ledge, Gaff's group talked. Cash the new addition more than made his presence felt.(16)

With only slight alterations of phrasing, this style could slip into the interior monologue -- the personal idiom -- of a particular character.

Strange, as he listened, felt a terrible guilt. Here he was, running around on a furlough he didn't even need, trying to get back in with a wife and family he didn't even seem to know any more, or understand. Loafing for four lousy days downtown in Luxor playing poker. And all the time Prell needed him, lying here trying to save his damned leg from those goddamned civilian doctors. Gone when, for once, somebody really needed him.(17)

There is no obvious break in style (as, for example, in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury) between straight narration and stream-of-consciousness. The omniscient, objective narrative, because of its vernacular rendition, blends by almost imperceptible stages into the sentences in which Strange thinks. The colloquial tone serves as a stylistic mean. It unifies the writing by providing a predominant middle tone against which passages notable (when read out of context) for crude violent emotion or near-stateliness appear not as opposites, but as variations of a common style.

Mast turned his head to look . . . but he did not stop or change his gait. Then suddenly emotion spurted out of him like blood gushing out of a wound. "Go to hell!" he shouted happily, knowing that for once he was invulnerable even to an officer. Just then a third plane came screeching, blasting over and his eyes began to blink themselves rapidly, as if that act in itself would offer him protection. Then it was gone, just like

that, off over the quad. In some odd way of possessive ownership, of just knowing it was there, the pistol on his hip helped shore up Mast's courage. He sure wished he didn't have to turn it in tonight. It wasn't like a rifle. Didn't give you the same feeling at all. What the damned government ought to do was issue every trooper a rifle and pistol both. They used to. In the Cavalry.(18)

This is the choppiest combat scene in Jones' fiction. Its violent collocation, "emotion spurting out of him like blood gushing out of a wound," redounds of pulp fiction. But because it shares a spoken-vernacular structure with the following, which in isolation conveys even more eloquently the hushed foreignness of the jungle --

Here the rain did not fall. It was stopped high above by that roof of green shingles. From there it dripped down slowly, leaf to leaf, or ran down the stems and branches. Despite the heaviness of the downpour which now purred loudly in their ears from just outside, here there was only a low rustle of slow occasional dripping. Everything else was supremely quiet.

As their eyes adjusted, they became able to see huge vines and creepers hanging in great festooning arcs, many of them larger than young trees at home. Giant tree trunks towered straight up, far above their heads to the roof, their thin bladelike roots often higher than a man's head. Every-where, every-thing, was wet. The ground itself was either bare dirt, slippery, slick, with wet; or else impenetrable tangles of dead-fall. Here and there a few stunted straggly bushes struggled to maintain an almost lightless life. And saplings, totally branchless with only a few leaves at the top and hardly bigger around than the width of a pocketknife, strained to stretch themselves up, up, always up, to that closed roof and closed corporation a hundred feet above, where they could at least compete, before they strangled here below.(19)

-- the two passages belong together. Just as Jones' individual characters are linked to the mass, and thereby to each other, so these different voices are joined to and by a common tone.*

The Harmonization of Structure

By employing conversational Style, Jones sought to keep the reader's attention concentrated on the narrative. Similar considerations led him to homogenize the tones of his writing, minimizing thereby the interruptions of his story line. From Here to Eternity was marked by chunks of exposition, long patches of unedited conversation, and bursts of lyricism; the flow of the narrative was impeded as it shifted among these. In his later novels Jones recognized the need to prune and harmonize these discordant tones. He began by reshaping his exposition.

Expository passages dot Jones' fiction like livingrock boulders worked into a castle wall. They testify and record, explaining quickly what fiction would take too long to dramatize.

*The last passage also bears comparison with the jungle scene with which Conrad opened Chapter Eleven of Altmayer's Folly:

"On three sides of the clearing, appearing very far away in the deceptive light, the big trees of the forest, lashed together with manifold bonds by a mass of tangled creepers, looked down at the growing young life at their feet with te sombre resignation of giants that had lost faith in their strength. And in the midst of them, the merciless creepers clung to the big trunks in cable-like coils, leaped from tree to tree, hung in thorny festoons from the lower boughs, and, sending slender tendrils on high to seek out the smallest branches, carried death to their victims in an exulting riot of silent destruction."

This is what gives Jones' works their feel of memoir -- the sense that they are not only fiction, but also a witness' testimony. He used two kinds of exposition: fictionalization, the reporting of witnessed scenes; and an editorial, or commentating, exposition.

Groups of naked or nearnaked men were wading in the river pushing boats ahead of them, one line coming upstream another going down, an improvised supply line replacing the stalled trucks. The boats coming upstream carried supplies. And in the ones going down C-for-Charlie got its first look at infantry wounded by infantry: dull-eyed men most of them, lolling against the thwarts and wrapped here and there with the startlingly clean white of bandages, through which on many the even more startling red of fresh blood had soaked. From the bridge every eye in C-for-Charlie turned toward them whitely, as the company crossed. Not all of the returning boats carried wounded men, only about half.(20)

The italicization illustrates how these two varieties of exposition function -- in effect, as photograph and caption. The bulk of the paragraph presents the scene of the river. The last sentence, hooked together over a comma splice, adds an observation the reader could not have drawn himself. At times these comments verge on direct exposition, drawing the reader into the events depicted by making him a listener-in on the characters' conjectures.

Of the 13 per cent of them in the lounge [of the hospital ship], one-fifth, or 2.6 per cent of the total, had to go into the extra-care unit. The 2.6 per cent were almost all lung wounds. Only about a sixth of them were abdominals or head wounds. Because the head wounds almost always died before they got on board, and the abdominals either died or recovered sufficiently to travel out in the open lounge with the others. Among the infantry, us infantry, Strange thought with a chief

cook's smile, it was an interesting note that 75 per cent of the lung wounds were caused by rifle or machine-gun bullets, but only 50 per cent of abdominals were bullet wounds. They did not know why, and they did not know whether these figures also applied to other types of outfits.(21)

Over the course of his career, Jones found increasingly subtle ways to work this exposition into his fiction.

Fatigue, in the Army, is the very necessary cleaning and repairing of the aftermath of living. Any man who has ever owned a gun has known Fatigue when, after fifteen minutes in the woods and perhaps three shots at an elusive squirrel, he has gone home to spend three-quarters of an hour cleaning up his piece so it will be ready the next time he goes to the woods. Any woman who has ever cooked a luscious meal and ladled it out in plates upon the table has known Fatigue, when, after the glorious meal is eaten, she repairs to the kitchen to wash the congealed gravy from the plates and the slick grease from the cooking pots so they will be ready to be used again this evening, dirtied, and so washed again. It is the knowledge of the unendingness and of the repetitious uselessness, the do it up so it can be done again, that makes Fatigue fatigue.(22)

.....

"Do you think you could handle the payroll, too?" Prevor asked [Landers] one night. "We've got to have it in three days' time, or they'll redline the entire payroll. And nobody will get paid."

Redline. A red line of ink through a soldier's name on the payroll, because of a mistake in his line on the roll, or in the remarks under his name, was just about the cardinal sin in the Army. It meant that the soldier did not get his pay that month.

"I'll try it for you," Landers said. "But I told you, I've never done a payroll directly off the service records. I've always had a previous payroll roster to work from."(23)

The first of these passages comes from From Here to Eternity, the second from the last quarter of Whistle. The difference in tone and form is immediately apparent. The first is lyrical in its

hunt for analogies to define "Fatigue." The second, written a quarter-century later, while no less exact in its definition, is less obtrusive in its narrative context. Its language never breaks tonal stride with the paragraphs around it. Embedded in them, it is less obviously a break in the narrative flow. Because of the way this explanation blends into the narrative, it is less apparent that the author has stepped in to provide background.

In From Here to Eternity, exposition was not the only opportunity Jones seized upon to burst into lyricism. Take the purported thoughts of Milt Warden upon Karen Holmes --

All the womanness of her shown in it, reached out demanding male attention, as a crowded street of long legged, tanned, high breasted women will catch your eye and pull your head around without your having even thought about it. If that was all there was, he thought again, for the fifteenth time today, just that womanness of this picture done in breathing flesh, it would be all right. But the picture didnt show it all. And he was not, he realized, a boy who is so rapt by the solemn religious joy of his first female flesh that he is blinded to the existence of the woman wearing it, does not even know or need to know that she exists. It would be fine if you were that, he thought, but you are not, and have not been for some time now, nor will you ever be again.(24)

-- or, more successfully, Jones' attempt to translate Taps:

This is the song of the men who have no place, played by a man who has never had a place, and can therefore play it. Listen to it. You know this song, remember? This is the song you close your ears to every night, so you can sleep. This is the song you drink five martinis every evening not to hear. This is the song of the Great Loneliness, that creeps in like the desert wind and dehydrates the soul. This is the song you'll listen to on the day you die. When you lay there in the bed and sweat it out, and know that all the

doctors and nurses and weeping friends dont mean a thing and cant help you any, cant save you one small bitter taste of it, because you are the one thats dying and not them; when you wait for it to come and know that sleep will not evade it and martinis will not put it off and conversation will not circumvent it and hobbies will not help you to escape it; then you will hear this song and, remembering, recognize it. This song is Reality. Remember? Surely you remember?(25)

As Jones matured as a writer, he ceased to indulge in such bursts of lyricism. To The Paris Review he stated:

I have been accused of taking up all of [Thomas] Wolfe's flaws (if they are flaws), such as lack of selectivity and stylistic overwriting and a number of others. All of which I don't think is true. Wolfe actually did influence me a great deal toward becoming a writer

I think I've moved a long way from him in viewpoint and style and even in selectivity; certainly I have in structuring novels.(26)

Next page, a footnote identified the "combat novel" that would demonstrate those changes: The Thin Red Line. Neither in that book nor in Whistle would those lyrics be paralleled. Jones had forborne them -- not only to save words, but also to remove one more impediment that their presence suggested: the presence of an author who was eager to rhapsodize.

Similar considerations governed Jones' reduction of the use of dialogue. The briefest thumbing of pages will show how heavily From Here to Eternity depends for its substance upon transcribed conversations among characters. Most notable for its use of dialogue is the poker-playing scene of Chapter Ten. Jones does not describe the setting. It is his poker-players' dialogue, echoing down pages void of narrative and description, that sketches the scene, creating the effect of voices breaking the silence of a dark bare room.

"Dealem," Prew said.

"The man says dealem." Angelo passed the cards, his thin hand flickering nervously, pouring out the energy, as he deftly made the round. "I aim to win this, friends. Oh, oh. Two jacks to Andy. Jesus Christ! I closed my eyes. Two Jacks bets."

"Its a ukelele," Sussman explained. "Originally Hawaiian instermint. And besides, it gets the wahines. Thats all I care. My motor gets more pussy than all the dough in this compny."

"Then why dont you put the other three strings on it?" Maggio said. "You cant even play it anyway."

"I dont have to play it," Sussman said. "Its ony atmosphere."

Maggio peeked tentatively at his holecard. "When I have to start playin a one string fiddle and buy me a motorcycle on time to get wahines, I'll start payin my three bucks at the window."

"You pay your three bucks at the window now, Angelo," Sussman, whose motor was the dearest thing in his life, said testily.

"Thats what I said, dint I?" Maggio said disgustedly. "I call that two bits, Andy, and hump it two. Four bits to Reedy."

"Horse frocky," said Pvt Readall Treadwell, the sixth man, who had not won a single hand and who came from southern Pennsylvania. He heaved the fat-lined barrel that was his chest and belly in a lazy sigh and turned over his cards and tossed them in. His round face grinned lazily, belying the tremendous strength that was underneath the fat. Beside the nervous swiftness of little Maggio he was like a fat cross-legged Buddha. "You guys done broke me. I aint got no business playin cards with sharpers no ways."

"Hell," Maggio said. "You still got twenty cents. Stick around. I'm just beginning to win."(27)

In the last two books of his Army trilogy, however, Jones substantially reduced his use of dialogue. "Dialogue is

almost too easy. For me," he told The Paris Review. "I could find myself evading problems of true expression because dialogue's so easy for me to do."²⁸ Fiedler had described From Here to Eternity's conversations as "mercilessly uncut."²⁹ When Jones voiced an intention to face squarely the problem of "true expression," he recognized the same point. Fully-reported conversations, however accurate, often ran to whole page of text; the same events could have been treated more economically. "True expression" required that a writer do what was required to tell his story effectively, rather than draw out its narration while he satisfied his penchants. If the need to maintain the flow of the narrative required that scenes be summarized rather than presented in full, "true expression" required that dialogue be subordinated to straight narration.

From Here to Eternity dealt with barracks life, an existence composed of discipline and release from discipline. It could thus be reduced to typifying scenes: fatigue, payday, KP, stockade, Saturday night in the red-light zone. The novel's structure was consonant with fully-reported, extensive conversations. In The Thin Red Line Jones had to lead his characters through combat; in Whistle he had to track their progress toward their individual fates. Such plotting required a strengthened narrative line. Scenes had to fit this flow. Accordingly, dialogue had to be reduced: with much to be told, only the gist of conversations mattered. Using the technique he had learned

from Stendhal, to summarize a monologue and conclude with a characterizing quote, Jones was able to trim independent, linked scenes into a direct, unbroken narrative.

In order to supervise the action of The Thin Red Line, Jones took an occasional, direct role in telling the story. His omniscient voice appears in order to establish certain milestones of the plot, paragraphs which serve as the novel's topic sentences:

This was almost precisely the same moment that C-for-Charlie was beginning its attack against Hill 279, its fourth, which was defended by a platoonsized body of Japanese.

It was a tough fight and, curiously enough, a boring one. For almost everybody. One man, however, it was not boring for, and this was Corporal Geoffrey Fife, newly of 2d Squad, 3d Platoon, because during it Fife killed his first Japanese.(30)

.....

Band was relieved three days later.

But before that happened the whole of C-for-Charlie had gotten blind, crazy drunk in a wild mass bacchanalian orgy which lasted twenty-eight hours and used up all the available whiskey, . . .(31)

Jones was faced in The Thin Red Line with the problem of keeping open the communications lines between the reader and his characters: Storm in the rear area, Welsh at the command post, Witt in the front line, various minor characters scattered among their separated squads. He thus had to frame the novel's individual scenes so that each might be viewed in the proper context. Necessity legitimized this authorial intervention.

In Whistle Jones succeeded in completing his vanishing

act, in working exclusively through his characters. "We got the word that the four of them were coming a month before they arrived," Whistle opens, and its first chapter is told by an anonymous member of a group of unnamed infantrymen. Thereafter, however, Jones disappears as swiftly and completely as Flaubert does after the initial chapter of Madame Bovary. His opening chapter is an introduction; the rest of the book belongs to Landers, Strange, Winch, and Prell.

Their experiences, several and joint, form the four strands of the plot. The narrative focus switches abruptly from one of them to the other like a baton traded by relay bearers. Jones' authorial coordination is still present, serving to foreshadow, place in context, and outline the narrative. In Whistle, however, the coordination is less obvious, the intervention of the author less apparent. The linking of narrative strands is not done from an impersonal vantage point but from the observations of the four main characters. "But by that time Johnny Stranger was back from Cincinnati and Winch knew about his old mess/sgt that, some way or other, Johnny Stranger had seen the shit hit the fan," runs one example. "When [Landers] reported back in to his ward, four days earlier than necessary, he found that Mart Winch had been taking out the girl Carol Firebaugh every single night since he left," states another.³²

The narrative strands these links connect are laid end-to-end. A chapter from Prell's point of view is followed by

one centered on Winch, and that by one dealing with Landers. One man thinks of another, or encounters him, and the narrative focus swings across this nexus to close on that second character.

Chapter Nine ends with Strange returning from furlough. Chapter Ten opens, "Landers had had fourteen days in which to start getting along without his new buddy Strange." The chapter details Landers' experiences in that time, and concludes, "Strange, when Landers saw him, was on his way to visit Prell."

Chapter Eleven then begins, "For the first four days after his arrival Prell had done very little but sleep." The narrative recounts Prell's troubles with the hospital staff, and finishes, "'Winch would know what to do,' Strange said softly as he closed the ward door." The next sentence-and-a-half, beginning two chapters devoted to Winch, is "Strange and Landers could not know it, but Winch already knew about Prell. And was already pushing forward his departure from Letterman to Luxor, because of him."

This abrupt, character-initiated shifting between subplots amounts to a sort of abdication of authorial prerogative. What now summons Strange, Landers, Prell and Winch into the story is no longer Jones' impersonal statement, made from a point equidistant from both characters. It is the thoughts of their fellows. They exist in each other's consciousness, emancipated by the disappearance of explicit supervision. From this point, Jones' presence can only be inferred.

De-Dramatization and Disclaiming

These modifications of language and structure were the result of Jones' attempt to eliminate authorial eccentricities that placed a remove between reader and story. The substance of his novels he treated in like manner. Jones rejected the novelist's opportunity to dramatize: to emotionalize and add weight to the events he portrayed. Jones believed that reality unfolded without dramatic moments, and so the artist's function was not to dramatize. In The Thin Red Line, following an abortive assault on the Japanese line, John Bell speaks for his creator in analyzing the difference between art and reality.

So Bugger's little feeling attack was over. If this were a movie, this would be the end of the show and something would be decided. In a movie or a novel they would dramatize and build to the climax of the attack. When the attack came in the film or novel, it would be satisfying. It would decide something. It would have a semblance of meaning and a semblance of an emotion. And immediately after, it would be over. The audience could go home and think about the semblance of the meaning and feel the semblance of the emotion. Even if the hero got killed, it would still make sense. Art, Bell decided, creative art -- was shit

. . . Nothing had been decided, nobody had learned anything. But most important of all, nothing would have ended.(33)

Accordingly, Jones' fiction is characterized by a reluctance to dramatize, a reluctance to heighten slowly and release quickly dramatic tension. Conscious de-dramatization was Jones' code. Whenever a chance for high drama presented itself, he deliberately took the lowest-keyed approach available, believing that this

approach was more life-like.

From Here to Eternity offers one striking example. Those who have seen the film version of this work nearly always remember what has become known as the beach scene, with Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr kissing on the sand as the waves lap over them. If these moviegoers afterward turn to the original novel, however, they will find only a summary of what Milt Warden recalls as an "abortive swimming party."

She had slipped climbing down the rocks and skinned her arm, and after they had got down she tore her dress, one of her best ones she said, on a snag. They had waded, nude, out into the water, hand in hand, making, he remembered, a fine picture in the moonlight with the water that seemed to run uphill from the beach breathing heavily around their knees. She had gotten chilled and had to go back and wrap up in a blanket.(34)

With this series of minor catastrophes and embarrassments as one of its emotional peaks, it is not surprising that Warden and Karen Holmes' love affair is as un-torrid as it is. There is also the highly undramatic death of Prewitt, blasted by an MP's Thompson-gun over the lip of a sandtrap. Prewitt is perhaps the most recent Romantic hero in American fiction, but his end is anything but Romantic. Jones does not let him die dramatically, or even expire with speed and quiet nobility. Instead, he cuts to the MP's standing above the soldier dying at their feet, embarrassed and guilty over their deed, and afraid to see if he is dead. Prewitt's death does not end the novel. It does not even call for the close of a chapter. Officers arrive, a few questions are asked. Finally Warden appears to sign for the dead

man's personal effects and see that the corpse receives an Army funeral.

The Thin Red Line's subject, the fighting on Guadalcanal, gave Jones even more dramatic subjects to de-dramatize. Here Jones' technique is best described by summarizing what he does not do. C-for-Charlie Company, shipped to Guadalcanal as reinforcements, do not splash ashore into machinegun fire (as do Norman Mailer's soldiers in The Naked and the Dead). They do not move up to the front immediately. When they do move up, they do not see action the first day. They do not fight one climactic engagement: they help take one set of hills, return to base, take another set of hills, return to base, and finally are sent off to take another island.

De-dramatization is especially evident in Jones' treatment of the attack by Captain Gaff's volunteers on the Japanese strongpoint. Objectively, this ranks as a heroic feat of arms -- six men against an entrenched force of nearly forty, and against these odds victorious. It should be one of a war novel's high points. But Jones down-plays the scene, reducing it to a crawl through dusty grass, a throwing of grenades, and then a calmly described melee:

Big Un broke the face of a sixth Japanese man just emerging from a hole, then jerked a grenade from his belt, pulled the pin and tossed it down the hole after him into a medley of voices which ceased in the dull roaring boom of the constricted explosion. While he struggled to unsling the rifle from his back, he was attacked by a screaming officer with a sword. Gaff shot the officer in the belly from the hip, shot him again in

the face to be positive after he was down. Bell had killed two men. Charlie Dale had killed two.(35)

None of Gaff's men are killed, which means there is no pathos, no heroic sacrifice. Even the moment of victory is qualified. Some Japanese prove to be hidden in the machinegun emplacements, the assault group must clamber about, killing them with grenades. And notice the tense in which Jones casts his verbs. It begins in the past tense and ends in past perfect: Bell had killed, Dale had killed. The effect is to shift the firefight into the past, ending it when its narration has barely begun.

Later scenes are similarly handled. The most obvious deflation of drama occurs when C-for-Charlie moves forward against a ridge undignified with the name of The Sea Slug. They encounter machinegun fire; Don Doll passes out grenades; he and his squad edge toward the unseen enemy.

But they had not gone ten yards when there were screams up above, the explosions of several grenades, and the machineguns stopped. Then voices in English with unmistakable American accents yelled down at them. "Hold your fire! Hold your fire! This is 3d Battalion! Hold fire, 2d Battalion!" Doll was suddenly so frustrated that he bit his lip until tears came in his eyes. He had had himself all primed. And now nothing.(36)

In this firefight, in the rest of the Guadalcanal campaign, there are no dramatic crescendos. C-for-Charlie marches, fights, dies, sleeps, eats, growing enured to combat. Eventually, knowing what they must do to overrun a hilltop and knowing that they will win, they can even find their penultimate engagement boring.

Jones' belief in de-dramatization not only led him to

refuse to heighten tension in the parts of his novels he invented. When he had factual elements to incorporate, he made the fictional versions of his recollections less important -- or less grisly, or less dramatic -- than their originals had been. In WW II he recalled how two of his unit's non-commissioned officers, competing for a sergeantcy, had chiseled open "a major breakthrough."³⁷ This seems the basis for the rivalry between Don Doll and Charlie Dale; but in The Thin Red Line, the most this competition achieves is promotion for the two competitors. No matter that such things might occur in reality; in Jones' fiction, major break-throughs are too good to be truthful.

Another example shows how Jones reworked his fiction to lessen its drama. On Guadalcanal, while defecating in a ravine, Jones was surprised by a Japanese infiltrator, and killed the man with a knife.³⁸ He wrote about the incident twice. The first time was in a short story called "The Temper of Steel," which was published in 1948. Twenty years later, writing a foreword for it, Jones stated, "It seems young to me today."³⁹

"The Temper of Steel" is more dramatically staged and executed than the event it fictionalizes. Its setting is a dark night in the trenches, with Japanese crawling in from the jungle. An American soldier senses an infiltrator's approach. He draws his own knife and kills the Japanese as they grapple. Employed in telling the story are all the elements of veterans'-return melodrama: painful recollections, banal generalities about

chivalry's absence from modern war, unscarred civilians who insist on telling returned soldiers about combat. The protagonist even explicitly refers to "'the scene in All Quiet where Paul kills the Frenchman in the hole and then begs his forgiveness.'"⁴⁰ Only two details indicate that "The Temper of Steel"'s author might develop into the author of The Thin Red Line. One is Jones' eye for physical detail: how tiring it was to dig a slit trench, how a knife struck "slitheringly" off a helmet. There is also Jones' conjecture about the reasons for the Japanese troops' nightly forays: "probably some point of Bushido honor. . . . Or maybe it was just that they were so hungry and they did it to get the luxurious cans of C rations each Yankee carried."⁴¹ Such observations would remain Jones' strengths.

The second time Jones dealt with the experience was in The Thin Red Line, in the scene in which Private Bead kills C-for-Charlie's first Japanese. This time the parallel was exact. No young soldier, alerted by a sixth sense, stealthily draws his knife in a rain-slick trench at midnight. There is only Bead, bespectacled and scared, hitching up his trousers as a nondescript Japanese soldier runs at him with a bayonet. Bead's weaponlessness and resultant panic make his actions mock-heroic in the most grotesque sense. He struggles with a frantic pathos to defend himself from a man he cannot seem to kill. He tackles the Japanese man, grapples with him, punches him, seizes the bayoneted rifle and stabs him, shoots him, and, finally, in

shocked, terrified confusion, batters the corpse with the rifle-butt before sneaking away, "ashamed and embarrassed by the whole thing."⁴² If Bead, like Jones, had had a knife, the combat might not have been so pathetic. It might have been admirable, or even heroic. Jones had determined that if readers were to empathize with Bead, they should feel shame rather than exultation in Bead's victory. To this end he retold his story in the least dramatic way he could imagine.

Accompanying this refusal to heighten dramatic tension was a refusal to provide authorial conclusions. Jones consciously avoided making any claim to have stated truths. On factual matters in which he had particular expertise, he would indeed speak authoritatively. He would explain, for example, that the Japanese adopted kamikaze tactics not out of suicidal fanaticism but rather because that was the best way to use shoddy aircraft and untrained pilots. On intellectual matters, however, Jones was unwilling to do more than suggest and voice hypotheses. He took pains to disassociate himself from the ideas that appear in his fiction -- indicating that while he personally might hold the ideas expressed, he did not wish to establish them as dogma.

This can be seen even in From Here to Eternity, Jones' only preachy novel. In it Karen Holmes lectures Milt Warden on love and Prewitt listens to Jack Malloy's instruction on civil disobedience. There is little doubt that these ideas are being put forward by the author, but the book's events are not calcu-

lated to urge readers to follow them. Karen and Warden part happily, but they still part, and their separate adventures after their farewell do not show that either has changed. Warden, thinking of his past love affairs, reckons up how many more he can expect. Then he joins Stark on a furious red-light-quarter spree. Karen departs for the Mainland, beginning en route an affair with an Air Corps lieutenant colonel. Beylism offers them a way to accept their misfortunes; but on the whole, it seems to have worked no better for them than it did for Stendhal. As for Prewitt, his fate is hardly certain to win additional converts to passive resistance. The efficacy of civil disobedience remains a matter of faith. Not in Jones' fiction will this virtue be verifiably rewarded.

The Thin Red Line's equation of sex and combat, similarly, cannot be traced to Jones himself. The character whose thoughts develop the analogy is John Bell. Bell is one of Jones' main spokesmen, an unbiased reporter. This argues that his conclusions on sex should be accepted as Jones' own; but there is also the fact that Bell is concerned with his wife's probable faithlessness. His hypotheses may be the author's, but they may just as easily be the misunderstandings made by a sexually-preoccupied man.

In WW II Jones found himself writing direct exposition. With no character to work behind, he was forced to explain the psychology behind banzai charges and seppuku. His attempts to

disclaim personal authority are plain.

I don't want to go into some layman's speculation on Japanese psychology [he wrote] Only a slight knowledge of modern Japanese literature shows their ritualistic preoccupation with blood It is a kind of joyous national sadomasochism which borders on a sensual despair in defeat and is fascinating to get into. A fairly close reading of the works and biography of their modern novelist Yukio Mishima, who committed suicide by ritual seppuku (hara-kiri) in 1970, bears this obsession out.(43)

Whistle offers more evidence that Jones would not press too strongly any idea, not even an idea fundamental to his understanding of humanity. When Landers illustrates the bond among himself, Winch, Stark, and Prell by comparing them to investors, then later deprecates the illustration as "high-toned and dumb," Jones thereby not only attacks the validity of positive style. He also disclaims responsibility for the comparison itself, even though it embodies -- indeed, probably because it embodies -- his final definition of the social bond.

Jones' Move Toward Conventional Grammar and Figures of Speech

Even an analysis of Jones' punctuation -- a minor characteristic of style -- demonstrates Jones' move toward a style in which the author's presence was subdued. Jones' punctuation begins by being deliberately eccentric and nonconformist; it ends by being completely conventional.

From Here to Eternity shares with the works of George Bernard Shaw a disregard for the apostrophe. "Thats too bad," Warden tells Pete Karelsen at one point. "I was just thinkin

about goin over to Choy's and lappin up some brew." "I aint got no money," Pete replies. Every conversation repeats this quirk. The only contractions exempt from it are contractions which involve pronouns, such as I'm, I'd, I've, you've, you'll and you're (when this is not transcribed as yore). Contractions of verb and not are uniformly un-apostrophized. Yet despite this flouting of convention, Jones hyphenated every compound adjective phrase in the novel, carefully typing out wide-eyedly, dark-skinned, even almost-unearthly-lovely. That Jones wrote these purposely, aiming at some artistic effect is shown by one of his recollections of a short story he published in 1949. It concerned this punctuational non-conformity. "We argued over things like the abbreviation of lieutenant," he recalled. "I didn't want a period after it. Allen [the editor of Harper's Magazine] did. We compromised by spelling it out."⁴⁵

The reader who begins The Thin Red Line upon closing From Here to Eternity immediately notes a change in punctuation. Didn't coexists with dont, cant with can't. A strange flock of unhyphenated phrases appear: jollylooking, humansocalledculture, the longpicklenose of Lieutenant Johnny Creo. One make of automatic weapon is referred to as a Thompson gun, Thompsongun, and Thompson-gun.*

* The problem has been compounded by poor production in some editions, in particular the British Fontana paperback.

Possibly it was such constructions that led Maxwell Geismar, when reviewing The Thin Red Line, to describe Jones' English as "atrocious."⁴⁶ At first glance they seem senseless atrocities. There is no way to explain why some compounds are hyphenated, some unhyphenated, and some written as one word. There is no logical reason for one contraction to receive an apostrophe while another does not. It is particularly troublesome to reconcile the presence of variant forms when they appear close together.

Band's eyes suddenly narrowed above his still smiling mouth. "You still want to go." He sighed. "All right, Witt. I guess there's really no way I can stop you officially. And anyway I wouldn't want a man in my command who didn't want to serve under me."

"It's not that, Sir," Witt lied. Because it was. At least partly. "It's that I don't want to serve in a battalion"--he deliberately did not mention Colonel Tall--"that does to guys what this battalion did to Captain Stein."(47)

The conjunction of these variant punctuations provides the key to understanding the inconsistency. Jones could hardly have failed to notice the presence in the same conversations of there's, wouldn't, didn't, it's, and don't. That he did not harmonize these punctuations strongly suggests that he simply must not have cared to do so.

The evidence is circumstantial, but from it one can infer Jones' intention. Jones, by the time he wrote The Thin Red Line, no longer cared how he punctuated his contractions, because telling his story had become more important to him than satisfy-

ing his grammatical whims. He had come to prefer getting his story set down -- typing in "bursts of stenographic speed," as he told The Paris Review, before the exact phrase could escape him -- to setting it down with precisely solipsistic detail.⁴⁸ His willingness to let stand such inconsistencies shows a confidence that the substance of the story would overshadow these minor flaws. Jones had come to assume that the reader would understand whatever he said -- that the reader would grasp the effect of apprehension, whether that emotion was indicated by fear-ridden or airraidfearridden. And if a reviewer found the results "atrocious" -- these results nonetheless conformed to Jones' artistic credo. By sometimes following convention, sometimes flouting it, Jones showed a disdain for positive style. In the context of naturalism, this was a positive good. It was an improvement on From Here to Eternity's deliberate non-conformity, which had been so rigorously unconventional that it approached affectation.*

After From Here to Eternity and The Thin Red Line, what strikes one about Whistle's punctuation is its normalcy. Jones maintained his practice of using military abbreviations, calling Strange a Mess/Sgt and promoting Winch to W/O instead of Warrant Officer. In all other ways, however, he followed grammatical convention. Every contraction receives its apostrophe. Compound

*Such aberrant forms also complement the subject matter of Jones' fiction: in novels about common soldiers, such apparent grammatical crudities fit very well.

adjective clauses receive their proper share of hyphens: assembly-line, long-limbed, around-the-clock. What The Thin Red Line repeatedly called cannonfodder is now cannon-fodder. Adhering to the letter of the rule, Strange conjectures that Prell must be "twenty-three or -four."

Jones died with three chapters of Whistle unfinished. Others sent the manuscript to press. Among these literary executors' tasks was not the standardization of grammar and punctuation. In the books he wrote after The Thin Red Line -- The Merry Month of May, A Touch of Danger, Viet Journal and WW II -- Jones had used the standard forms. In Whistle, it was he who typed in the hyphens and apostrophes, leaving them in the typescript where they were found by his friend Willie Morris.⁴⁹

Conventional punctuation, Jones must have decided, draws to itself the least amount of attention. Readers are accustomed to it; they pay it no mind. Non-orthodox punctuation, on the other hand, is as distracting in a written story as a physical tic in a story-teller. Whenever a reader encounters cant where education has taught him to expect can't, he loses, however temporarily, his concentration on what the language narrates. In The Thin Red Line Jones had forgotten punctuational eccentricities to let himself concentrate on his story. The next step was to eliminate such quirks altogether, so that the reader could maintain his own concentration.

With this gradual adherence to grammatical convention

went a taming of violent figures of speech. From Here to Eternity is laden with overdone writing.

Maggio [moved] with his club out into the aisle for clearance and [went] to meet [Bloom], and death suddenly slid into the big room dartingly like a boxer on silent resined feet moving pantherishly in to punch.(50)

.
He had gotten under her shell . . . and he was going back payday night . . . because, he thought, in this world, any more, with things like they are, the hardest of all hard things was to know the real form the illusion, to meet one other human being breath to breath without the prefabricated soundproofed 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, he thought, I think I have.(51)

So common were these passages that they inspired the humorist Peter De Vries to write a piece titled "From There to Infinity" for The New Yorker.

As he approached [Colonel Stilton's house] he could see Mrs. Stilton under a burning bulb on the screened terrace with her feet on a hassock, smoking a cigarette. She had on shorts and a sweater. Her slim brown legs like a pair of scissors made a clean incision in his mind

"What do you want?" she said with the same insolent invitation, not stirring. He was aware of the neat, apple-hard breasts under the sweater, and of the terse, apple-hard invitation in her manner.

"I want to read this to you," he said, trying not to let his voice sound too husky.

"How much have you got in there," her voice knew all about him.

"A quarter of a million words," he said

. . .After a week or maybe a month of honest passion you woke up to find yourself trapped with the sow Respectability, which was the chicken-eating digest-reading middle-class assurance and where it lived: the house with the, oh sure, refrigerator, oil furnace and all the other contraptions that snicker when they go on -- the well-lighted air-conditioned mausoleum of love....

The door flew open and Stilton stood inside the room. His eyes were like two wet watermelon pips spaced close together on an otherwise almost blank plate (under [two] anchovies one of which had learned to stand on end).(52)

It was such passages, coupled with a rough-and-ready use of grammar, that led Fiedler to complain that Jones "[had accepted] bad writing as his ideal."⁵³ These deliberately vigorous figures of speech, however, are characteristic of only From Here to Eternity. That Jones did not repeat them in Some Came Running, a novel that showed less self-discipline than From Here to Eternity, and which was written after Jones had received financial and personal encouragement to write exactly as he wished, suggests that they result from a beginning writer's testing his metaphors.*

*Most of these passages come from the first quarter of From Here to Eternity, which supports this hypothesis; they are the first pages of a first novel. Additionally, slipshod sentence structure was something which the author of "James Jones' Dead-End Young Werther" hardly in a position to criticize. Consider the following sentence from that essay:

Even without such overdone figures of speech, however, Jones' language is marked by a penchant for belligerent, heated rhetoric. One example comes in The Thin Red Line, when Don Doll decides to make a dash across a hillside under Japanese fire.

When [Doll] had squirmed himself around facing the rear, he lay a moment lifting himself to the act, his heart pounding. He could not quite bring himself to begin to move. But he knew he would. There was something else in it also. In what it was that was driving, pulling him to do it. It was like facing God. Or gambling with Luck. It was taking a dare from the Universe. It excited him more than all the hunting, gambling, and fucking he had ever done all rolled together. When he went, he was up in a flash and running, . . . (54)

In such passages, the force of the rhetoric overshadows the perceptions it sets forth. Jones' purpose in using such violent expressions seems three-fold. One, it seeks to shock for the sake of shocking -- attacking middle-class conventionality. Such rhetorical violence also comports with the violence of Jones'

(cont.)

"As Werther turned to Homer and Ossian and the Ballads in order to touch again the great innocent heart of nature, so Prew-Jim Jones turns to certain 'pure' movies made between '32 and '37, Grapes of Wrath and Dust Be My Destiny, the on-the-bum pictures with James Cagney, George Raft, and John Garfield (these slick productions he thinks of as not yet commercialized!) -- plus the authentic blues, hill-billy songs, and jazz -- perhaps, to Django Reinhardt also, the three-fingered gypsy guitarist, and Jack London, the American prototype of the artist as bum." (55)

narrative. He writes of infantry combat and illicit sex, employing a raw diction to describe this raw life. Finally, and most important, this is the language Jones' characters would use: one cannot determine whether these expressions of masochistic excitement originate with Jones or Doll.

Although the intensity of this rhetoric never abated, over the course of Jones' career, he increasingly reserved its use to his characters. In their voice it served to characterize.

"What did you mean?" Annie Waterfield asked him, "when you kept hollerin' Pay?"

"Hollering Pay?" Landers said. "Pay?"

"Yes. Every time you hit somebody you kept hollerin' Pay!"

"I don't know," Landers said hollowly

But he thought he did know. . . . Something inside him. Aching to get out. There was something inside him aching to get out, but in a way that only a serious fight or series of serious fights would let it get out. Anguish. Love. And hate. And a kind of fragile, short-lived happiness

. . . The anguish was for himself. And every poor slob like him, who had ever suffered fear, and terror, and injury at the hands of other men. The love, he didn't know who the love was for. For himself and everybody. For all the sad members of this flawed, misbegotten, miscreated race of valuable creatures, which was trying and failing with such ruptured effort to haul itself up out of the mud and dross and drouth of its crippled heritage.(56)

Landers' phraseology is roughly phrased and repetitious. This may reflect hasty writing on Jones' part. The passage may also be read, however, as reflecting the psychic deterioration of the character whose thinking is portrayed. Landers, before being

drafted, had been reared in a stable, middle-class home, and had attended college. Now Landers thinks in clumsy, over-emotional terms. He repeats phrases and piles up synonyms, wallowing in a generalized sentiment of resentment and frustration without finding definitions precise enough to let him solve his problem. Eventually Landers will become a suicide -- an end here foreshadowed by the deterioration of his language.

Conclusion

It is against this background -- of Jones' attempts to simplify and de-personalize his language, narrate fact, and eliminate drama and authorial preaching -- that the last pages of Whistle stand. The last three-and-a-half chapters Jones meant to be relatively short.⁵⁷ Because he died before he could complete them, they are little more than outlines of action fleshed out with detail. The last rebellion of Bobby Prell, who entered the novels as Pfc Robert E. Lee Prewitt, occupies no more than a page.

He ran around down in the low-bar areas of Los Angeles and ended up in a seedy bar filled with drunk servicemen. The driver waited for him outside.

With all the accumulated rage burning in him, he tried to pick a fight. But with his bad legs he was practically incapable of self-defense. Just as the irate soldiers whom he had insulted and challenged were about to beat him up, perhaps even kill him, one of them suddenly recognized the Medal of Honor ribbon he was wearing on his blouse, and then remembered him from his pictures in the Los Angeles papers. The soldier said: "Good God, we're about to beat up on a Medal of Honor winner!" and stopped the fight.

The soldiers found out that there was a sergeant waiting for Prell in the limousine outside the bar. They went and got him. The soldier who had recognized Prell warned the sergeant, "He shouldn't be in a place like this." The sergeant took Prell home. He did not inform Major Kurntz of what had happened, thinking that he was protecting Prell, and doing so with his natural soldier's instinct not ever to tell the authorities anything they did not already know.

The next speech was in Bakersfield. The entire bond-selling group drove out in limousines for the evening "performance." After his speech, Prell repeated the same pattern with a different driver. He got very drunk and asked the driver to let him off at another tough bar.

He got out of the limousine and hobbled into the bar on his ruined legs. There was an expression on his face of hard desperate determination. He walked into the bar. It was a green place, smoke-filled, with the rattling of pool balls, and mean drunken soldiers at the tables and on the bar stools, and a couple of poker games in the corner. After two or three drinks he began to bait some of the servicemen around him, and picked another fight. This time he was not recognized by the soldiers. The result was a bloody brawl, with Prell at the center, in which he seriously hurt someone. In the smoky haze one of the soldiers picked up a pool cue. He hit Prell over the head with it and killed him.

The sergeant driver, having heard the noise, rushed into the bar and saw Prell bleeding on the floor. He felt his pulse. He told the men what they had done, told them whom they had killed. The soldiers were horrified, but left the impression that Prell had brought it all on himself, as in fact he had done, deliberately picking the fight with them.(58)

Death kept Jones from putting the last touch on his book, but it did not prevent him from finishing it, from setting down its facts in elemental form. The writing is a series of statements, a summary narration of what was done and what happened. In its flat impersonality can be identified no individualities of style. No conclusions intellectualize the

facts of Prell's brawling; no drama interferes with the writing's understated objectivity. There is in it -- in all, in short -- no sign at all of an author.

Chapter IV
JOSEPH HELLER'S RHETORIC OF ABSURDITY

Introduction

No matter what the novel, Whistle or Catch-22, there remains a novelist behind the story. The presence of the author can never be wholly forgotten. But while the difference between Jones and Heller is thus only one of degree, this difference in degree is very great. Catch-22 makes too much use of the language for its inventiveness to be overlooked: it plays too much with words and grammar, cuts too quickly between different scenes and varying tones. A reader who begins Scene A and suddenly finds that he is finishing Scene F is bound to wonder how he got there. A secondary effect of this disorientation is a curiosity about its cause. The reader wonders about not only what he is experiencing, but also who is responsible for it.

Heller's conception of the Absurd is often imposed upon the events he presents. It arises, as in the case of the firemen who dash away from the burning mess hall to watch the planes land, from a deliberate suppression of rational explanations which is coupled with an exaggeration of irrationality and farce. The author's shadow falls across the story. Heller takes advantage of such evidence of authorial action, making it a positive

aspect of his narrative technique. Jones, who believed that the individual belonged to the group about him, made himself a self-effacing, anonymous narrator, speaking for and from among a group of soliders. Heller, by contrast, becomes the circus ringmaster, as much a part of the extravaganza as the events he presents.

In Catch-22 an apparent conflict of interests has arisen: between what Yossarian knows to be his personal interest (which suggests that he stop risking his life by flying missions) and what he is told is his interest as part of his country (which demands that he continue flying missions). The novel chronicles his efforts to reason his way out of this paradox. This he will do by realizing that there is no conflict, because only one of these loyalties is valid. Nationalism per se is a false value; the individual's only loyalty is to himself. Yossarian's experiences teach him the absurdity of a society that misperceives so badly the value of the individual. He witnesses the a-national, ultimately inhuman spread of M & M Enterprises; he deals with the organization men who seize opportunities to govern; he struggles to deal with the conventions crystallized in Catch-22. Yet instructive as the novel's events are, they do not of themselves account for the novel's vision of a thoroughly insane, surreal world. The substance of the novel is reiterated by the manner of its telling -- by a structure and diction that confuse, frustrate, and shock.

Chaos by Design: The Structure of "Catch-22"

Heller has stated that Catch-22 was written to give the impression of being a formless novel.¹ To give the impression is the operative phrase here; for if Catch-22 seems formless, it is only because its material is organized into so many superimposed patterns. The novel's chapters may be organized by their relative logicity and degree of fragmentation:

Catch-22 falls into three nearly equal parts separated by the rhythmic repetition of hospital scenes. In the first section, although the narration dwells primarily on the past, a few events do occur in the present to advance the action somewhat

. . . Primary attention is paid to introducing us to the major characters of the novel and to adding more information of past events [in Chapters One through Sixteen].

The second section of Catch-22 is again approximately 150 pages, or one-third of the novel, and once again appears framed in hospital scenes. This section contains somewhat more action in the present time. . . .

In the final section of the novel . . . which concentrates on events in the present, the tempo of horrors increases.(2)

Or, alternatively:

The first part, through Chapter Ten, establishes and develops the narrative present; . . . The second part flashes back to the Great Big Siege of Bologna in Chapters Eleven through Sixteen; and a third part returns to the narrative present . . . in Chapters Seventeen through Twenty-two. Another long flashback, this time to Milo Minderbinder's operations . . . forms a fragmentary but essentially sustained fourth part in Chapters Twenty-two through Twenty-four. A fifth part returns again to the narrative present in Chapter Twenty-five and remains there with increasingly less fragmentation to the end.(3)

Or, the book may be divided thematically, by tone:

A three-part tonal structure, then, seems evident. The first part, Chapters One through Twenty-nine, establishes the tone by which the novel is usually characterized: a predominantly and broadly humorous tone, a mixed tone in which fear and desperation are contained within and controlled by exploding jokes, gags, puns, parodies, and satiric attacks, the tone of a fireworks display in a thunderstorm. The second part, Chapters Twenty-nine through Thirty-nine, pivoting on the mission to the mountain village, shifts to a much different and more consistent tone, one of deepening despair whose growing darkness envelops the humor and turns it increasingly sick and savage. The third part, the last three chapters, shifts to another mingled tone, one of resigned desperation broken by revelation and release.(4)

If these are the book's skeletons, the nervous system connecting them, moving across the book is likewise multipartite:

Behind what appear to be merely random events lies a careful system of time-sequences involving two distinct and mutually contradictory chronologies. The major part of the novel, focussed on Yossarian, moves forward and backward from a pivotal point in time. Yossarian, like many other anti-heroes of modern fiction from Leopold Bloom to Moses Herzog, lives in a world dominated not by chronological but by psychological time

While the dominant sequence of events shifts back and forth from the present to the past treating any period of time as equally present, equally immediate, a counter-motion controls the time of the history of Milo Minderbinder. Across the see-saw pattern of events in the rest of the novel Minderbinder moves directly forward from one success to the next.(5)

This pattern of narration is also a subject for debate. While Jan Solomon (in "The Structure of Joseph Heller's Catch-22," quoted above) feels that the time-sequences are contradictory, Doug Gaukroger (in "Time Structure in Catch-22") argues that they are not. In "The Sanity of Catch-22," Robert Protherough eschews

such Yossarian-and-Milo-centered hypotheses to read the novel as organized by the incremental revelation of answers to two questions: what happened to Snowden, and what will happen to Orr.⁶

Catch-22's structure, because of its peculiarly schematized confusion, has served as a Rohrschach blot for critics. The following interpretations have been suggested:

Catch-22 is an anti-novel parodying the novel form.⁷

Catch-22 is not a novel but a "romance-parody -- an episodic and formless mixture of genres."⁸

Catch-22 is a grab-bag, an anatomy in Northrop Frye's sense: "a work which is characterized by a great variety of subject matter, a strong interest in ideas, and a disinclination to be bound by the customary logic of narrative."⁹

Catch-22 is indeed a novel, but one constructed on cinematic rather than novelistic principles.¹⁰

Catch-22 is built on the structural principal of déjà vu; that is, its incidents repeat to confront the reader with something he has seen before.¹¹

Catch-22's structure is "an intricate molecular structure whose avenues of communication can reach out to any direction at any time."¹²

Catch-22's structure "complements the multifarious ideas and issues associated with the theme of responsibility," showing the reader how Yossarian resolves his dilemma by immersing him in the same flow of memories.¹³

Catch-22 is constructed to undercut the perception of time and its sequential passage.¹⁴

Catch-22 in its structure "inverts the actual world and the art world," seeking to case the former in the image of the latter, alienating, obscuring, schematizing, and dislocating -- manipulating real (or naturalistic) objects as an artist manipulates pigment.¹⁵

Yet another explanation has been given by Heller himself. An interviewer had begun, "Now I don't want to put you in the silly position of saying, 'But I don't sideswipe character and action'--" when Heller interjected:

Well, I do sideswipe character and action. I think that's one of the approaches to the book that gives it what effect it has. I tried to avoid, first of all, the conventional structure of the novel; I tried to give it a structure that would reflect and complement the content of the book itself, and the content of the book really derives from our present atmosphere, which is one of chaos, of disorganization, of absurdity, of cruelty, of brutality, of insensitivity, but at the same time one in which people, even the worst people, I think are basically good, are motivated by humane impulses.

And I tried to emphasize this by the structure, much the same way that many of your modern artists have resorted to a type of painting as being most suitable to the emotions they want to express . . . and your very good contemporary composers are using dissonances and irregular tempos and harmonics to get the same feeling....

. . . There was a definite technique, at the beginning of the book particularly, of treating people and incidents almost in terms of glimpses, and then showing as we progress that these things do have a meaning and they do come together.(16)

The structure of Catch-22 has two aspects. One is the novel's schematic organization, the second its fractured composition. The latter necessitates the former. Catch-22 is a cyclical narrative built of narrative cycles -- repeated, interwoven incidents that in each reappearance become more detailed and elaborate. Each of its episodes is fragmented into foreshadowings, overviews, main scenes and recollections. These scenes are scattered over the full length of the novel, interspersed among similarly-splintered episodes. In such circumstances, the novel's scenes can hardly follow one another of their own accord. There is no obvious sequence to the narrative. Hence arises the need for the imposed structure of schematization.

The impact of Catch-22's scenes depends as much on their paginal locations -- on their relative positions within the book -- as on their locations within the chronology of the story. In Catch-22, as in the theatre of the absurd, it is only such structuring that creates the novel, because naturalistic forms of plot development have been rejected in order to present "a total, complex impression of a basic and static organization." The novel's structure "controls the emotional and intellectual impact of [the work] through the ordering of the scenes and images, arranging them into a certain sequence of imagistic perceptions atomized and juxtaposed to create tension, suspense, and ultimately understanding."¹⁷ By arranging his scenes, Heller is able to march his themes toward a conclusion.

The matters thus organized are Catch-22's incrementally narrated scenes. No single episode is ever presented once and for all, in its entirety. Instead, as Jan Solomon has explained, each is narrated piecemeal. "At first, numerous brief references to an event are inserted into the current action; then, somewhat fuller allusions; and finally, for each specific important episode, a fairly extended direct narration."¹⁸

The best example is provided by Catch-22's most important episode, the one in which Yossarian learns the full significance of war: the episode in which Snowden dies. "Snowden had been killed over Avignon when Dobbs went crazy in mid-air and seized the controls away from Huple" -- that, on Page 35, is the first mention of Snowden. On Page 50 the scene crops up again. This time the narration covers twenty-four lines, adding one crucial detail, that Dobbs cried out "Help the bombardier, help the bombardier." A quiet falls for eleven chapters. Then on Page 164, Yossarian, hospitalized, thinks, "Being in the hospital was better than being over Bologna or flying over Avignon with Huple and Dobbs at the controls and Snowden dying in back"; an overview preparing the reader for the additional increment of data Heller furnishes six pages later: "That was the secret Snowden had spilled to him on the mission to Avignon -- they were out to get him; and Snowden had spilled it all over the back of the plane." On Page 221 the reader experiences with Yossarian the burst of flak hitting the B-25, hear him yelling at Dobbs

that he's the bombardier and he's all right, he's all right; and then for the first time hears Snowden whimper, "I'm cold. Please help me. I'm cold." Yossarian crawls back to him. Page 325 finds Yossarian crouched over Snowden, sickened by the wound in his thigh. Fourteen pages later the reader learns why it was the wrong wound, the leg wound, that Yossarian treated. Finally, in the penultimate chapter, on Pages 426-430, he is given the entire scene: Yossarian's desperate coolness, Snowden's pain, the morphine stolen by Milo, the detailed, practical, and useless first aid, and the horrifying secret hidden by Snowden's flak armor -- the huge hole ripped through his flesh by shrapnel.¹⁹

Heller's incremental story-telling confuses in two ways. It fragments the scene being told, creating a situation in which every fact is presented out of context. To comprehend fully an event, the reader must recall and organize widely-separated pieces of data. Furthermore, the technique complicates efforts to understand what is happening by serving up clues which are either contradicting or baffling in their inadequacy.

In 1971 Jean Kennard published "Joseph Heller: At War with Absurdity," an essay which still offers the most useful introduction to the rhetoric Heller uses to create the absurdity of his novel. Kennard has identified three distinct variants of Heller's incremental narration.²⁰ First, a statement -- a detail of an episode -- may be presented without necessary clarification. This omission makes the given information unintelligible

until the full explanation is provided as the scene unfolds throughout the novel. For example, on Page 22 there is a reference to a dead man "lying around" in Yossarian's tent. Not for eighty-four pages does the reader learn that the Dead Man in Yossarian's tent is (or was) a real man -- a replacement pilot named Mudd who died in action on his first mission, and whose presence in the tent owes to the presence there of his unpacked bags. Second, contrary explanations of one event may be given, and only much later resolved. The provenance of Colonel Cathcart's cherry tomatoes is a case in point. At first, the reader hears that they come from Colonel Cathcart's farmhouse in the hills (Page 188); then is told that they are purchased (Page 207). Then comes the explanation: the plum tomatoes that do in fact grow at the farmhouse are too much trouble to harvest (Page 208). Finally, contrary explanations of an event may be given, but never resolved. On Page 250 Milo protests to Yossarian that he was not on the ground at Orvieto. On Page 363, however, he explains to Colonel Cathcart that he was at the bridgehead, directing the German anti-aircraft fire.

The effect this technique produces is clear. As well as fragmenting the tale, it ensures that each episode confronts the reader with a mystery, which later explanations will convert to either a riddle or an enigma.

Narrative fragmentation confuses the reader, thereby engendering the disorientation and absurdity critical to the full

effect of Catch-22. It also serves a second purpose.

I did consciously try to use a form of what might be called dramatic counterpoint [Heller has stated], so that certain characters suffer tragedies, and they're dismissed almost flippantly -- a line or two might describe something terrible happening to a character, whereas whole pages might be concentrated on something of subordinate dramatic value.

And by doing that, I tried to do two things. One was to emphasize the sense of loss, or the sense of sorrow, connected with it; and also to capture this thing in experience which permits us to survive the loss of people who are dear to us, so that nobody's suffering lingers with us very long.(21)

A line on the death of Snowden (as on Page 50) may be followed by four pages discussing the career of Hungry Joe. The death of Kraft is similarly sandwiched between less-than-tragic events.

[Aarfy] got lost on the streets of Rome that same afternoon and never did find the eligible Red Cross girl from Smith with the important milk-of-magnesia plant. He got lost on the mission to Ferrara the day Kraft was shot down and killed, and he got lost again on the weekly milk run to Parma and tried to lead the planes out to sea over the city of Leghorn after Yossarian had dropped his bombs on the undefended inland target and settled back against his thick wall of armor plate with his eyes closed and a fragrant cigarette in his finger tips. Suddenly there was flak, and all at once McWatt was shrieking over the intercom, "Flak! Flak! Where the hell are we? What the hell's going on?"(22)

A conventional narrative could achieve the same dramatic counterpoint by leaping through tragic occurrences and lingering on the mundane, without flashbacks or foreshadowing. Fragmented narration, however, facilitates and complements the effect.

Transition Devices in "Catch-22": Confusing Guides

In order to use his cyclical narrative technique, Heller

had to find a way to intersperse scenes, associate events not logically connected, and link scenes differing in time, location, tone, and theme. Catch-22's fragmentation and schematization thereby made possible another means of communicating the idea of disorder and irrationality: through the use of transition devices which, instead of ensuring an orderly, comprehensible narrative flow, frustrated the reader's expectations and increased the book's confusion.

One of Catch-22's transition devices is the method Joseph Conrad used to weave the Costaguanan background of Nostromo: linking two distinct scenes through a tenuous intersection of character, locale, or language. A new section may open by answering the question that closed its predecessor, or stretch a comparison into a whole new episode.

"They're not going to send a crazy man out to be killed, are they?"

"Who else will go?"

McWatt went, and McWatt was not crazy.(23)

.....

Seeing everyone he didn't like afraid once again throughout the appalling, interminable Great Big Siege of Bologna reminded Captain Black nostalgically of the good old days of his Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade

Actually, it was not Captain Black but Sergeant Knight who triggered the solemn panic of Bologna, slipping silently off the truck for two extra flak suits as soon as he learned the target(24)

This method of linking scenes is not particularly disorienting. While the transitions between different episodes are abrupt, the

reader is never startled by unexpected changes within a scene. The narrative shift is from scene to scene, finishing one (however quickly) before beginning the second. As such, this method of transition represents not so much an attempt to shake up the reader as to transfer to prose the film-maker's technique of high-speed crosscutting. But Heller goes beyond this, with an innovation of his own:

"Tangerines?"

"Yes, sir."

"My men would love tangerines," admitted the colonel in Sardinia who commanded four squadrons of B-26s.

"There'll be all the tangerines they can eat that you're able to pay for with money from your mess fund," Milo assured him. . . .

"It's amazing, positively amazing. How can you do it?"

"Mass purchasing power makes the big difference. For example, breaded veal cutlets."

"I'm not so crazy about breaded veal cutlets," grumbled the skeptical B-25 commander in the north of Corsica.

"Breaded veal cutlets are very nutritious," Milo admonished him piously. "They contain egg yolk and bread crumbs. And so are lamb chops."

"Ah, lamb chops," echoed the B-25 commander. "Good lamb chops?"

"The best," said Milo, "that the black market has to offer."

"And everybody has a share?"

"That," said Milo, "is the most beautiful part of it."

"I don't like it," growled the uncooperative fighter-plane commander, who didn't like Milo either.

"There's an uncooperative fighter-plane commander up north who's got it in for me," Milo complained to General Dreedle.(25)

The above is one conversation between one man and four others, four sub-conversations united by the narrative eye blinking from Milo to the series of officers facing him across the table. It is a sleight-of-voice trick. Here Heller throws out of synchronization the aural and visual halves of his scenes, starting a new scene before the reader knows the last has ended. The difference in the familiar startles. More than connecting separate incidents, this technique aggregates scenes, collecting individual episodes which share a theme or participant. Here it summarizes Milo's formation of his syndicate. Later, in Chapter Twenty-Seven, it will bring together the conversations Yossarian carries on from his hospital cot with Major Sanderson the psychiatrist, Dobbs, Chaplain Tappman, and Major Sanderson again.

This linking device represents a manipulation of viewpoint. Heller's other favorite method of transition involves a distortion of grammar. Kennard noted that "sentence structure is used throughout Catch-22 to add to the reader's confusion about characters and events and contributes to the impression of an irrational world.... As [a] sentence progresses each new clause or phrase does not clarify what has gone but adds new complications."²⁶

Heller employs the simplest method of providing continuity, the writing of transition sentences, and then stretches this ad absurdum by writing transition sentences to link subjects that have absolutely no relation to each other. Grammatically, the sentences are perfect, but in fact they are incoherent -- literally incoherent, because their contents do not fit each other. The result is a confusion which goes beyond the vagueness of imagery and difficulty of comprehension identified by Kennard. It is a confusion which mocks both the idea of a narrative line and the idea that grammar organizes expression.

The day before Yossarian met the chaplain, a stove exploded in the mess hall and set fire to one side of the kitchen.(27)

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Actually, no one but Lieutenant Scheisskopf really gave a damn about the parades, least of all the bloated colonel with the big fat mustache, who was chairman of the Action Board and began bellowing at Clevinger the moment Clevinger stepped gingerly into the room to plead innocent to the charges Lieutenant Scheisskopf had lodged against him.(28)

.
Immediately next door to Yossarian was Havermeyer, who liked peanut brittle and lived all by himself in the two-man tent in which he shot tiny field mice every night with huge bullets from the .45 he had stolen from the dead man in Yossarian's tent.(29)

Note the forced marriage of dichotomies. The transitions are not written to satisfy the requirements of the narrative flow; on the contrary, the transitions create and direct the story line. There is no pretense that one episode follows another because of an intersection of the episodes' individual sets of characters,

locales, or themes. The relative locations of Yossarian's and Havermeyer's tents are immaterial to their conjunction. The time of the fire is essentially unrelated to Yossarian's meeting with Chaplain Tappan. To the extent that these events are related, their connection is confusing; as the reader moves forward into the book, he is sent spinning backward in time. The episodes linked may abut physically or temporally. They may share characters: the colonel who judges Clevinger has earlier judged Lieutenant Scheisskopf's parades. Almost always there is some nexus of time, location, or action; but this nexus is immaterial, because it goes unused. A nexus is important only as a bridge from scene to scene across which logic or causality can carry the narrative. The links between these episodes depend on neither logic nor causality. The episodes are linked because the author has decided to connect them.

These sentences add to Catch-22's air of unreality and absurdity. Not only do they link unrelated episodes; their internal structure also catches in loose association numerous discrete, unrelated items.

(McWatt wore) (fleecy bedroom slippers) (with his red pajamas) (and slept) (between freshly pressed colored bedsheets) (like the one) (Milo had retrieved) (half of) (for him) (from the grinning thief) (with the sweet tooth) (in exchange for none) (of the pitted dates) (Milo had borrowed) (from Yossarian).(30)

In theory, in terms of grammatical possibility, a sentence like the above is perfect and admirable. On the printed page, it represents more data than the reader can digest at a scan.

Heller's nouns, verbs, and modifiers are ordinary; so are the prepositions and conjunctions linking them. It is the unexpected accumulation of so many parts of speech that creates the difficulty. What is intelligible by parts becomes unwieldy in the mass; the compounding and interaction of so many data make a complex structure of the simplest grammatical construction.

Such sentences repeat in miniature the novel's overall structure, micro aping macro. Just as Catch-22 is built of colliding episodes, so its transition sentences represent towering, rickety stacks of separate phrases. Activities meant to run the war effectively end by hindering it. Milo Minderbinder, who starts his business to supply his squadron with fresh fruit, ends by bombing and strafing his own airfield. The standards meant to keep unfit airmen out of combat become twisted to ensure that crazy men do fly missions, which gives rise to Catch-22 itself. Exactly so do the rules of grammar, meant to ensure the orderly, effective expression of thought, end by making ungraspable the thoughts they express. Following grammatical potential to its logical conclusion has turned out to be following grammatical potential to the point of absurdity.

This linking of unrelated phrases, as well as the linking of unrelated scenes, reveals the author's hand. Grammar is never stretched so far unless someone stretches it. Heller has exercised his authorial prerogative to relate phrases by employing conjunctions. This use of grammar for grammar's sake is

paralleled in Absurdist drama -- for example, in Ionesco's The Bald Soprano, where characters speak in the clipped, precise sentences of language-textbook exercises, and the use of these straightforward declarations grows absurd because of its stiltedness. "The day before Yossarian met the chaplain, a stove exploded" is equally a rote-exercise sentence, an arbitrary linking of clauses, constructed to manipulate form rather than narrate substance. By avoiding the patterns of everyday speech, Heller increases the novel's air of absurdity and contradiction. In writing the book, Heller is attempting to communicate some message to the reader; but the story is being told in a language that is not the reader's own.

Heller's distorted grammar is also absurd in that it undermines Catch-22's verisimilitude. Without a willingness to believe what he is reading, to regard temporarily fiction as fact, a reader will learn nothing from the book. Here the novel's message is enciphered by the complexity of its presentation. Moreover, a reader who has been reading what seems an account of the Second World War is suddenly reminded that Catch-22 is really not a history -- that the propositions he has worked from are at heart fictitious. He is reminded that the whole story is a fiction, a tale told by an author whose reliability is made suspect by the liberties he takes with its narration.

Thus Catch-22's grammar works against the very thing the

book needs in order to succeed. The conjunctions disorient. The reader knows that what he is reading does not make sense, but he accepts the manipulation of his awareness because it is theoretically correct. And yet, paradoxically, Catch-22's stylistic absurdities further its purpose. The resulting sensation of frustration and absurdity is precisely what Heller intends his readers to feel.

Negation, Mystification,
Contradiction, and Irony

Complementing and compounding the confusion caused by Catch-22's structure is the mystification caused by its diction. Not only is it hard to follow the story line; it is also hard to make sense of the scenes. Catch-22's language obscures and contradicts what it tells -- working against itself, refusing to do what the reader expects of it. These ironic contradictions quickly become satirical, resulting in the novel's characteristic "bitter laughter."

One way in which Heller distorts language is negation. Major Major's father exploits the New Deal's farm subsidy program: "The more alfalfa he did not grow, the more money the government gave him, and he spent every penny he didn't earn on new land to increase the amount of alfalfa he did not produce."³¹ Or consider Yossarian's reflection on combat: "And if that wasn't funny, there were lots of things that weren't even funnier."³² Kennard has observed that this negation "gives [the]

effect of language constantly trying, but always just failing, to describe or define." ³³ Moreover, in reading such sentences, the reader is asked not to deal with the positive units of ordinary grammar, but to puzzle out their inverses. Such writing simply increases the difficulty of understanding what has been written. It also serves as a two-level parody: of the subject of the sentence, because it pokes fun at the idea of the virtuous farmer, and of the ordinary opposite of the negated sentence actually written.

What Heller does not negate, he mystifies. He pairs with his nouns adjectives that seem to describe them, but in fact suggest something indelibly unfamiliar. The chaplain hurries along a railroad's "fossilized wooden ties" into a clearing where sits Huple's pet, a "luminous pearl-gray cat." Aarfy's ineptitude is "fustian [and] moon-faced," and Yossarian's hospital visitors appear "familiar, though esoteric." The Pianosa graveyard is "yellow as hay and green as cooked cabbage." When Milo turns indignant with Yossarian, "his slim long nose flicker[s] spasmodically between his black eyebrows and his unbalanced orange-brown moustache like the pale, thin flame of a single candle."³⁴

Ordinarily, modifiers clarify their objects. Unexpected modifications like these, however, cut against the meaning of the principal words. They do not describe; they transmogrify. Such description, because of the way it makes the familiar strange,

lays the groundwork for Catch-22's irony and satire.

Characteristic of Heller's writing style, even more than transmogrification, is contradiction. Catch-22's author litters his book with contradictory statements and witting non sequiturs.

The chaplain was sincerely a very helpful person who was never able to help anyone. . . .(35)

.

"It looks like a good year for artichokes. The crops were very bad."(36)

.

Orr was an eccentric midget, a freakish, likeable dwarf with a smutty mind and a thousand valuable skills that would keep him in a low income group all his life.(37)

What makes these contradictions sharp-edged ironies is their accuracy. Their opposing components are both true, both accurate. The second represents an outcome or conclusion from the first's premise, a conclusion that should not be, theoretically or ideally, but in fact is. A reader, instead of chuckling at their ridiculousness, is likely to observe sad but true.* Con-

* These are subtle beliefs, suitably attacked with irony. When the target is a cliché, Heller uses a blunter instrument, the simple making of jokes. The overly-familiar story of the dispossession of the American Indian is deflated by the story of the White Half-Oat tribe, who are tracked, stalked, and finally dry-gulched by oil prospectors. The sturdy yeoman farmer, an archetype in American social thought from before Thomas Jefferson to after John Ford, is discredited in Major Major's father, "a long-limbed farmer, a God-fearing, freedom-loving, law-abiding rugged individualist who held that federal aid to anyone but farmers was creeping socialism." And the simplest, most blaring example is Heller's belly-laugh at Old Money's expense: "Nately's mother, a descendant of the New England Thorntons, was a Daughter of the American Revolution. His father was a Son of a Bitch."(38)

sider Orr. In the best of all possible worlds -- Robinson Crusoe's isle, or the society posited in guidance-counselors' handbooks -- Orr's mechanical competence would keep his services in constant, lucrative demand. The reader here is conscious of the gap between received ideas and reality: he knows that Orr ought to prosper, and yet knows also how much handymen are paid. Similarly, any reader can be reminded by the chaplain that the best-intentioned Samaritan can nonetheless be ineffective. These contradictions manifest the source of Catch-22's satirical power: the reversal of the reader's expectations. They point out, as Robert Protherough has observed, the difference between reality and the implicitly-accepted social myth.³⁹

Heller consistently maintains this contrast between the nature of the events he chronicles and the tone in which he records them. Catch-22 is a book about war, yet one that is laced with humor. In the book's most macabre death, Kid Sampson is diced by a propellor and "rains all over" the beach.⁴⁰ The observation's accuracy makes the tragedy keener by contrast. Similar are the details of Milo's triumphal entry into Palermo.

Small boys and girls had been released from school and were lining the sidewalks in new clothes, waving flags. Yossarian and Orr were almost speechless now. The streets were jammed with joyous throngs, and strung overhead were huge banners bearing Milo's picture. . . . Sinking invalids blew kisses to him from windows. Aproned shipkeepers cheered ecstatically from the narrow doorways of their shops. Tubas crumped. Here and there a person fell and was trampled to death. Sobbing old women swarmed through each other frantically around the slow-moving truck to touch Milo's shoulder or press his hand.(41)

This passage mixes the tragic with an over-broad splendor reminiscent of opera. At other times cruelty will mix with flat earnestness: for example, when Milo tells one of his pilots that he must strafe the airfield. "'We have no choice,' Milo informed him resignedly. 'It's in the contract.'"⁴² Horrors are narrated in complete nonchalance. In this Heller follows other satirists. Exactly so did Swift recommend that Irish infants be dressed "hot from the knife," and Mark Twain record his Missourians' agreement that Injun Joe's burial was just as much fun as his hanging would have been.

In addition to satirizing, however, Heller's differentiation of tone and subject adds to the novel's treatment of war as absurd. As Kennard observes: "By introducing these unexpected attitudes in a very casual way [which here is to say, by treating the tragic in a very casual way], [Heller] not only challenges the traditional value system, but suggests through his tone that nothing shocking is being said, thus doubling the shock effect."⁴³ There is nothing rational about a world in which death is normally occasioned by celebrations and even the most gruesome accident can be found to have a funny side. One cannot even be sure what attitude underlies the sentences that report such incongruities. It may be dead-pan satire. On the other hand, if the world is as absurd as Catch-22 says it is, it may be only objectivity.

Comic Relief and Validating Detail

To sustain satire, across Catch-22's four hundred and forty-three pages, is a major accomplishment. The problem is to keep it fresh over that distance -- to ensure that its endemic presence does not immunize the reader to its anger. Heller avoids this in three ways. The first is by intensifying the horrors as the novel draws toward its close. Except for Clevinger, who vanishes in Chapter Ten, none of the book's important characters are killed or lost in action until Chapter Twenty-Eight, when Orr drifts away from his ditched bomber. It is only in the last hundred-odd pages that Dunbar, Dobbs, Nately, Kid Sampson, McWatt, Doc Daneeka, and Snowden die.⁴⁴ The grisliness of their leave-takings increases, too: where Clevinger simply flies into a cloud without flying out, Snowden's fatal wound is described in grim detail. And it is only in Chapter Thirty-Nine that the squalid, random cruelty of the world, implicit throughout the book, shows itself directly in Yossarian's walk through Rome. If the reader has grown accustomed to Catch-22's persistent satire, this escalation of horror can jar him out of it.

Second, and perhaps more important, is comic relief, however odd it sounds to speak of comic relief in Catch-22. The allusions are sometimes mordant: for example, Chapter Twenty-Four opens, "April had been the best month of all for Milo." A sizeable majority of jokes, however, provide innocent humor, relieving what otherwise might be a stream of sarcasm. Doc

Daneeka regards the Pacific as "a body of water surrounded on all sides by elephantiasis and other dread diseases."⁴⁵ The chaplain, accused of unloading a "hot tomato," is an Anabaptist; Yossarian remarks to him that the "fighting 256th Squadron" can be thought of as "two to the fighting eighth power."⁴⁶ And M & M Enterprises' activities, as Milo summarizes them, suggest what might have happened had James Joyce (or Edward Lear) been conscripted into the Quartermaster Corps:

"Peas?"

"That are on the high seas. We've got boatloads of peas that are on the high seas from Atlanta to Holland to pay for the tulips that were shipped to Geneva to pay for the cheeses that must go to Vienna M.I.F."

"M.I.F.?"

"Money in Front. The Hapsburgs are shaky."

"Milo."

"And don't forget the galvanized zinc in the warehouse at Flint. Four carloads of galvanized zinc from Flint must be flown to the smelters in Damascus by noon of the eighteenth, terms F.O.B. Calcutta two percent ten days E.O.M. One Messerschmitt full of hemp is due in Belgrade for a C-47 and a half full of those semi-pitted dates we struck them with from Khartoum. Use the money from the Portuguese anchovies we're selling back to Lisbon to pay for the Egyptian cotton we've got coming back to us from Mamaroneck and to pick up as many oranges as you can in Spain. Always pay cash for naranjas."(47)

Third, and perhaps least expected, is realism. What one notices first about Catch-22 are its surreality and humor, but scattered throughout the book are countless realistic details, tentpins spiking the novel's fantasies into the solid ground of

believability. Crazy things are done naturally. The narrative focus may spin and loop, the characters may be caricatures or symbols. In the middle of this confusion, however, the narrative eye repeatedly finds stable foci, however brief, on substantial, undeniably real details. The concrete particular validates the surreal tableau. "The mounting and carrying out of the main mission of the Combined Strategic Air Command was perhaps the main air war story of World War II. It had all the drama, irony, and insanity of a Catch-22 -- the novel which was drawn out of the deep-down guts and heart of its prime effort." That accolade -- a signal honor, for saying that the war had been like the book, and not vice versa -- was paid by James Jones.⁴⁸

The officers of the other five planes in each flight arrived in trucks for the general briefing that took place thirty minutes later. The three enlisted men in each crew were not briefed at all, but were carried directly out on the airfield to the separate planes in which they were scheduled to fly that day, where they waited around with the ground crew until the officers with whom they had been scheduled to fly swung off the rattling tailgates of the trucks delivering them and it was time to climb aboard and start up. Engines rolled over disgruntledly on lollipop-shaped hardstands, resisting first, then riding smoothly awhile, and then the planes lumbered around and nosed forward lamely over the pebbled ground like sightless, stupid, crippled things until they taxied into the line at the foot of the landing strip and took off swiftly, one behind the other, in a zooming, rising roar, banking slowly into formation over mottled treetops, and circling the field at even speed until all the flights of six had been formed and then setting course over cerulean water on the first leg of the journey to the target in northern Italy or France.(49)

Passages such as the above make it believable that Yossarian is actually engaged in the air war. They provide sufficient visual

and auditory imagery to justify acceptance of his reactions to it. Other details of description lend credibility to fantastic occurrences. Major Major may seclude himself to an extent uncommon even among commanding officers, but the office in which he hides is a real building, with its "dingy celluloid window," close by two olive-drab trailers on cinder-blocks and a tent where a gray cat suns itself. When Chaplain Tappman flees that office, a ridiculous act based on a false premise, it is through the branches of a visualizable forest that he scrambles. The reader sees with him the light scattered by the leaves overhead, feels the sting of resisting branches. Orr may be a character half-symbolic and half-comic, and his conversations with Yossarian built around inane riddles, but their unintelligible, teasing sentences are interwoven with the down-to-earth actions of a mechanic tuning up a stove.

Even Catch-22's tallest tales add to its realism. For a tall tale is to some human activity or incident what an archetype is to a human being: an exaggeration that in its grand characteristics subsumes the particularities of its real-world copies, so that in it each individual can recognize the copy he knew. The novel's irrational rules parody the administrative procedures used under General George Marshall and Viscount Montgomery, who realized that the war would be won by out-managing the enemy. M & M Enterprises represents on a grand scale all the small-time rackets run during the war: the squadron- or group-based cooper-

atives whose members would steal jeeps to liberate breweries to buy beer to cool in the auxiliary gas tanks of bombers flown for that purpose into the lower stratosphere. Milo Minderbinder is From Here to Eternity's Jim O'Hayer writ large. He is the "source" from whom, on Guadalcanal, First Sergeant Welsh buys his gin.

The courtmartial of Clevinger, in Chapter Eight, demonstrates how Catch-22's satire and fantasy are authenticated by its detail. The trial is truly a farce. Lieutenant Scheisskopf, Clevinger's accuser, serves also as judge, prosecutor, and defense attorney. Clevinger is charged with failure to sir superior officers when not interrupting them, as well as "moperly, high treason, provoking, being a smart guy, listening to classical music, and so on." His inquisitors confuse each other's feet and muddle in Marx-Brothers fashion the taking and reading-back of the transcript. The presiding colonel blusters at him:

"Justice is a knee in the gut from the floor on the chin at night sneaky with a knife brought up down on the magazine of a battleship sandbagged underhanded in the dark without a word of warning. Garroting. That's what justice is From the hip."

Clevinger is found guilty, "of course, or he would not have been accused, and since the only way to prove it was to find him guilty it was their patriotic duty to do so." Two members of the court are also sentenced to penal servitude. And then, after pages in which he has sought not to suspend the reader's disbelief, but rather to provoke it, Heller brings his entire fantas-

tic, satirical construction telescoping back down into reality. Clevinger is sentenced to walk fifty-seven punishment tours. "A punishment tour for Clevinger," Heller explains, switching his satiric tone for a resentfully fatalistic griping reminiscent of Jones, "was fifty minutes of a weekend hour spent pacing back and forth before the provost marshal's building with a ton of an unloaded rifle on his shoulder."⁵⁰ A tired young man marching unwillingly in the afternoon heat: that is the reader's last picture of the courtmartial, and it is a picture realistic enough to validate the fantasy that has preceded it.

The Role of Allegory

In its details, Catch-22 is concerned to depict the facts of service in the Army Air Corps. It lacks, however, the ties to the physical reality of the Second World War that characterize Jones' Army trilogy. Catch-22 is an allegorical novel, a Twentieth-Century morality play -- about the war as Everyman is about life in the Renaissance. The characters' interaction serves as a debate of ideas. Their fates represent Heller's refereeing of that colloquium, not dramatizations of the horrors of combat. This allegorization adds universality to Catch-22.

Each of Catch-22's locales embodies a concept. The connotations of each setting count for more, in terms of the novel's ultimate purpose, than the climate or terrain. The United States, Pianosa, and other locations associated with the war effort, as Mike Frank has pointed out, form a vast archi-

pelago under the jurisdiction of thanatos. Against this is set Italy, a warm, friendly country that survives wars by losing them and whose brothels are shrines sacred to eros. Everyman Yossarian's destination is Sweden, the terrestrial paradise where a shelteringly benevolent government aids its people to enjoy long lives of comfort, intelligence, and promiscuity. Milo's fabulous success is made all the more magical by reaching its apogee in Sicily, Malta, Egypt, Oran, and Iraq, the lands of the Arabian Nights. Heller's military hospitals, unlike Jones' grim wards of cripples and amputees, are places of refuges, sanctuaries -- clean, well-lit places, even if at Catch-22's end their lights are slowly dimming.⁵¹

Yossarian's squadron-mates are the tale's Virtues and Vices. Milo Minderbinder, battenning on holocaust, represents the military-industrialist complex. Ex-Pfc. Wintergreen, his rival and eventual business partner, personifies bureaucracy, called into existence by the war, and without whom the war effort could not be maintained. Lieutenant Scheisskopf is the martinet. Clevinger is the intellectual rationalizer of war and retribution. Nately is the naive, idealistic patriot. Chaplain Tappman is the good pastor, Corporal Whitcomb the debaser of faith into commercial slogans. Dunbar and Dr. Stubbs, members of what is referred to only as the other squadron, are doppelganger for Yossarian and Doc Daneeka; they illustrate their doubles' frame of mind and doing what their consciences should dictate. These

qualities help make Catch-22's plot more than the interaction of personalities. In conjunction with the book's other symbols and motifs, they extend the novel into the realm of allegory.

The Author's Presence:
The Final Remove

Catch-22, because of the complexities of its presentation, is less one man's attempt to record his experience of the Second World War than an author's attempt to make something out of that conflict. The adventures of Yossarian provide Heller with a chance to attack war in general. To do this, he alienates the reader from the story. The book's confusing structure and language serve him in this task, forcing the reader to remove his attention from the narrative in order to figure out exactly what is going on. The satire plays its part, by setting against the book's reports of callousness and paradox the reader's own standards of what is effective, sensible, and just. Finally, by making his tale an allegory, Heller is able to deal with and defeat war on the level of ideals, where the reader knows he is not following the interaction of characters but balancing abstract philosophical arguments. And the combined effect of these alienating techniques is greater than the sum of their individual effects. This synergism represents what one infers from the presence of extraordinary methods of narration, satire, and philosophizing: the intrusion of an author between the reader and the reality purportedly depicted. To distance his readers

from the story he tells them, Heller uses his presence to add this final remove.

The author's own presence is, or can be, an important ingredient of every work he creates. It is this personal dimension of fiction that helps make the difference, I believe, between storytelling and literary art. The difference, let's say, between Somerset Maugham and Andre Gide. . . . In every work of fiction that we do agree is good, it might well be found that the author himself is there invisibly as one of the characters -- and usually as one of the more interesting characters. . . .

For my own part, I find it almost impossible to read anything by Salinger, Joyce, Proust, Dostoevski, or even Dickens and Conrad, without feeling as though the authors themselves were in the same room with me. I can almost hear them breathing and chewing beside me; and pretty much the same thing happens when I enjoy the writing of a new author about whom I know nothing. If I enjoy what I'm reading, I grow aware of the author as a personality. I wonder about him and want to know more; and already he has become a character in his own work -- unseen, unidentified and unnamed, but an important presence nonetheless.(52)

So Joseph Heller, discussing literature at a writers' colloquium.

The novelist had met his own critical standard.

Chapter V

"SOCIETY" AS AN ILLUSORY CONCEPT IN HELLER'S FICTION

A cursory glance at Catch-22 and Jones' novels yields one apparent contrast: that Jones' books are "war novels," while Catch-22 is an "anti-war novel." The contrast is inapposite. "War novels" like Leon Uris' Battle Cry or James Michener's Tales of the South Pacific focus a shallow sensibility on a limited subject. Their protagonists are vulnerable but invincible. Their minor characters are boldly-sketched stereotypes, kept on hand for pathos or comic relief. Tough commanders (always sergeants, captains, or colonels) win respect and love from their griping troops. The enemy, doomed to defeat, is nevertheless cunning. Jones deals with the same material, but with a conscious goal: to sand off the glamour of war, identify the other-than-heroic components of heroism, and portray the individual as a function of the group. As his books are other than simple "war novels," Catch-22 is likewise more than an "anti-war novel." Using the military to represent society, it argues that society is absurd: to behave as a social animal puts the individual's own sanity and life at risk.

The "Anti-War Novel," the Literature of the Absurd, and "Catch-22"

"The army as madhouse," Bruno Bettelheim wrote in 1976,

"seems to have become a fashionable cliché." He continued:

In a film about life under Fascism [Bettelheim was dealing with Lena Wertmuller's film, Seven Beauties, and critical reaction thereto], about the concentration camp, about survival, one might rightly ask: which army? The all-too efficient Nazi army, which we have seen killing prisoners, exterminating Jews, and which as long as it existed maintained a world of concentration camps? Or the army whose victory the prisoners prayed for and dreamed about, since they knew it was their only hope for survival? The army without which Hitler and Mussolini and their successors would now rule most of the world, making the German concentration camp part of the present -- is this army a worse madhouse? . . . One can understand why the many millions of Italians who were quite satisfied with Fascism would like to view the Second World War this way, since it would justify their acceptance of Fascism and its evils. But one cannot help wondering for what strange reasons American intellectuals have embraced this view of things.(1)

In the years preceding Bettelheim's essay, there had grown to maturity the genres to which he objected: the anti-war novel and anti-war film. In 1964 Stanley Kubrick had released Dr. Strangelove, in which a SAC bomber commander, worried about pollution of the nation's precious bodily fluids, orders his planes to attack Russia, and Slim Pickens waves a ten-gallon hat as he rides an H-bomb down to its target. Richard Lester followed, venturing into black humor by casting John Lennon as a Tommy in How I Won the War. Kurt Vonnegut wrote Slaughterhouse-Five, in which a character named Billy Pilgrim, "unstuck in time," wandered between farce, science fiction, and the firebombing of Dresden. Robert Altman's film M*A*S*H (1970) represents the paradigm. It congratulates its draftee heroes on their willingness to drink, wench, smoke marijuana, and play crude pranks on those who rely

on Army rules and ideals. The film's threefold argument is clear: the intelligent, sensitive man cannot take military service seriously; those who do take it seriously are buffoons; the only good that can come of armed service is the good one does in spite of the service.*

Catch-22 helped inspire the anti-war genre. The 1970 film version, directed by Mike Nichols, belongs to it. Catch-22's colonels and generals, neurotic militarily and sexually, took their places alongside M*A*S*H's Major Burns, a philandering would-be martinet. Slaughter-House Five focused on the destruction of Dresden; Catch-22's jokes ended with a bombing raid on an undefended village, Yossarian's walk through the squalor of Rome, and Snowden's death. But it was only in the 1970 film version that Catch-22 belongs to the anti-war genre, for the 1961 novel remains a different work altogether.

Anti-war novels present the military as an aberrant subculture, as an asylum. The patients may be in charge and may threaten the sane, but it remains an asylum, an island of absurdity in a sane, coherent, natural world. Catch-22 does not

* By 1980, the motif had penetrated the work of directors as traditional as Sam Fuller. Fuller inserted a battle-in-the-insane-asylum sequence into a very traditional "war movie," The Big Red One. But The Stunt Man, issued that same year, showed how obligatory this treatment had become. In it, in a movie-within-the-movie, a director making an avowedly "anti-war movie" offhandedly announces of his hero, a flier downed behind enemy lines: "When the Germans capture him, they throw him into an insane asylum."

share this view. It satirizes the military specifically, but not exclusively, or even particularly. Catch-22 treats the military as a paradigm of society. When Heller's military firemen abandon a raging fire in order to deal with a threat which never materializes, the satire only superficially attacks the Air Corps' operating procedures. Heller's real attack is against social organization, and how it can direct men to ignore realities in favor of purely theoretical contingencies.

"A few friends I have who are Republicans embraced this book immediately," Heller commented. "I thought it was a liberal book, and they said, 'No, it's not a liberal book, it's anti-everything.'"² "Anti-everything," an accurate description, points out Catch-22's identity as a novel of the Absurd. The literature of the Absurd presents a universe in which there is no sense -- no God, no order, no shaping or explaining logic, no causality.

The Absurdist vision may be defined as the belief that we are trapped in a meaningless universe and that neither God nor man, theology or philosophy, can make sense of the human condition. . . . The "new" logic, with its acceptance of the illogical, and modern science, with its denial of causality and its concept of entropy, elevate chaos to the level of scientific fact. Recent sociological tracts argue convincingly that we are a lonely crowd of organization men, growing up absurd. Modern existential philosophy warns that we face a loss of self in a fragmented world of technology that reduces man to the operational and functional. Each of these theories seems to lend support to what certain writers have believed for a long time, that ours is a disintegrating world without a unifying principle, without meaning, without purpose: an absurd universe.(3)

In Catch-22, absurdity manifests itself in neurotic characters, senseless actions, and paradoxical rules.* Significantly, Heller identifies the cause of the absurdity: the individual's faith and involvement in human society.

Military service had demonstrated to both Jones and Heller how an individual could function as a part of his society. Both had witnessed how single men, dressed in uniform and drilled in groups, eventually came to act jointly, their lives interdependent in the mechanical and statistical senses. Jones had responded by heeding the gravitational attraction of the mass. His characters accepted the compromise of their personal identities in order to share in the life of the mass. Heller, by contrast, had based on similar experiences a novel in which the right choice for the individual was not just rebellion against his society, but ultimately flight to escape from it.

Each writer posed the same question: how is the individual to reconcile the conflicts of his personal and social roles? Jones' and Heller's differing resolutions of this problem derive

* One of the reasons that Catch-22 looks to the anti-war genre is that the anti-war genre occupies a borderland between traditional satire and the literature of the Absurd. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a satire is a work which uses sarcasm, irony, or ridicule to attack vice, folly, abuse, or evil. Like traditional satire, the anti-war novel or film derides the waste and cruelty of modern armies and wars. It extends this satire toward the realm of Absurdity with its grotesque, implausible characters and events. Its flippantly categorical rejection of traditional values (particularly the martial virtues) moves its attitude beyond scorn into alienation.

from the conditions under which they observed. Jones dealt with men in exigent circumstances. Especially in The Thin Red Line, his characters are confronted by risks too great for any single human, risks which will be survived only by the surviving members of a unit. To gain this corporate interest, it is necessary for each man to endanger his individual life. Significantly, no character ever preaches the point. It is something all understand.

In Catch-22 the opposite is true. At the time it is set, the war is won. It is only a matter of weeks until the Axis forces surrender. The risks Yossarian runs in flying missions are not compensated for by any advantage accruing therefrom to his squadron or country. He no longer must fear the consequences of belonging to a nation that has lost a war: he will never be sent to a slave labor camp, see his womenfolk carried off by the Japanese, or endure hard times because foreign interests have monopolized world markets and resources. The Allied Powers have achieved the goals they sought when they declared war. Yossarian has won title to these corporate rights of belonging to a victorious state. In legal terms, his rights are vested -- subject, however, to the possibility of defeasement. He will enjoy the advantages of being on the winning side only if he is not killed. The obstacles to his well-being come from those responsible for his welfare. He is exhorted to treat hopeful times as though they were desperate by displaying the self-abnegation appropriate

in war. Catch-22 falls outside Bettelheim's indictment because it deals with an army which has already defeated Hitler and Mussolini. Although this army has become a madhouse, this is because it persists in acting as though the Axis powers were still a threat. In such circumstances, society has gone amok; and all the individual can do is separate himself from it.

Fervent Homogeneity:
The Social Background of "Catch-22"

Catch-22 is a novel of the 1950's. It is set in the 1940's, and is linked to the anti-war school of the 1960's and 1970's, but it remains a product of the decade in which it was written.* It portrays a neurotic society. This focus derives from, and indeed was made possible by, American outlooks and lifestyles during those years. This society manifested the neurotic symptoms which Catch-22 satirizes.

Early in Catch-22, Yossarian specifies his grievance against Colonel Cathcart:

"He never sends anyone home, anyway. He just keeps them around waiting for rotation orders until he doesn't have enough men left for the crews, and then raises the number of missions and throws them all back on combat status."(4)

* Catch-22 has dated so little that only rarely does the odd period term crop up. Nately's mother, for instance, instructs her son to remember that he is not a member of the Duke family, "whose income was derived from the sale to the unsuspecting public of products containing cancer-causing resins and tars." The contemporary reader may wonder momentarily why Heller, whose descriptive prose is so precise, preferred the gerund form to the adjective; but in the 1950's, carcinogenic had not yet passed into common use.

This describes the last phase of the Second World War. It also describes the 1950's. In this decade, the peoples who had defeated Hitler found that they were not to be demobilized at war's end. Instead, they were to remain on alert, to be "kept around waiting" for a resumption of hostilities, as the nationalist sentiment mustered against the Nazis suddenly re-focused on the Soviet Union.

Heller has commented:

What Catch-22 is more about than World War II is the Korean War and the Cold War. The elements that inspired the ideas came to me from the civilian situation in this country in the 1950's when we did have such things as loyalty oaths to say when we were at war in Korea and MacArthur did seem to be wanting to provoke a war against China, when Dulles was taking us to the brink of war against Russia every other week and it seemed inevitable that we were going to plunge right into another major war.

Until that time we were in a process of restoring ourselves. The same factionalism, the same antagonism, the mortal enmity that exists between groups today in this country existed then as well. But to me it was a new phenomenon. I chose the war (World War II) as a setting because it seemed to me we were at war. Certainly that was the start of the civil rights movement, for example. There were whites who wanted to kill every black. . . .

Then there was the same type of antagonism developing between (Senator) Joseph McCarthy -- and Nixon and his committee -- and people, who, well, it then was called the Communist conspiracy. Teachers and Quakers were being fired. There was a kind of war going on between groups.(5)

In these ways, the United States may have seemed at war during the 1950's. The ethic of peace and prosperity had proved as demanding as the ethic of war.

"Catch-22" as History

The 1950's were a decade in which, perhaps for the last time, American society turned on an axis drawn from Boston to Washington. Within this area one found the United States' largest urban areas; its centers of finance, communications, and government; a plurality of its corporate headquarters; its military academies and all the Ivy League schools; and its cultural and literary centers. There were no rival foci of power. California was being developed; Texas and the South remained a backward, economically colonized region where apartheid was the law. The rest of the United States seemed peripheral to this stretch of the Atlantic Coast.

This specific viewpoint is fundamental to the satire of Catch-22. Orr is "from the wilderness outside New York City."⁶ There is Colonel Cargill, whose awfulness as a marketing executive is known "throughout the civilized world, from Battery Park to Fulton Street."⁷ Natally's homes (excepting those in Southampton, London, Deauville, Paris, and the south of France) are in Philadelphia, New York, Maine, and Palm Beach.⁸ Those characters whose eccentricities satirize society come from the Northeast or else go unbiographed. Those from elsewhere are identifiable regional types: Midwestern farmers, bigoted Texans who look as if filmed in Technicolor, stoic Indians, tough sergeants from the deserts of the Southwest. Even these characters remain functions of the Northeastern outlook, because they show the stereotypes by

which Northeasterners represented their fellow countrymen.

More important, Catch-22 confronts the ideological mindset that characterized the Fifties: the Cold War, with its endemic fits of Red-hunting. Catch-22 reports such outbursts with its episode of the Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade.

While Captain Black was imagining, Colonel Cathcart was acting [to appoint Major Major to the position of squadron commander], and Captain Black was flabbergasted by the speed with which, he concluded, Major Major had outsmarted him. His great dismay at the announcement of Major Major's appointment as squadron commander was tinged with an embittered resentment he made no effort to conceal. When fellow administrative officers expressed astonishment at Colonel Cathcart's choice of Major Major, Captain Black muttered that there was something funny going on; when they speculated on the political value of Major Major's resemblance to Henry Fonda, Captain Black asserted that Major Major really was Henry Fonda; and when they remarked that Major Major was somewhat odd, Captain Black announced that he was a Communist.

"They're taking over everything," he declared rebelliously. "Well, you fellows can stand around and let them if you want to, but I'm not going to. I'm going to do something about it. From now on I'm going to make every son of a bitch who comes to my intelligence tent sign a loyalty oath. And I'm not going to let that bastard Major Major sign one even if he wants to."

Almost overnight the Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade was in full flower, and Captain Black was enraptured to discover himself spearheading it. He had really hit on something. All the enlisted men and officers on combat duty had to sign a loyalty oath to get their map cases from the intelligence tent, a second loyalty oath to receive their flak suits and parachutes from the parachute tent, a third loyalty oath for Lieutenant Balking-ton, the motor vehicle officer, to be allowed to ride from the squadron to the airfield in one of the trucks. Every time they turned around there was another loyalty oath to be signed. They signed a loyalty oath to get their pay from the finance officer, to obtain their PX supplies, to have their hair cut by the Italian barbers.

To Captain Black, every officer who supported his Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade was a competitor, and he planned and plotted twenty-four hours a day to keep one step ahead. He would stand second to none in his devotion to country. When other officers had followed his urging and introduced loyalty oaths of their own, he went them one better by making every son of a bitch who came to his intelligence tent sign two loyalty oaths, then three, then four; then he introduced the pledge of allegiance, and after that "The Star-Spangled Banner," one chorus, two choruses, three choruses, four choruses. Each time Captain Black forged ahead of his competitors, he swung upon them scornfully for their failure to follow his example. Each time they followed his example, he retreated with concern for some new strategem that would enable him to turn upon them scornfully again. . . .

"The important thing is to keep them pledging," he explained to his cohorts. "It doesn't matter whether they mean it or not. That's why they make little kids pledge allegiance even before they know what 'pledge' and 'allegiance' mean."(9)

As Heller summarized, "the combat men found themselves at the mercy of the people who were employed to serve them, the administrators."¹⁰ Against Milo's better judgment, the crusade invades even the mess hall.

"National defense is everybody's job," Captain Black replied to Milo's objection. "And this whole program is voluntary, Milo -- don't forget that. The men don't have to sign Piltchard and Wren's loyalty oath if they don't want to. But we need you to starve them to death if they don't. It's just like Catch-22. Don't you get it? You're not against Catch-22, are you?"(11)

The crusade intensifies until, at its height, it is deflated by Major _____ de Coverley, "the majestic, white-haired major with the craggy face and Jehovean bearing, who came back from Rome finally with an injured eye inside a new celluloid eye patch." "Gimme eat," Major _____ de Coverley announces,

crumpling a loyalty oath, "Gimme eat, I said". Then, as he notices airmen singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" in order to use the ketchup, salt and pepper, he thunders: "Give everybody eat!" "Give everybody eat," Milo echoes, and the crusade collapses.¹²

Anyone familiar with modern American history can recognize in this episode an outline of McCarthyism. What the contemporary reader may not recognize is that the specific elements of the Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade actually existed. Loyalty oaths were written. Those who refused to sign them were fired. (Thirty years after the Army-McCarthy hearings, states still inquire of would-be attorneys whether they have ever sought to overthrow the government.) The effect of the campaign was indeed to require continual reaffirmation of patriotism rather than to root out threats to national security: consider that the Congressional panel which investigated subversion named itself the Committee on Un-American (not Anti-American) Activities. Certain members of the crusade did look forward to the physical liquidation of subversives -- notably the Texas legislature, which considered making membership in the Communist Party a capital offense.* And as for the songs: one example is "The Ballad of Roger Young," written about an infantryman who won a posthumous Medal of Honor on New Georgia. The song survived V-J Day, when

* The moderates prevailed. When the bill left the state-house, Communist Party membership was punishable only by a maximum of twenty years in prison and a \$20,000 fine.(13)

its relevance logically should have ended. Its greatest vogue came in the next decade, when schoolchildren sang it at assemblies. The Loyalty Oath Crusade recalls McCarthyism even in its sudden end. McCarthyism was brought down in a single series of Congressional hearings -- a collapse exceptionally startling because of the extensive paranoia McCarthy had touched off.

Concurring Opinions:
Terry Southern and Richard Condon

Not only in terms of subject matter, but also in terms of literary generations, can Catch-22 be read as a novel of the 1950's.

Q. I was talking to Ralph J. Gleason [The Realist's interviewer began], and he was wondering how you feel about certain other writers' approaches to the insanity of our time. I'll name them one at a time. Louis-Ferdinand Celine?

A. Celine's book, Journey to the End of the Night, was one of those which gave me a direct inspiration for the form and tone of Catch-22.

Q. Nelson Algren?

A. The Man With The Golden Arm, which I had read earlier, became an almost unconscious influence in the form of this type of open hero. . . .

Q. Terry Southern?

A. I read The Magic Christian very quickly, and there were parts of it I liked enormously, and parts that just eluded me. I'm not a very good reader. I had not read his book before I wrote Catch-22, but I think those people Southern influenced through his book might very well have influenced me.

Q. Richard Condon?

A. I read The Manchurian Candidate and I read The Oldest Confession. When I read the review of The Manchurian Candidate, I was in about the middle of Catch-22, and I had a feeling, well, here's a guy who's writing the same book I am; I'd better read this quickly because he might have already written it.

And then I read it, and I think there's a great deal of similarity, first of all in the concern, or the use of political and social materials -- or products of the political and social conflicts -- as the basis for his book, and there's a great similarity in the attitude toward them, so that they are at once serious and at the same time it's almost like watching a kind of burlesque and also a kind of everyman show on stage.

There's a definite feeling of kinship with him, but I don't think they're the same kind of novel. Mine is, I suppose, an optimistic novel with a great deal of pessimism in it -- there's a very heavy sense of the tragic -- particularly toward the end, where I almost consciously have sought to re-create the feeling of Dostoevsky's dark passages, and I have one or two allusions to chapters in Dostoevsky.(14)

The Magic Christian and The Manchurian Candidate are little read today. Terry Southern faded from view with the 1960's, ending his career on a diminuendo of datedly naughty satire. Southern co-authored Dr. Strangelove, The Loved One, and Barbarella; he last drew attention in 1968 when his script for Easy Rider received an Oscar nomination. Richard Condon still survives, turning out potboilers; his latest concerns two professional assassins, husband and wife, who learn that each has received a contract to kill the other. Heller's comment may represent their most important memorial, for The Manchurian Candidate and The Magic Christian are useful in understanding Catch-22. They may be read as cribs. As Heller had recognized, all three novels were tests that identified similar symptoms. If the first two

are less successful than Catch-22, one finds in them common themes more accessibly presented. They concur with Heller, supporting his diagnosis -- that the society of the 1950's had tightened itself until it began to crack.

"The Magic Christian"

"The American way" as slightly absurd and vaguely hazardous -- this was the theme of The Magic Christian. Terry Southern's novel concentrated on culture: the received ideas, social norms, and conventions which defined American society. "This book was basically shaped by certain events, and by values otherwise manifest, over the last few years" -- before denying similarities with any persons living or dead, so Southern opened his libel disclaimer.

Each chapter of The Magic Christian relates an episode in the career of Guy Grand, billionaire. Grand devotes himself to "making it hot for them" -- "them" being other people. In the novel's opening chapter, as Grand's train is about to pull away from a station platform, he buys a hot-dog from a vendor and hands the man a five-hundred-dollar bill. The vendor realizes he cannot give change; he runs after the train. Grand reaches out frantically for the bill, always managing just to miss it, keeping the vendor running the full length of the platform until the train leaves him behind. The vendor is left with five hundred dollars, and Grand has bought a ludicrous performance.

Grand's succeeding adventures follow a similar pattern,

which eventually becomes predictable and tedious. Grand pays a man six thousand dollars to eat a traffic ticket. Sky-writing ethnic slurs above a crowd, he foments a multilateral race riot. He organizes a dog show, then attends with a disguised black panther which devours several miniature best-of-breeds. He bribes boxers to throw fights in a mincingly homosexual manner. In Chicago, he erects a huge concrete vat with a gas burner underneath, fills the vat with offal, blood, and large-denomination bills, lights the gas, and leaves the citizens to balance greed against repugnance.

Every chapter closes with a variant of the refrain, "It cost him a pretty to keep clear." Making it hot for them means finding every man's price. Grand humiliates his fellow man, secure in the knowledge that he maintains the ultimate social more, financial compensation. The hot-dog vendor of Chapter One, who tries to return a bill he cannot change, is the novel's only honorable man. Every other character chooses to belittle himself.

Some of Grand's victims consult a psychiatrist -- who, unknown to them, is one of their tormentor's accomplices. "The trouble is in ourselves, you see," the headshrinker warns.¹⁵ Although the psychiatrist speaks in deadpan jest, Southern means for his diagnosis to be taken as true.

Grand is really a personification of his society. He embodies the financial and industrial interests that support it;

moreover, the inspiration for his pranks comes directly from society.* He leaves a trail of lunatic behavior, creating an environment of worldly magnificence in which something is freakishly, absurdly wrong. Because Grand represents society, Southern implies that society is inherently absurd; it itself is to blame for the folly and inanities that beset its members.

Grand mocks people by offering unheard-of rewards at unnecessary costs. Grand does pay a pretty penny to avoid trouble over his stunts, but he does in fact avoid it. Both these examples show that, in The Magic Christian, money demonstrably compensates all grievances. Materialism thus becomes an implicit, ingrained, and universal social bond; nothing is too silly to do if one is being paid for it.

Having established this societal norm, Southern uses it to attack the idea of society. He satirizes people who sacrifice their personal integrity in order to conform to it. Grand's victims are satisfied to take Grand's money, but no reader will agree that they are right to do so: the stunts they do to earn it are too ridiculous and humiliating. Southern thus mocks what he suggests is the defining bond of post-war American society. Heller's attack would be more comprehensive, it would challenge the very idea that social bonds exist.

*Grand is essentially a parodist; his stunts involve linking people's desires and expectations with their worst fears. The Chicago example illustrates. In an example of abstraction ad absurdum, Grand confronts the city with the unpleasant foundations of its wealth.

"The Manchurian Candidate"

The Manchurian Candidate (published, like The Magic Christian, in 1959) opens with the Stateside return of Sergeant Raymond Shaw. Raymond comes home both as a war hero and as an unknowing agent of the KGB. While on patrol in Korea, Raymond's squad (commanded by one Major Marco) was taken prisoner. All were brainwashed to forget the experience. Raymond was conditioned -- programmed to obey instructions given him after exposure to a specific stimulus. This stimulus is the appearance, in a game of solitaire, of the queen of diamonds. The purpose is to make him a completely unconscious, reliable assassin.

Crucial to Raymond's mission are his family connections. His mother is a contemporary Lady Macbeth. She is married to Senator John Yerkes Iselin, a powerful demagogue. "I hold here in my hand," Iselin thunders, "a list of two hundred and seven persons who are known to the Secretary of Defense as being members of the Communist party and who, nevertheless, are still working and shaping the policy of the Defense Department."¹⁶ Unknown to Raymond, his mother is also his KGB case officer.

Major Marco, meantime, has nightmares in which he recalls the brainwashing sessions. Working with Army Intelligence and the FBI, Marco surmises the truth about Raymond. The novel's plot becomes a race to issue Raymond orders. In the last chapter, Raymond carries a sniper's rifle into a spotlight booth overlooking the rostrum of a political convention. On that ros-

trum are three people: the presidential nominee, his running mate Johnny Iselin, and Raymond's mother. Raymond fires. His mother had ordered him to kill the candidate; instead, he kills Iselin and his mother, then himself.

For the reader familiar with Heller's style, certain passages in The Manchurian Candidate stand out as if italicized. Condon's style foreshadows Heller's so much that, were Condon's existence not well documented, his work might be vulnerable to reattribution, and through arguments less eccentric than those made on behalf of Bacon and Marlowe. "Marco was an intelligent intelligence officer," a typical sentence puns,¹⁷ and Condon's New York City anticipates Catch-22's Rome:

Columbus and Amsterdam avenues were the streets of the drunks, where the murders were done in the darkest morning hours, where there were an excessive number of saloons and hardware stores. They were connected by trains of brownstone houses whose fronts were riotously colored morning and evening and all day on Sunday by bursts and bouquets of Puerto Ricans, and beyond Amsterdam was Broadway, the bawling, flash street, the fleshy pig-eyed part of the city that wore lesions of neon and incandescent scabs, pustules of light and color in suggestively luetic lycopods, illuminating littered streets, filth-clogged streets that could never be cleansed because when one thousand hands cleaned, one million hands threw dirt upon the streets again. Broadway was patrolled by strange-looking pedestrians, people who had grabbed the wrong face in the dark when someone had shouted "Fire!" and were now out roaming the streets, desperate to find their own.(18)

The Manchurian Candidate portrays American society the same way Catch-22 will portray it: as a peacetime nation at war. Normal life bustles along, with its elections, romances, and flashy downtowns, while soldiers crawl through the mud of Korea

and spies carry out systematic campaigns of assassination.

This tension finds expression in the novel's sardonic tone. Condon relates chilling events in a style which alternates between calm and flippancy. His characters, events, and ideas are realistic cartoons -- too fantastic to make the book a roman a clef, but still troublingly familiar. Their capacity to disturb comes from the fact that Condon's menaces are sinister mirror images of his audience's ideals. In Condon's world, the destruction of liberty is a joint venture of commissars and ambitious Cold Warriors. An All-American boy -- tall, good-looking, intelligent, and a Medal-of-Honor Winner -- can become a ruthless silent killer for a totalitarian state. When Condon wrote, the American holies were said to be Mom, God, and flag; and the evil genius of the conspiracy is -- Mother herself.*

* The Manchurian Candidate is not Catch-22 because Condon is not as thorough-going as Absurdist than Heller. The Manchurian Candidate's satiric and surreal components are accessories to a competently-plotted thriller of the Robert Ludlum school. No reader need be troubled by Condon's vision of the world; he can be reassured that things are not crazy, that loyal counter-intelligence officers have things well in hand. Condon also sticks close to fact; his Johnny Iselin offers a speech-by-speech, claim-by-claim parody of Joseph McCarthy. He did not venture to create, as Heller did with Captain Black, a generalized demagogue. And while much of Condon's language suggests the obfuscating rhetoric of Catch-22, he aimed at comedy rather than absurdity. Within two pages, Raymond's mind is likened to an aircraft carrier, a nuclear reactor, and the feelers of an insect.(19) Such a lack of coordination argues that Condon aimed only at outlandish comparisons -- unlike Heller, whose deliberately strange language reinforces the absurdity of his fiction's events.

Southern depicted individuals who abased themselves in conforming to the standards of their culture. Condon suggested that a society's favorites might double as its most deadly enemies. Both writers concluded that "we have met the enemy, and he is us" (a phrase coined during the same years by Walt Kelly, in his comic strip Pogo). They anticipate Catch-22's argument that the enemy can be within -- that the enemy may be the authorities who order a man to risk his life for the good of his society, or even the individual who obeys to his own peril. Corroborating Heller's conclusion, they point out the absurdities within the society which inspired Catch-22.

The Absurdity of Society in "Catch-22"

Each writer of the Absurd has inverted a different, particular set of norms. Ionesco's subject was literature. The subtitle to The Bald Soprano, "Anti-Play," provides the clue. With dialogue that is stilted instead of believable, characters who appear, interact, and disappear to comply with dramatic conventions and not to purport to represent reality -- whose every element, in short, parodies an element of traditional theatre -- this one-act is to an ordinary play what a positron is to an electron: of the same specifications, but opposite in charge. Ionesco's later plays have continued such reversals. One finds brides with three noses, settings that mystify instead of locating, well-briefed orators who are deaf-mutes and whose muteness is nonetheless eloquent. There is even the ultimate

absurdity, that one is supposed to watch and learn from something that is absurd.

At another extreme of Absurdism, a different set of norms are mocked by the humor of Woody Allen. Allen relies only partially upon mistaken identity, puns, sex, slapstick, and the comedian's other time-honored techniques. Instead, his humor is dotted with anecdotes which recall Goya's Caprichos. A man is jailed for immersing a dwarf in Bearnaise sauce. Under the influence of a mummy's curse, a museum's directors form a conga line and dance over a cliff. Such a pattern of bizarre transactions exceeds the comedian's traditional use of incongruities. The banal suddenly becomes strange and dangerous. According to Freud, the source of humor is embarrassment. Here the embarrassment comes from a realization that contemporary man has created things as ridiculous as Bearnaise sauce and conga lines. Allen makes such things lethal in order to demonstrate their silliness.

In Heller's fiction, the idea held up as absurd is the idea of society. To thine own self be true would be a proper epigraph for Catch-22, for the book's argument is this: There is no such thing as "society." There are only individual men; men who are associated, sometimes, by similar characteristics and interests. Insofar as an individual is obliged to defend interests other than his own -- to risk his life when it would not otherwise be at stake -- such association ("society") is absurd. When the interests of the individual and the mass diverge, the

individual should champion his own.

This rejection of the idea of society explains why Catch-22, a novel about contemporary life, can appropriately be set in the military. The legal historian Sir Henry Maine observed that as societies mature, their organization progresses from status to law to contract. The military is a society in which status determines rights and obligation, law takes a minor interstitial role, and contract plays no role at all. The military thus represents the reverse, a parody, of normal society -- a fitting environment for an Absurdist work.

To return to the comments Heller made in the month of the Cuban Missile Crisis:

I regard [Catch-22] essentially as a peacetime book. What distresses me very much is that the ethic that is often dictated by a wartime emergency has a certain justification when the wartime emergency exists, but when this thing is carried over into areas of peace -- when the military, for example, retains its enormous influence on affairs in a peacetime situation, and where the same demands are made upon the individual in the cause of national interest; the line that I like very much is when Milo tells Yossarian that he's jeopardizing his traditional freedoms by exercising them -- when this wartime emergency ideology is transplanted to peacetime, then you have this kind of lag which leads not only to very absurd situations, but to very tragic situations.
(20)

The wartime, emergency "ethic" of Catch-22 ordains that Yossarian and his squadron-mates should continue flying missions when the war has been won. Like the men of C-for-Charlie, each is to endanger his individual life for the collective good; but because Allied victory is a foregone conclusion, only the most thorough-

going, hard-bitten soldier -- for whom, because it is his profession, risking death is literally the way of life -- can be expected to accept this. The call to self-sacrifice becomes a means of attacking the idea of society. If an individual somehow has an interest in the lives of other men (that is, if society exists), it is logical that he should risk his life on their behalf. Heller argues that the first idea is absurd by demonstrating the ridiculousness of the second. The war is won; there is no need to keep risking one's life for others. And if a man has no duty to risk his life for others, then his loyalty must be to himself.

The only time when self-denial is appropriate, in Catch-22's view, is when society makes no demand, because the individual's personal interest requires such action.

Q. But you know what people will say -- and this is one of the things I meant before when I asked about people who might've found the book objectionable -- Yossarian deserts at the end. Now this is what people always say about pacifists and conscientious objectors: If this is the moral, then everybody should desert, and we would've lost the war.

A. I thought I had gone beyond that point by a discussion preceding his act of running. The last chapter or two is almost in the nature of disputation, in which all the possibilities are discussed and resolved. The answer to that one -- that if everybody deserts -- then he would be a damn fool not to.

When he says, "I'm tired, I have to think of myself, my country is safe now," he's told, "Well, suppose everyone felt that way," and he says, "Well, I'd be a damn fool to feel differently."

I also tried to make it very evident that the war was just about over.

Q. Would it have made any difference if the war weren't over?

A. Oh, certainly. I mean if this book had been set two or three years earlier, before the beachhead, then it would be a completely different book.

Q. Suppose he had flown that many missions, and it was still the middle of the war?

A. Well, if the book were written then -- if he had that many missions and the other conditions were the same, that he were being asked to fly more purely to help a superior officer achieve a promotion -- then I would've had him desert, because the replacements are waiting there, as they are at the end of the book; there are replacements ready. So there would not have been any great loss as far as the military effort were concerned.

But if you postulate this situation: It's right after Pearl Harbor, and we don't have enough planes, and we don't have enough men, and Hitler is in a dominant and threatening position, then it would be a completely different book.(21)

The survival of the individual is Catch-22's only constant, absolute value. Heller's thesis is that one ought to survive personally, no matter what the risk or whence it comes. The risk may be that of becoming a member of a defeated group, and come from a hostile foreign power. In such desperate circumstances, as after Pearl Harbor, one should fight, risking one's personal life, which is at hazard already. Alternatively, the risk may be that of being killed while pushing home a war that is de facto won. In such hopeful times, the enemy may be the members of one's own group, if they continue to regard organization, order, and self-compromise (the defining characteristics of society) as ends in themselves. In these circumstances, one can act for

oneself and, like Yossarian, take off running.

Society can be the enemy of the individual, and society need not be militaristic or corporate in order to be absurd. Even the simplest attempt at social regulation -- the minimalist society, Carlyle's anarchy and the constable -- creates paradox and contradiction. "There's no question that policemen are public servants," Heller commented, "but they're not in a position of servitude in relation to the people that they're supposed to serve."²²

To borrow a phrase from Orwell, the evil is groupthink: accepting blindly the dictates of society. To escape, one must do two things. First, the individual must realize the falsity of the loyalties urged upon him. That done, he must separate himself from the mass.

"Catch-22"'s Attacks on "Society"

Heller presses his attack on the idea of society in two ways. He creates in M & M Enterprises a model of a society, then demonstrates the ludicrous and tragic gap between what this paradigm is supposed to accomplish and what it really does. He also demonstrates the distortions created by a belief in mutual, reciprocal duties -- the hypocrisy such beliefs disguise and the absurdities they produce.

M & M Enterprises: A Representative Society

The rise of M & M Enterprises provides a fully-developed

demonstration of the falsity of the idea of society. Milo's syndicate features all the characteristics of a society. It exists to serve the individuals who comprise it, just as governments are instituted to provide for the common welfare and defense. It supposedly does this by facilitating transactions among its members, putting a soldier who would rather have an egg than two cents in touch with a farmer who would gladly trade an egg for two copper coins. The state performs the same functions, less explicitly, by creating a stable environment in which people may live unmolested and with clearly defined rights. Just as a society is commonly held to be more than the sum of its parts, so M & M Enterprise's members purportedly gain from the mere fact of their association; even if they do no trading themselves, the syndicate flourishes as trading mounts, and they gain this corporate advantage. And all men are members of the syndicate, as Milo points out: everybody has a share. Because it cuts across the lines of race, creed, and nationality, M & M Enterprises is really the grandest, most all-embracing society of all.

The reality of the syndicate gives the lie to its purported benevolence. The promised dividends never arrive. Near the novel's end, a skeptical flier demands his rights as a syndicate member; Milo responds by scrawling "A Share" on a piece of paper and handing it to him. Meantime, M & M Enterprises makes deals with the Germans, possibly directs anti-aircraft fire against the squadron on its mission to Orvieto, sabotages its

first-aid kits and emergency equipment, and finally bombs its airfield. No one gains from associating with M & M Enterprises; its benefits are illusory, but its perils are real. It does not exist as a joint-stock association. It exists only functionally, as a web of enterprise that consumes raw materials and produces death and lucre. And, like the militarized society that insists that men keep flying missions, M & M Enterprises is out of control. It feeds the squadron, but the squadron has more than it can use, and the syndicate keeps running, swallowing assets and generating profits. Feeding its members is coincidental to its existence. The syndicate careens relentlessly on, eventually hypnotizing even its founder.

This is shown by the two sets of puns buried in Milo's surname. The first pun plays off "minder" and "binder." As Heller noted, a theme of Catch-22 is that administrators achieve power over those whom they are supposed to serve. Milo, the squadron mess officer, minds (cares for the needs of) his comrades. He also binds them, as he orders them on supply flights across the Mediterranean, or bombs their landing strip. His name thus suggests the role he plays. The second pun is between "mind" and "bind." Despite Milo's fantastic business success, he is literally enthralled by commerce -- consumed by a drive to push speculation to its theoretical limits. It is his temptation as well as his talent. Eventually he becomes incapable of taking any action which is not commercially oriented. The last time

Milo appears in Catch-22, he sincerely means to help Yossarian look for Nately's Whore's kid sister. Nonetheless, at the faintest suggestion of potential profit (a policeman's chance remark about the smuggling trade) he abandons his friend in the Rome police station.

"Milo!" Yossarian yelled, and bounded forward impulsively to intercept him. "Milo, you've got to help me."

"Illegal tobacco," Milo explained to him with a look of epileptic lust, struggling doggedly to get by. "Let me go. I've got to smuggle illegal tobacco."

"Stay here and help me find her," pleaded Yossarian. "You can smuggle illegal tobacco tomorrow."

But Milo was deaf and kept pushing forward, nonviolently but irresistibly, sweating, his eyes, as though he were in the grip of a blind fixation, burning feverishly, and his twitching mouth slavering. He moaned calmly as though in remote, instinctive distress and kept repeating, "Illegal tobacco, illegal tobacco."(22)

Milo's furious trading has cost him his free will -- bound his mind. Heller would return to this theme -- the idea that the greatest transmogrifications of personality are those which are self-inflicted, that the most absurd behavior is that which persists in the absence of a real stimulus -- in Something Happened.

Symptoms of the Neurosis

Nationalism -- a strong belief in one particular society -- is an altered state of conscience. Heller demonstrates that it is a fever (and not an ecstasy) by analyzing its symptoms. Instead of fever, one might better say reflex; for the

rationalizations offered to Yossarian are characteristically unthinking. That one must fly missions is assumed. To continue the physiological metaphor, it is the lack of a stimulus that makes these responses absurd. They are rationalizations, not reasons, because they are inappropriate.

Heller attacks the idea of self-sacrifice in two ways. First, he satirizes those characters who advocate it, presenting them as either opportunists or fools. Yossarian's commanding officers see their society as a gridwork of holes and themselves as pegs with a duty to conform to those holes. Substance is second to style. General Peckem likes his men to bomb on target because the aerial photographs look neater; Colonel Cathcart accordingly prays for a tighter bomb pattern. Their desire to meet expectations is the reason they insist on Yossarian flying missions, just as it will lead them later to order him home as a war hero.

"Colonel Cathcart wants to be a general and I want to be a colonel, and that's why we have to send you home."

"Why does he want to be a general?"

"Why? For the same reason I want to be a colonel. What else have we got to do? Everyone teaches us to aspire to higher things. A general is higher than a colonel, and a colonel is higher than a lieutenant colonel. So we're both aspiring."(24)

Ex-Pfc Wintergreen expresses the same view. "If I'm destined to unload these lighters at a profit and pick up some Egyptian cotton cheap from Milo, then that's what I'm going to do," he tells Yossarian. "And if you're destined to be killed over

Bologna, then you're going to be killed, so you might just as well go out and die like a man."²⁵

The character most deluded by such false understandings is Clevinger. Witness his penultimate conversation with Yossarian:

"What about the men on the mainland?" Clevinger demanded with just as much emotion. "Are they supposed to get their asses shot off just because you don't want to go? Those men are entitled to air support!"

"But not necessarily by me. Look, they don't care who knocks out those ammunition dumps. The only reason we're going is because that bastard Cathcart volunteered us."

"Oh, I know all that," Clevinger assured him, his gaunt face pale and his agitated brown eyes swimming in sincerity. "But the fact remains that those ammunition dumps are still standing. You know very well that I don't approve of Colonel Cathcart any more than you do." Clevinger paused for emphasis, his mouth quivering, and then beat his fist down softly against his sleeping bag. "But it's not for us to determine what targets must be destroyed or who's to destroy them or --"(26)

The other advocates of this view use it to their own advantage. By ignoring what he knows, Clevinger ignores his own interests. He vanishes during a routine mission, sacrificed for the sake of men he never knows, of whose exigencies he has only been assured. Clevinger is a victim of society.

Second, under the needless application of the "wartime ethic," under the impetus of a fervent belief in "society," life grows distorted. What should be familiar becomes strange. Hence the mystifying descriptions of everyday items. Hence also the grotesques that Catch-22's airmen have become, for their bizarre

characters can best be understood as neuroses caused by this pressure. Society demands such behavior of those who would belong to it. Hungry Joe, the photojournalist, is reduced to making frantic snapshots of naked women. Clevinger, the intellectual, rationalizes instead of hunting truth. Corporal Whitcomb is a spiritual consultant who believes in mailing out form-letters of condolence. Colonel Cargill, the business consultant, specializes in losing money.

Eventually, the result is a destruction of language.

Catch-22 opens with Yossarian censoring mail.

Death to all modifiers, he declared one day, and out of every letter that passed through his hands went every adverb and every adjective. The next day he made war on articles. He reached a much higher plane of creativity the following day when he blacked out everything in the letters but a, an, and the. That erected more dynamic interlinear tensions, he felt, and in just about every case left a message far more universal. Soon he was proscribing parts of salutations and signatures and leaving the text untouched. . . .

When he had exhausted all the possibilities in the letters, he began attacking the names and addresses on the envelopes, obliterating whole homes and streets, annihilating whole metropolises with careless flicks of his wrist as though he were God.(27)

In the novel's closing chapters this grammatical nihilism is confirmed by the memoranda of General Peckem. "General Peckem laid great, fastidious stress on small matters of taste and style," Heller writes.

The prose in the memoranda of other officers was always turgid, stilted, or ambiguous. The errors of others were inevitably deplorable. Regulations were always stringent, and his data never was obtained from a reliable source, but always were obtained. General Peckem

was frequently constrained. Things were often incumbent upon him, and he frequently acted with greatest reluctance. It never escaped his memory that neither black nor white was a color, and he never used verbal when he meant oral.(28)

This change demonstrates that language has deteriorated as the number of required missions has risen. At Catch-22's start, meaninglessness could be achieved only by the literal obliteration of language. At its end, meaninglessness comes from the precise use of language. General Peckem's vocabulary is too prissy to communicate. Not only does its formality cut against the easy (if less precise) comprehension that makes colloquial language popular. It also shows that its author Peckem (true to character) is more concerned with single words than with the sense of his message.

That society is absurd explains why Catch-22's satire fastens so savagely upon rules. In Catch-22, rules function unjustly. Administrative schema prove both under- and over-inclusive. Gus and Wes, the medical corpsmen, divide their patients into two classes: those with temperatures above 102 degrees, and those with temperatures below 102 degrees. The first are hospitalized, the latter dosed with laxatives and discharged. This categorization fails, however. Those men who have temperatures of exactly 102 degrees are not treated at all, despite their four degrees of fever. The system thus treats some of the sick as well; and under it some of the well are treated as sick -- in particular Yossarian, who still enters the hospital

whenever he feels like it.

Rules do not codify intuition; they over-rule it. Form matters more than substance. In a triumph of a priori deduction over empiricism, Doc Daneeka, who has failed to parachute from a crashing plane in which he is listed as a passenger, is treated by his squadron-mates as dead de facto. When he protests his continued existence, Colonel Korn bars him from Group Headquarters on pain of being cremated. In the meantime, the rules conquer love: Mrs. Daneeka receives so many insurance dividends that she finally moves and leaves no forwarding address.

Nor are these flaws the worst into which rules can fall.

That worst flaw is paradox.

Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to.(29)

So often does Catch-22 construe rules into paradox that the novel's title is completely appropriate. Major Major, as Captain Black explains and others believe, is obviously a Communist because he refuses to sign a loyalty oath. Nonetheless, he cannot be allowed to sign, because that would defeat the crusade's purpose. There are also the discussion sessions held by Clevinger for Colonel Korn.

Under Colonel Korn's rule, the only people permitted to ask questions were those who never did. Soon the only people attending were those who never asked questions, and the sessions were discontinued altogether, since

Clevinger, the corporal [whom Captain Black believes to be a subversive because he wears eyeglasses and uses words like panacea and utopia] and Colonel Korn agreed that it was neither possible nor necessary to educate people who never questioned anything.(30)

In all these absurdities there is more than illogic and disingenuity. Rules are what society makes of individual events: the lessons it draws from past events, its means of organizing its responses to future occurrences. By making rules ridiculous, Heller argues once more that the idea of society is absurd -- any attempt at social organization will inevitably go wrong.

Flight As Responsibility

Ultimately, in such an environment, the meanings of effort and loyalty are inverted. Yossarian is urged to be loyal to his country, to his comrades. Because they are baseless, these loyalties are false; the only true loyalty is the one he is urged to ignore, the loyalty to self. And paradoxically, by keeping this faith, he is indeed faithful to his comrades. He demonstrates the answer to their common problem. This adds the final line to Catch-22's epigraph: Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Appropriately, this discovery of loyalty requires action that is the opposite of action. "The monolithic society closes off every conventional area of protest or corrective action, and the only choice that's left to Yossarian is one of ignoble acceptance in which he can profit and live very comfortably -- but nevertheless ignoble -- or flight, a renunciation of that condi-

tion, of that society," Heller told The Realist. "This is an act of opposition or an act of protest. It's the only way left that he can protest without cutting his own head off. And he doesn't choose to do that . . . But the very act of doing what he does will stir up things"31 Flight thus becomes a form of action.

The Virtue of Selfishness

In understanding flight as action, one cannot ignore that it is flight. It is not enough to recognize society as a false idea. To assume responsibility for one's own life -- to make personally the decisions affecting it, to act oneself to protect it -- requires that the individual strike out on his own. If one knows that he is an individual, and that in numbers lies danger, why remain part of the mass? Especially when one's purpose is to show other people that they too have a choice?

Yossarian's breaking away is facilitated and foreshadowed by his background. Or, better said, by his lack of background: his lack of close ties means that the only bonds he must disregard are those that purportedly form society.

Q. Why did you have an Assyrian as the central character?

A. Because I was looking for two things. I got the idea, frankly, from James Joyce's placing Bloom in Dublin. I wanted somebody who would seem to be outside the culture in every way -- ethnically as well as others. . . .

But I wanted to get an extinct culture, somebody who could not be identified either geographically, or

culturally, or sociologically -- somebody as a person who has a capability of ultimately divorcing himself completely from all emotional and psychological ties. . . .

It was from [William Saroyan's "Twenty Thousand Assyrians"] that I first learned the Assyrians were extinct, or almost extinct. But my purpose in doing so was to get an outsider, a man who was intrinsically an outsider, who had the capability of being a complete outsider. It's hard for a person really to shake off all his roots. . . .

Yossarian will be able even to be outside his own family tradition. You know, his own family is never mentioned -- I think it's never mentioned -- brothers, sisters, father, mother. I forget now whether I refer to his grandmother and aunt, or other children's on the block. But he has no family. I'm not sure where he came from.(32)

The chaplain, likewise, stands outside society. "I am not that well informed about religion," Heller explained, "but I assume that Anabaptists are either extinct or not very militant. I was looking, again, for a religion that would sound familiar and yet would not have associations with any of our established religions."³³

The ability to divorce oneself completely from society is a virtue in the context of Catch-22. Although Yossarian seeks to motivate his comrades to follow his example, his escape is valuable primarily because of the good it does him personally. One, he realizes his responsibility -- educates himself. Two, he removes himself from a hostile environment. Benefit to others is inherent but incidental: for a man who has outwitted one form of self-sacrifice, it would be wrong to submit to a second compromise of individuality. The enlightenment offered by Catch-22 is

thus self-focused, with a tinge of pitilessness.

That this is a sub-message of Catch-22 is evidenced by a contemporaneous work by Heller: a January, 1962, review of Evelyn Waugh's The End of the Battle. Heller found the novel well-written but without substance, a dry exercise.

[Guy Crouchback's] only virtue is that he lacks vice. In the Waugh allegory he personifies middle-aged innocence, emasculated and bewildered in a world teeming with petty ambitions and small and nasty conspiracies. Yet, innocence in a man of forty is no longer innocence but stupidity. It was not innocence but stupidity that led Crouchback to cause the death of an invalid friend with a well-intentioned gift of whiskey in an earlier volume, just as it is stupidity in this volume that leads to the execution by the Communists of a Jewish refugee he has attempted to aid while on assignment to Yugoslavia. And it is not innocence but apathy -- although he tells himself otherwise -- that leads him to remarry his first wife [Virginia] when she is so desperately in need of help [being unmarried and pregnant], just as it is apathy with which he learns by letter of her death, and of the death of his uncle and his uncle's housekeeper by the same bomb: "The news did not affect Guy greatly."(34)

Heller had indeed caught the surface of the novel, had noted accurately its record of baseness and incompetence. He had overlooked, however, the spiritual level of its events. Thereby he missed half the book; because Waugh, here as in Brideshead Revisited the Catholic novelist, used this level to work in irony.

In Waugh's later fiction, irony is not success qualified by loss; it is sadness twisted by consolation. Waugh's war trilogy fits this pattern exactly. By the middle of The End of the Battle Guy Crouchback is a burnt-out, loveless failure. His

story does have a happy ending, but seemingly no thanks to his own efforts. He marries the girl who has become attached to his wife's baby (not his son). He becomes well-off because his father leased land instead of selling it; as the leaseholds expire, the family estate reconstitutes itself. But although Guy seems passive, the cause-in-fact of his ultimate happiness is the only considered decision he makes: to provide for Virginia's unborn child by marrying her. Its immediate effect is spiritual, providing Guy with a reinterpretation for an aimless life. Ironically, it also brings temporal rewards -- prosperity and marital happiness.

Heller had interpreted Guy's decision to marry Virginia as merely another anecdote of his apathetic drifting. The episode, however, seems to be of considerably greater importance. It is foreshadowed as early as the first volume of the trilogy, and Waugh intended it to be the trilogy's technical climax. Witness Waugh's own interview with The Paris Review:

Interviewer: Would you say there is any direct moral to the army trilogy?

Waugh: Yes, I imply that there is a moral purpose, a chance of salvation, in every human life. Do you know the old Protestant hymn which goes, "Once to every man and nation / Comes the moment to decide"? Guy is offered this chance by making himself responsible for the upbringing of Trimmer's child, to see that he is not brought up by his dissolute mother.(35)

Even if Waugh is not allowed the final word, he has provided a legitimate interpretation, one which views Guy's choice in terms of faith, compassion, and self-sacrifice. This

points out, by contrast, how Heller's interpretation disfavors these selfless virtues to view Guy's problem as "inaction" and "no will." Guy can be understood as caring about others. Heller reads him as apathetic -- as not caring, presumably about himself. These comments on Waugh indicate that Heller, when writing Catch-22, valued most highly the abilities to take action and to act for oneself. Pity and self-denial fit nowhere in this canon of virtues.

In Catch-22, this concern for self is essential, for the choice between group and individual is the choice between death and life. Because society is a false idea, there can be no hope of reforming it. Thus, Yossarian cannot revolt to change society's form; he must leave each of his squadron-mates to choose his own fate. Additionally, individualism offers the only way of creating new life. Despite all the copulation that occurs in the novel's brothel scenes, the only time sex is linked to procreation is in Yossarian's fantasies of escape to Sweden. It is with comrades that he visits the brothel; in these fantasies (save for blonde Swedish maidens) he is alone.

There is a limit to this self-centeredness: one must not kill to save one's own life. The squadron is offered the choice of flying to Bologna -- a mission on which they will face heavy flak -- or bombing the undefended, inoffensive mountain village. Despite misgivings, they choose the latter; and thereafter they begin to be killed themselves. But within this boun-

dary, self-interest is a paramount value.

Catch-22's last conversation articulates this view.

"The Germans will be beaten in a few months. And Japan will be beaten a few months after that. If I were to give up my life now, it wouldn't be for my country. It would be for Cathcart and Korn. So I'm turning my bombsight in for the duration. From now on I'm thinking only of me."

Major Danby replied indulgently with a superior smile, "But, Yossarian, suppose everyone felt that way."

"Then I'd certainly be a damned fool to feel any other way, wouldn't I?"(36)

Like Prewitt's final realization, this conversation can be read on multiple levels. It shows Yossarian's new resolve to protect his own life. It reiterates Heller's belief in the absurdity of "society." Envisioned is the break-up of the human aggregate -- the squadron, the Air Corps, the nation dissolving into individuals. And it prophesies that in this future sanity will reign. When men realize their individuality, each will pursue his own interests. The idea that one owes duties to the group, with its corollary idea of self-sacrifice, which can so easily become neurosis, will seem absurd on its very face.

"Something Happened": The Converse Proof

Men are individuals; men are responsible for themselves; men have a responsibility to act as individuals. Catch-22 offers a positive demonstration of this thesis, narrating Yossarian's gradual appreciation of these points. Heller's second novel, Something Happened, offers a converse proof. Its central charac-

ter, Bob Slocum, has learned none of them.

Heller told The Paris Review:

I think one difference between the two books is that Catch-22 is concerned with physical survival against exterior forces or institutions that want to destroy life or moral self. Something Happened is concerned very much with interior, psychological survival in which the areas of combat are things like the wishes a person has, whether they are fulfilled or not, the close, intimate situations we have with our children when they're small and as they grow older, the memories we have of our relationship with parents as they grow older -- these are some of the areas of disturbance in Something Happened. Of course, these areas are much more difficult to deal with than those in Catch-22. Given an Adolf Hitler, or inefficient or corrupt people, or people without sensibilities, we know what the dangers are, and we know what we must try to do.(37)

In a struggle for "interior, psychological survival," the adversary (as well as the protagonist) is oneself. It is this factor that characterizes the development and ultimately determines the outcome of Something Happened. The entire novel reflects Bob Slocum's perspective; and, as Heller commented: "I told several people while I was writing the book that Slocum was possibly the most contemptible character in literature."³⁸

Slocum personifies everything that has gone wrong. He embodies every negative ever attacked in Heller's fiction. Completely self-centered, he is equally an obsequious, fawning creature of society. Knowing that such things as love and responsibility exist, he perverts them when he finds them. Misunderstanding is the key word. Slocum misunderstands every fact and relationship in every level on which he operates: society, family, and self. Operating on such misinformation, he reaches

faulty conclusions and ultimately does actual harm.

The society within which Slocum exists fulfills the prediction of Sam Slater. One memorable early passage calculates:

In the office in which I work there are five people of whom I am afraid. Each of these five people is afraid of four people (excluding overlaps), for a total of twenty, and each of these twenty people is afraid of six people, making a total of one hundred twenty people who are feared by at least one person. Each of these one hundred and twenty people is afraid of the other one hundred and nineteen, and all of these one hundred and forty-five people are afraid of the twelve men at the top who helped found and build the company and now own and direct it.(39)

"Perpetual apprehension" indeed describes this state. Relationships no longer function in terms of duty -- what one person will do for someone else, what one person can expect from another -- but as degrees of fear. The situation is worse than in Catch-22. There, enmity ran along vertical lines. Yossarian's enemies were his superior officers, men at the top of a hierarchy who were willing to condemn their subordinates to death. His fellow flight officers were his friends. Now, however, such positive bonds have vanished. Dread has expanded to fill the void, creating a society in which fear is universal and reciprocal.

Such a view reiterates Catch-22's central theme, that the idea of society is absurd. Bob Slocum pictures society as the negative of the ideal of society, as a grouping of people associated by fear. This is the emotion they should not feel, were their association legitimate. This is the emotion that

should push them apart.

The viewpoint also illustrates Slocum's misunderstanding of his circumstances. He suggests an absolute, comprehensive pattern of fear, of one hundred and forty-five people scared of each other and their employers. This is the gestalt he will act upon; but it is an inaccurate conclusion, even if he has all his figures right. Slocum's description of his office is like the riddle about how many travelers were going to St. Ives, because Slocum himself is not one of the one hundred and forty-five. This is important in two ways. First, Slocum is not part of the mass. Second, he is not caught up in the general fear; fearing five people is much less a problem than fearing twenty-eight-fold that number. And significantly, the entire negative pattern flows from Slocum himself. If he released himself from his fear, the flow would have no starting point. The obstacles are illusory; individual action would succeed. If Slocum understood, he could (like Yossarian) free himself from an intolerable situation.

The point is, however, that Slocum does not realize this. He chooses to see himself as part of the fear-bound mass, incapable of individual action -- of the individual existence that allows it, of the personal responsibility it entails.

Slocum is defined by other parts of society. He is a microcosm, a representative sample. His handwriting is not his own; he knows that he acquired it from one Tom Johnson, a fellow

employee at the insurance office where he worked after high school. He also unconsciously slips on the language and characteristics of anyone with whom he spends time.

It amuses me in a discouraging way to know I borrow adjectives, nouns, verbs, and short phrases from people I am with and frequently find myself trapped inside their smaller vocabularies like a hamster in a cage. Their language becomes my language. My own vocabulary fails me (if it is indeed mine), and I am at a loss to supply even perfectly familiar synonyms. Rather than grope for words of my own, I fasten upon their words and carry their phraseologies away with me for use in subsequent conversations (even though the dialogue I steal may not be first rate).

If I talk to a Negro (spade, if I've been talking to a honky who calls a spade a spade), I will, if I am not on guard, begin using not only his vernacular (militant hip or bucolic Uncle Tom), but his pronunciation. I do the same thing with Puerto Rican cabdrivers; . . .

If I'm with Andy Kagle, I will limp.(40)

The identification between Slocum and other people entails more than Slocum taking on other individual's traits. Slocum and society as a whole are differently-scaled reflections of the same factors.

Dirty movies have gotten better, I'm told. Smut and weaponry are two areas in which we've improved. Everything else has gotten worse. The world is winding down. . . .

. . . From sea to shining sea the country is filling with slag, shale, and used-up automobile tires. The fruited plain is coated with insecticide and chemical fertilizers. . . . You don't find fish in lakes and rivers anymore. You have to catch them in cans. Towns die. Oil spills. Money talks. God listens. God is good, a real team player. "America the Beautiful" isn't: it was over the day the first white man set foot on the continent. . . . Depreciating motels, junked automobiles, and quick-food joints grow like amber waves of grain.(41)

Non-salacious sex and slow decay, two manifestations of a universal degeneration: Slocum sees these as the characteristics of his age, and the reader can see that they are also characteristic of Slocum. Slocum is preoccupied by sex and death. He remembers the sexual liaisons he has had; conjectures and fantasizes about Jane in the art department, whom he considers seducing; buys sex from prostitutes; maintains a sex life with his wife. He also recalls how his mother wasted away after a stroke, how his brother died of a heart attack, how he was relieved to learn of the death of a hospitalized friend. He considers often the life-in-death to which retardation has condemned his son Derek. These two preoccupations account for why Slocum so often thinks about Virginia Markowitz, the girl with whom he flirted (but never had sex) and who later committed suicide. Virginia combines libido and thanatos.

Because Slocum defines himself as a part of society, as a part of the rusting machine, he absolves himself of responsibility and excuses himself from initiative. This affects him socially: it means that he sees the world as a steady state. A cogwheel is incapable of changing the machine's operation. It can only carry out its function, turning smoothly on its own axis and meshing with the other cogwheels arranged around it. This outlook prohibits the optimism Yossarian discovered. Because he learned that he was an individual, that he could choose, Yossarian could act to change his environment. Believing himself help-

less, Slocum will never do the same.

Slocum misunderstands society; Slocum also misunderstands the idea of family. He knows that there are links among himself and the woman who bore him, the woman to whom he is married, and the children whom he has fathered, but he fails to appreciate the point of this association. Instead of understanding his kin as individuals who stand in a special relationship to him, who are linked by blood to him as he is to them, he sees them in terms of himself. He accords none individual standing. They are "my wife," "my children," and "my mother," and he uses the possessive pronoun to define, not identify. Although Slocum knows the word "love," he misunderstands this, too. Every human relationship he has entered has proven loveless. He pretends not to notice when his mother has her stroke, merely gets along with his wife, taunts his daughter and son, cannot bring his attention to bear on his retarded son Derek. With this background, the book's ending is almost to be expected; it is characteristic that Slocum would intend to offer consolation to his son, injured in an automobile accident, and end by literally hugging the child to death.

Because Slocum, the creature of society, is paradoxically the ultimate egotist, it is natural that his greatest misunderstandings concern himself.

Catch-22 had argued that wartime self-denial was absurd when the wartime emergency had passed. Something Happened shows

the absurdity of another reaction that lingers after its stimulus has ended.

The kind of choice [facing businessmen, Heller said] becomes between showing the gross profit 4 million dollars one year, how do we boost it to 4.5 million the next year, how do we keep it from slipping back -- and after a while you really don't give a damn.

And I begin to wonder whether the people involved really care about it as a profit thing. I think they care about it in terms of (1) their own security and (2) their own ego-fulfillment. It becomes a personal challenge rather than distributing more gaskets.

I don't think they really care about the stockholders -- the widow who is dependent on increased dividends -- it's just even like a beaver building a dam. A beaver builds a dam -- I don't know why a beaver wants a dam, by the way, but I have a feeling that it may not even need the dam -- it builds a dam because it's a beaver. And a person trained to one occupation, even when he gets to the top, he continues doing accountancy because he's an accountant.(42)

The Realist's interviewer did not question Heller about works-in-progress. Nonetheless, he was already exploring the idea of his second novel,* and what he said about business explains much of Something Happened.

Milo Minderbinder conditioned himself to be hypersensitive to lucre. The slightest stimulus would ignite a full-

* The interview appeared in November, 1962. References in it to one General Walker, who had advocated insurrection during the Ole Miss desegregation riot of September, 1962, date the interview to the fall. In 1974 Heller told The Paris Review that two opening sentences for Something Happened ("In the office in which I work . . .") had come to him in 1962, as he sat alone on the deck of a beach house -- which points to a date during the summer of 1962.

scale reaction on his part: seeing a tickertape machine made him snap up the entire Egyptian cotton crop. Bob Slocum does not share Milo's financial acumen, but Something Happened develops the same theme of self-imposed personality distortion. Slocum responds to spurious stimuli as quickly and completely as Milo; whereas Milo launched into getting-and-spending, Slocum slavishly conforms to what he believes a business executive should do. The result is that Slocum, like Milo, loses his capacity for independent action.

A beaver builds a dam without consciously deciding to do so. It operates by instinct -- a generalized pattern of responses evolutionarily found appropriate to its environment. Slocum's actions, similarly, form a pattern of generalized responses; but his actions are inappropriate, are even absurd, because Slocum knows better. A beaver can only react generally. So limited are its responses that its survival requires a specific environment, a narrow range of stimuli to fit those particular responses. Slocum is capable of responding to individual, specific stimuli, and yet he does not. A beaver builds dams because that is what beavers do; Slocum does what he does because that is what he thinks executives do. He breaks off work for sex because firm policy favors such indulgence. He hopes to make a three-minute speech at the firm's annual meeting -- a minor act that has been done many times before, passes quickly and without much notice, and will be repeated countless times -- because making speeches

is what an executive does. Even worse, he ignores specific choices which he knows to be right in order to pursue a course of conduct in conformity with his generalized perception of his world. Here Slocum's conception of himself as a creature of society plays him most false.

Slocum's problem is summed up by the title of an essay by Susan Klemtner: "A Permanent Game of Excuses: Determinism in Heller's Something Happened." Klemtner sees the novel as a demonstration of the falsity of deterministic thinking and the truth of existential reasoning.

Both the pessimism of Something Happened and the repulsion of its narrator find their source in Slocum's determinism. In contrast to Yossarian, whose rebellious stance implied an existential faith in human freedom, Slocum maintains a deterministic belief that man is the helpless and irresponsible pawn of fate If we are encouraged to judge Slocum an unreliable narrator, then the novel becomes a more subtle exploration of a consciousness resisting its own freedom and exploration. . . .

The assertion that "something happened," recurring throughout the novel, represents a massive effort by Slocum to justify his failures, his mediocrity, and his disappointment with himself by locating their origin in external forces rather than in his own internal character and decisions. . . .

Though he extends implicit blame for his disappointments to specific people -- his wife, his children, his parents, the people in his office -- Slocum's largest indictment is reserved for the cultural climate of contemporary America. . . .

If Slocum's exploitation of the deterministic game of excuses undermines his credibility for the reader, the climactic action of the book finally invalidates his deterministic vision.(43)

Crucial to Klemtner's analysis is the link between Slocum's nine-year-old son (known only as "my boy") and Slocum's better self. Klemtner sees the boy as the novel's "unacknowledged hero." Uncompetitive, he will halt during a race so that others may catch up. He begs a nickel from Slocum, then gives it away it away in his father's presence. "Though the boy does not voice philosophical theories, his acts reveal an instinctual notion that people are free to choose and that good choices make other people happy, while bad ones hurt."⁴⁴ Klemtner continues:

By demonstrating the superiority of an affectionate nature, the child evokes an alternative which Slocum has rejected. Faced directly with this alternative in the form of action, Slocum's determinism falters

Focused by the vision of his son's superiority, Slocum's longing for a better identity takes the shape of a little boy. . . .

The merger of the two little boys, coupled with Slocum's being offered a job that involves sacrificing both boys' values for money and prestige, results in tragedy. In making his choice between keeping his own job and taking Kagle's, Slocum is also choosing between recovering and abandoning his boy. That Slocum has a clear choice between these alternatives emphasizes his freedom for the reader. True to his established adult vision, Slocum chooses the better job; true to his deterministic vision, he denies he has chosen at all. He presents himself as the passive recipient of fate's latest twist. . . .(45)

Klemtner argues that just as Slocum takes Kagle's job -- doing an old friend ill, while denying he chose to do so -- Slocum intentionally smothers his son -- while telling himself he meant to comfort the boy. In this episode, "Slocum convinces himself of the truth of his deterministic vision while Heller finally des-

troys its validity for the reader." Attracted to the scene of an accident by a cry of "Something happened!" Slocum crushes his injured son in his arms. He can "finish off the boy because he tells himself that death has already come from the outside, from the environment, . . ." Klemtner concludes:

But the reader understands . . . that nothing simply happens by itself: people make things happen. The youth's cry of "something happened!" is richly ironic in retrospect because nothing much had happened until Slocum arrived on the scene to make something happen . . . This last evocation of the title exposes the deterministic vision as a refusal to cope with the evident responsibility we all have for our actions and the corresponding freedom with which we choose them.(46)

Klemtner's discussion stops with the boy's death. In the succeeding chapter, the novel's last (titled "Nobody Knows What I've Done"), Heller shows what becomes of Slocum. This final chapter counterpoints the final chapter of Catch-22, in which another main character, theretofore undecided, embarked on a new course of action. But Slocum's leavetaking is the opposite of Yossarian's. Yossarian escaped from society; Slocum submerges himself in it. Ironically, at the same time he finally yields blindly to the pressures of society, he believes that he is rising above society -- "taking command."

"I've never seen them working so hard, Slocum."

"I like the way you've taken control."

"I'm glad to see you're fitting in."

(I am fitting in.)

"Who's that?"

"Slocum."

"I'd like you to meet Bob Slocum," Arthur Baron and Horace White introduce me now. "He's one of our best men."

I meet a much higher class of executive at Arthur Baron's now when he has us to dinner

"Slocum's the name. Bob Slocum."

"Look me up the next time you're in town."

I have played [golf] at White Sulphur Springs in West Virginia as the company's representative to a national business conference. Maybe someday, if my game and job continue to improve, I might even play St. Andrews in Scotland. (Swish.) I miss my boy. Martha the typist went crazy for me finally at just the right time in a way I was able to handle suavely. I took charge like a ballet master.(47)

A final argument against "society" arises from the way society reveals itself. The society that Slocum sees accepting him is insubstantial in the extreme. Catch-22's characters were vivid, individualized personalities; Something Happened surrounds Slocum with a set of cyphers named White, Black, Gray, Green, Ed, and Red. And at the novel's end, even these characters are gone. The society surrounding Slocum is manifest only in a string of superficial comments. Slocum has proved himself eager to invent excuses for himself. The disembodied nature of these voices, given Slocum's psychological profile, suggests that they may be false. They are certainly too insubstantial to prove the existence of a world behind them; they may even be self-justifying hallucinations.

Slocum, however, does believe in this world: Slocum who

has abandoned his mother, betrayed his wife and his best friend, who has killed his own son. Here the argument against the idea of society is made ad hominem. Even if "society" exists, if Slocum accepts this idea, can it be worthwhile?

The Family Ties of "Good As Gold"

The attacks made on society in Catch-22 and Something Happened are similar in effect but different in method. Both conclude that it is absurd for an individual to be misled from his personal interests by a belief that society requires him to do so. In Catch-22, this was because "society" was a false idea. Heller argued that men could not be viewed otherwise than as individuals. Something Happened does not share this individualist stance. In it social organizations are recognized. Slocum believes that society exists, believes that various individuals can be described as his family. The only reason for the reader not to share this belief is a wholly merited distrust of Slocum.

Catch-22's protagonist had ultimately fled from all interpersonal ties. Good As Gold tells the story of a man who seeks to pursue what he believes is a natural drift away from his origins, but who ends by returning to them. This volte-face is not the sharp reverse it seems. Heller had never foreclosed the idea that blood relationship could define a legitimate extra-personal dimension of individuality. He had in fact dedicated Catch-22 to his mother, wife, and children. And despite its hostility to "society" and corresponding acclaim of individual-

ism, this novel never argued that the individual should reject family ties as well as the claims of society. By Heller's express design, Yossarian has no ethnic background, no family. His escape thus does not necessitate the breaking of such bonds. And Something Happened outright accepts the legitimacy of intra-familial loyalties and duties. If Slocum did not have a duty of love toward his wife, and children (and a similar loyalty to Andy Kagle) his mistreatment of them would not be so despicable. It is the final scene between Slocum and his mother, however, that most strongly makes the case for family relations.

I'm sorry I ever told my wife what I think my mother said to me before she died [Slocum thinks, immediately after he has fired Kagle and in the chapter before he kills his son]. . . . I was not even sure my mother said it. I wasn't sure she recognized me for more than an instant the last few times I went to visit her in the nursing home or remembered I was there as I sat at her bedside without talking for the twelve, then ten minutes I stayed. I brought no more gifts of spicy meats and fish and honeyed candies; she couldn't eat. I gave her no gossip. She couldn't hear. I was not even certain most times that she was able to see anyone sitting there when her eyes were upon me.

"You're no good," she said. There was no voice. It was more a shaping of the words with her lips and a faint rustle of breath. I was surprised, and I bent forward over the cavity of her mouth that I was no longer able to look at straightly and asked her to repeat what she said. "You're just no good."

Those were the last words I think I heard her speak to me. If I live to be a hundred and ninety years old, I will never hear any more from her. If the world lasts three billion more, there will be no others.(48)

This is the sharpest moment of pain in Heller's fiction. Slocum may later brush it aside, but the reader cannot. And it comes

not from physical distress to the individual, but from separation from those near to him. This realization anticipates the conclusion of Good As Gold.

It is not inconsistent to hold that while a man can rightly ignore claims asserted by society at large, he is also right to observe a loyalty to his family. The underlying message of Heller's novels is that a man must be true to what he knows himself to be. (Yossarian finally recognizes that he must defend his own life; Slocum ignores his better instincts and gives up his individual identity, the better to conform.) The crucial issue is measuring individuality. Heller's third book recognizes that individuals are not unique. The factors comprising one personality may be found in others. To the extent traits are shared, one individual is linked to another.* Good As Gold reaffirms positively a conclusion John Donne phrased in gloomy, negative terms. No man is an island, entire of itself. Accordingly, each man's specific traits are reinforced by their repetition in his fellows. Because humans are interdependent, each is enhanced by the strengthening of another. When Bruce Gold celebrates the Jewishness of his relatives, he is true to an integral part of himself.

* This is the difference between society and family. A family is a group of people who share an environment; who may be counted on to have a unity of outlook, who are genetically identical. In short, a family is a group of demonstrably related, similar persons. By contrast, Heller's fiction defines society as a group of unrelated persons, associated by arbitrary geographic and commercial boundaries.

Of all Heller's protagonists, Gold is capable of the most sophisticated responses. Yossarian was honest enough to recognize the problem facing him; but as the last surviving Assyrian, his only option was to rely on himself alone. Bob Slocum had family on whom he could have relied, but he chose to pass over these potential allies against societal degeneration. Gold is as intelligent as Yossarian (and more honest than Slocum), and he has an advantage the bombardier lacked. Gold is a Jew. Because of this, when his environment proves itself too hostile or absurd for normal functions, he need not strike out on his own; his Jewishness provides an additional set of responses. He can retreat into an area where three thousand years of intellectual tradition have imposed a credible order on reality, where family and ethnic loyalties work toward mutual survival.

Good As Gold portrays two worlds. The Washington to which Gold aspires is the world of inconstancy, double-talk, and false first appearances familiar from Heller's earlier novels.

Gold was not certain, but never in his lifetime had he felt more sanguine about his prospects. He glanced out the window at official Washington and caught a glimpse of heaven. Through the doorway, the view of the open office space was a soothing pastoral, with vistas of modular desks dozing tranquilly under indirect fluorescent lighting that never flickered; there were shoulder-high partitions of translucent glass, other offices across the way as imposing as Ralph's, and the dreamlike stirrings of contented people at work who were in every respect impeccable. The women all were sunny and chic -- not a single one was overweight -- the men wore jackets and ties, and every trouser leg was properly creased.(49)

One of its inhabitants is Pugh Biddle Conover, a career politician who owes his Olympian reputation and tremendous patronage power to repeated, non-partisan perjury. His daughter Andrea, a rising star of the Oversight Committee on Government Expenditures (a role satirized and made paradoxical by contemporary events) is not merely unfaithful to her varying degrees of lovers; she is utterly, empty-headedly faithless. Then there is Ralph Newsome.

Ralph had aged hardly at all. He was tall and straight with languid movements, freckles, and reddish-brown hair parted on the side. What Gold remembered most clearly about Ralph was that he never needed a haircut or ever looked as though he'd had one. He wore a tapered, monogrammed shirt and his trousers looked freshly pressed. He was still, somehow, the only graduate of Princeton University Gold -- or anyone Gold knew -- had ever met.(50)

Apart from his veneer, Newsome is a cypher. When impressed by Gold's work, he communicates his response by repeating the phrase, "the mind boggles." The cliched nature of this phrase explains much about the man who uses it. So does its literal meaning. Before the verb passed from the equestrian into the pop vocabulary, boggle meant to refuse an obstacle. Gold's ideas are not inaccessibly profound -- they are rather the opposite -- but one feels Newsome is correct when he uses boggle to describe his reaction to them.

For Newsome's mental prowess is nondemonstrable; he makes his career out of being rather than doing. "I can do whatever I want once I get permission," he tells Gold. "I know I can just about guarantee that you'll get the appointment you

choose as soon as you want, although I can't promise anything." A man whose job consists of "[being] in the inner circle," where he works "for [his] superiors," Newsome hedges every statement he utters. One cannot tell if he does so because he never keeps his promises, or if he never reneges on his promises because he has never really made any.⁵¹

Heller balances against this world of offices and country estates, the living rooms, family restaurants, backyards, and gyms of Gold's family. There is Sid, Gold's older brother, who baits his educated sibling by misquoting Alexander Pope or offering: "Let's talk about geology. Are vultures blind or aren't they?"⁵² If Gold says nothing, Sid inquires what good his college education did him; if he corrects Sid, the rest of the family denounce Gold as overbearing. There is Gold's father, who introduces Gold as "my son's brother," flies into rages at his children, and doggedly invents Jewish holidays to prolong his stays in New York. (His children correspondingly conspire to remove him to a Miami condominium.) There is Gold's wife Belle, unassuming and long-suffering. Gold's four sisters arrive at family gatherings with casseroles and baked goods, and gossip about each other. Overall, the Gold family is a squabbling, stereotypically predictable group. What matters, however, is this: they have gone beyond Catch-22's neurotics and the insecure people of Something Happened to become the first robust, self-confident, happy characters in Heller's fiction.

Gold, the only educated member of the family, believes he has outgrown them. Instead of dumplings and roasts, he indulges in French coffee and Lithuanian rye bread. Belle he admits to be a "good wife," whom he "[guesses] he might miss . . . if he ever decided he wanted one."⁵³ He nonetheless aspires to Andrea Biddle Conover, "a woman of . . . stunning ways whose academic credentials surpassed even his own, an undergraduate degree at Smith, a master's at Yale, her doctorate from Harvard, and a lectureship in England for one year at Cambridge University in her field of home economics."⁵⁴

Over the course of the novel, Gold's intentions change. He grows disillusioned with Washington and returns acceptingly to his origins. His progress is chronicled by the titles of articles on which he works. He begins by reviewing the President's book, "My Year in the White House," which brings him an unexpected phone call from Ralph Newsome. His next article is "Every Change Is For The Worse." Third is "Nothing Succeeds As Planned." This brings him an invitation to Washington; on the return flight, although still ambitious, he begins "Education and Truth or Truth in Education." The next essay to cross his mind is an unpublished piece, "Invite a Jew to the White House (and You Make Him Your Slave)." This is followed by "We Are Not A Society or We Are Not Worth Our Salt." These titles chronicle a change from confidence to reservations to objectivity to doubt (and, ultimately) to rejection.

Heller equates the ability to write about a subject with the ability to live it. The two books Gold outlines illustrate the competing environments which attract him. One of Gold's books is on the Jewish experience in America. He begins this first, then puts it aside as he shuttles between New York and Washington. Only at the novel's very end, when he is reconciled to his family, is he inspired to continue it. The second book is a diatribe against Henry Kissinger.

Gold's varying feelings about and success at writing about Kissinger are important in two ways. First, the work reflects his political ambitions. His decision to write it represents his decision to move to Washington. Nonetheless, he is unable to complete it. This shows that he was never cut out for life in Washington -- whereas, by contrast, he is suited to write about (and live) the life of a Jew.

Second, as Gold gathers information about Kissinger, the loathing he feels for the man becomes increasingly explicit. Gold notes how Kissinger approved the 1973 coup d'etat in Chile, how Kissinger called for "[breaking] down the atmosphere of special horror which now surrounds the use of nuclear weapons," and how over Vietnam Kissinger "lied about peace and lied about war."⁵⁵ After his research,

Gold saw the strangest contrasts preserved between the ridiculous aura of success and knowledge that surrounded the self-satisfied behayma and the legacy of diplomatic wreckage and tsuris he had left in his wake. For Gold, [Kissinger's] vaunted intelligence and brilliance remained as apocryphal and elusive as Nixon's grasp of

fundamentals and Spiro Agnew's high IQ: no distinctive sign of any existed. A farzayenisht to his detractors, he was a ceaseless mechaleh to a biographer like Gold. Every Montik and Donerschtik the scampering lummoX was in the papers again with some new mishegoss like a shmegegge from Chelm.(56)

Gold's mounting disgust with Kissinger reflects his growing resolution not to emulate Kissinger. This will push him back toward Judaism; note how he reacts by slipping into Yiddish.

This explains Kissinger's role in Good As Gold, as well as the length of the apparent digressions attacking him. He is Gold's evil double. He is the Jew who abandoned his people; which means he is like Slocum, a man who rejects his true identity for the sake of worldly success. That Kissinger is a diplomat compounds his crimes. It allows him to compromise the interests of other people, and his immense power amplifies the harm he does.

The event that forces Gold to choose between Washington and his family -- between being Kissinger and being Gold -- is the sudden death of his brother Sid. This news arrives at the peak of Gold's success, just as he is finally about to meet the President (but ironically, only because he follows the Jewish tradition of accepting a powerful Gentile patron -- in his case a former Governor of Texas).

"Anything wrong?" asked Ralph.

"It's my brother. He's dead."

"I'm sorry," said Ralph. "You'll want to leave immediately, won't you?"

That thought had not entered Gold's head until Ralph put it there, and he could think of no way of expelling it without risking the opinion that he was not worth his salt or as good as gold.(57)

In this split-second exchange of dialogue Gold repeats the realization made by Yossarian. He recognizes the falsity of his aspirations. Yossarian had to learn that he could not find security in playing along with Colonels Korn and Cathcart. Now Gold sees that he does not belong in Washington because he will never be accepted there; Newsome will seize any chance to avoid his presence. Gold apprehends the same danger as Yossarian -- mortality. And, also like Yossarian, he realizes that he must face up to his responsibilities -- must do so to be true to himself.

Gold reacts by becoming a Jew. He escorts Sid's widow to the bier. He deals with "distant relatives and old family acquaintances of whose existence he had not thought in decades and a goodly number of whom he would have traveled seven leagues out of his way to escape meeting."⁵⁸ He sits shiva, reading the Hebrew prayers for the deed phonetically from an English text. "His season in the White House was over,"⁵⁹ Heller states, and Gold drops his plans to write about Henry Kissinger.

When the mourning period is over, Gold visits his mother's grave. The epitaph is in Hebrew, which leaves him cold; he finds some warmth in hugging the monument and leaving a pebble on the mound to mark his visit. Then, as he drives home, in the novel's last scene, he finds the inspiration to complete his book about the

Jewish experience in America.

Returning for Belle by way of Coney Island Avenue, he came upon a softball game in a schoolyard played by boys wearing yarmulkas, and he left the car to watch. Athletes in skullcaps? The school was a religious one, a yeshiva. Some of the teen-agers had sidelocks, and some of the sidelocks were blond. Gold smiled. God was right -- a stiff-necked, contrary people. Moisheh Kapoyer, here it was winter and they were playing baseball, while everyone else played football and basketball.

And a stubborn dispute was in progress. The boy at first base had his back to the others, in a pose of limp exasperation. The pitcher was sulking and refused to throw the ball. The batter was waiting in a squat with his elbows on his knees, his head resting with disinterest on one hand. As Gold watched, the catcher, a muscular, redheaded youth with freckles and sidelocks and a face as Irish or Scottish or Polish as any Gold had ever laid eyes upon, moved wrathfully toward the pitcher with words Gold for a minute had trouble believing.

"Varf!" shouted the catcher. "Varf it, already! Varf the fucking ball!"(60)

This is one of the most succinct characterizations in Heller's fiction -- as sharp as any of the characterizations of Catch-22. It shows how Heller has come full circle. Doc Daneeka, Clevinger, Major Major, and the rest were defined by their individual characteristics -- their peculiarly personal tics and features. The catcher is distinguished from other young men only by speaking Yiddish and playing baseball. These stereotypical aspects of personality intersect to define him unmistakably as an American Jew. What matters is that the catcher is characterized vividly not by individual traits, but by corporate ones. By emphasizing these shared qualities of character, by giving them a moment in which they alone create a memorable figure, Heller points out the

conclusion to which Gold (and he) have ultimately come. Individual need not mean isolated; a man may be the more himself because of his links with others.

Chapter VI

CHARACTERIZATION IN JONES AND HELLER

Between Catch-22 and Jones' Army novels can be marked one similarity: both the novel and the trilogy are novels of characters. Jones' four continuing characters -- his First Sergeant, Mess Sergeant, Infantryman, and Company Clerk -- interact not only among each other, but also with a company-size group of auxiliary figures. Yossarian, likewise, exists among a squadron of characters. The two writers differ, however, in the way they handle and develop their characters. Heller creates and controls his characters, defining them physically and socially. He tells the reader exactly what to think, thereby remaining true to his ideal of the author as tangible narrator. Jones, loyal to his belief in letting a story speak for itself, sketches in crucial details and outlines, leaving definition and appraisal to the reader.

Description and Biography: Characterization in Heller's Fiction

Heller's characterization relies on surfaces and impressions. Catch-22 may be regarded as a local-color novel or travel book: its depictions of Air Corps life feature the same reliance on observations and generalized, sometimes superficial explanations. It has the same tone of a visitor jotting down what he

has witnessed. Heller reports of the hospital: "All the officer patients in the ward were forced to censor letters written by all the enlisted-men patients It was a monotonous job, and Yossarian was disappointed to learn that the lives of enlisted men were only slightly more interesting than the lives of officers."¹ Yossarian is not Heller, but one feels that here the protagonist's outsider's curiosity reflects his creator's.

Heller's primary characterizational tool is physical description.

General Dreedle moved to the full-length mirror in his office and stared at his stocky reflection. He had a grizzled, broad-jawed head with iron-gray tufts over his eyes and a blunt and belligerent jaw.(2)

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Hungry Joe was a jumpy, emaciated wretch with a fleshless face of dingy skin and bone and twitching veins squirming subcutaneously in the blackened hollows behind his eyes like severed sections of snake. It was a desolate, cratered face, sooty with care like an abandoned mining town.(3)

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Sergeant Towser was lean and angular and had fine blond hair so light it was almost without color, sunken cheeks, and teeth like large white marshmallows.(4)

Physical description is so important to Heller's characterization that a distortion or exaggeration of appearance serves to indicate a character's thematic function. In "The Moral Structure of Catch-22," Thomas Blues observes:

Catch-22 is a disease of the eyes, as suggested by Orr's insistence on the presence of the flies in Appleby's eyes: "'They're there, all right . . . although he probably doesn't even know it. That's why he can't see things as they really are'" Indeed, images of diseased, damaged, and distorted eyes pervade Heller's

characterizations. The doctors in the hospital, for example, see through "inefficient eyes" . . . ; Yossarian's companion, Dunbar, aware of his perilous situation, but resigned to his dying, is described lying flat on his hospital bed, "his eyes staring up at the ceiling like a doll's" . . . ; the dying colonel has "cavernous, sad mildewed eyes" . . . ; the patriotic Clevinger's eyes are "undernourished" Lieutenant Scheisskopf, who -- were it not for the shortage of copper wire in wartime -- would fasten the swinging hands of his marching men to pegs inserted in their thighbones, has "poor eyesight" . . . ; the villainously vapid Aarfy, who is impervious to the lives of others as well as to his own, has "little reptilian eyes" . . . ; and Milo Minderbinder, the entrepreneur who contracts with the Germans to bomb his own squadron, then pacifies an outraged public opinion by disclosing that the enterprise made a profit, has "disunited eyes, which never looked at the same thing at the same time"(5)

Heller's second technique is characterizational biography.

Clevinger knew so much because Clevinger was a genius with a pounding heart and blanching face. He was a gangling, gawky, feverish, famish-eyed brain. As a Harvard undergraduate he had won prizes in scholarship for just about everything, and the only reason he had not won prizes in scholarship for everything else was that he was too busy signing petitions, circulating petitions and challenging petitions, joining discussion groups and resigning from discussion groups, attending youth congresses, picketing other youth congresses and organizing student committees in defense of dismissed faculty members. Everyone agreed that Clevinger was certain to go far in the academic world. In short, Clevinger was one of those people with lots of intelligence and no brains, and everyone knew it except for those who soon found it out.

In short, he was a dope. He often looked to Yossarian like one of those people hanging around modern museums with both eyes together on one side of a face. It was an illusion, of course, generated by Clevinger's predilection for staring fixedly at one side of a question and never seeing the other side at all. Politically, he was a humanitarian who did know right from left and was trapped uncomfortably between the two. He was constantly defending his Communist friends to his

right-wing enemies and his right-wing friends to his Communist enemies, and he was thoroughly detested by both groups, who never defended him to anyone because they thought he was a dope.(6)

Other characters are similarly treated. The biography of Major Major, for example, runs for over nine pages, affording Heller potshots at Midwestern farmers, government subsidies, student radicalism, IBM machines, and Army boot camp.

These life histories deserve the adjective "characterizational" because they cannot be read as more. They do not really characterize; instead, they are satires tagged to appropriate characters.

Tangential Satire in the Characterizational Biographies

Catch-22's characters function without the aid of their biographies, and the biographies exist apart from their characters. The two are complementary, but not interdependent.

Clevinger offers a case in point. Clevinger, until his B-25 vanishes within a cloud, is the faithful prophet of the official line. He accepts the justifications offered for flying missions and attempts to educate others to the same conclusions. Better stated, he argues that there must be a method behind the madness. Talking to Yossarian, he denies to his friend that anyone is trying to kill him, since the anti-aircraft gunners of the Hermann Goering Division act impersonally. He rationalizes going even to Bologna on the ground that the generals who ordained the mission know better than the pilots who must brave the

flak. The last time Clevinger appears is to explain to Yossarian (albeit perhaps in jest) that there are no randomly inflicted harms.

"It's the highest kind of justice of all," Clevinger had gloated, clapping his hands with a merry laugh. "I can't help thinking of the Hippolytus of Euripedes, where the early licentiousness of Theseus is probably responsible for the asceticism of the son that helps bring about the tragedy that ruins them all. If nothing else, that episode with the Wac should teach you the evil of sexual immorality."

"It teaches me the evil of candy."

"Can't you see that you're not exactly without blame for the predicament you're in?" Clevinger had continued with undisguised relish. "If you hadn't been laid up in the hospital with venereal disease for ten days back there in Africa, you might have finished your twenty-five missions in time to be sent home before Colonel Nevers was killed and Colonel Cathcart came to replace him."

"And what about you?" Yossarian had replied. "You never got clap in Marrakech and you're in the same predicament."

"I don't know," confessed Clevinger, with a trace of mock concern. "I guess I must have done something very bad in my time."

"Do you really believe that?"

Clevinger laughed. "No, of course not. I just like to kid you along a little."(7)

This is Clevinger's part in Catch-22. It is to play Pangloss to Yossarian's Candide. His biography helps explain his actions, but it does not form their foundation. Clevinger exists to voice and be sacrificed to these sentiments, to represent allegorically the intellectual at war. All this he would do even if his biography were not related. The biography and its satire

exist independently of their bearer. What purports to be a buttress, or corner-stone of characterization, is in fact a separate structure. The characterization's satire is not even directed exclusively against Clevinger; much of it is a general satire on intellectuals and academia.

This is a major point. While much of Catch-22's comic force is directed against war and the Army Air Corps, much more, especially the satire of the biographies, is tangential. It aims at targets outside the novel's immediate scope. The reason for its inclusion is that, at the point it touches Catch-22 it applies to some character within the novel.

This satire can be all but independent of its ostensible subject. General Dreedle's nurse offers one example:

General Dreedle's nurse was chubby, short and blond. She had plump dimpled cheeks, happy blue eyes, and neat curly turned-up hair. She smiled at everyone and never spoke at all unless she was spoken to. Her bosom was lush and her complexion clear. She was irresistible, and men edged away from her carefully. She was succulent, sweet, docile and dumb, and she drove everyone crazy but General Dreedle.(8)

Ostensibly, the nurse exists to provide an excuse for the moaning in the briefing room; but her presence allows Heller a chance to satirize both the dumb-blonde stereotype of beauty and to attack one way in which the powerful tease the subordinate.

Colonel Cargill was so awful a marketing executive that his services were much sought after by firms eager to establish losses for tax purposes. Throughout the civilized world, from Battery Park to Fulton Street, he was known as a dependable man for a fast tax write-off. His prices were high, for failure often did not come easily. He had to start at the top and work his way

down, and with sympathetic friends in Washington, losing money was no simple matter. It took months of hard work and careful misplanning He was a self-made man who owed his lack of success to nobody.(9)

Colonel Cargill plays only a minor role in Catch-22. There is only a tenuous link between this civilian past and his military role as General Peckem's aide. With regard to Catch-22's ostensible subject, the bombing campaigns of the Second World War, Colonel Cargill's biography is a digression pure and simple. Its value to the novel comes from its satire on society at large. Heller had used General Dreedle's nurse to satirize an abuse inherent in hierarchical situations. Colonel Cargill's profession argues the absurdity of social organization. Society levies taxes for the purported good of all; governments structure tax deductions to favor the activities they value. That Colonel Cargill can be a success because he loses money suggests that behind Catch-22's staff officers stands a government with equally misplaced priorities.

Further proof of the independence of characters and characterizations is found in the fact that many of Catch-22's most important characters go undescribed and unbiographed, and are none the weaker for it. Of Dunbar -- though mainly because of his role as an externalization of Yossarian's conscience, Yossarian's doppelganger -- the reader receives no description and learns no history. Milo Minderbinder is described, but goes without a biography. Orr is defined only by his goggle eyes, skill at handy-work, and deceptive goofiness. Ex-Pfc Wintergreen

is as invisible and mysterious a figure to the reader as to the generals whose disputes he settles by throwing away letters. Yossarian, the most important character of the lot, is literally nondescript. Not only does he lack a family and ethnic background; he lacks identifying physical characteristics as well. All the reader knows of Yossarian's physical state is that it is fully suntanned, maintains its equilibrium at 101 degrees Fahrenheit, and suffers from Garnett-Fleischaker Syndrome. In the final analysis, all that is known of Yossarian is what he does.

The Characters As Heller's Creatures

Heller defines his characters functionally as well as descriptively. It is a mark of the dependence of Catch-22's characters on their creator that all are ridiculous, grotesque, humorous, or pathetic by varying degrees. They lack the strength to be heroic, tragic, or even evil. Yossarian's frantic endeavors to stay alive overshadow his attempts to resolve his moral dilemma. Until the novel's last chapter, he alternates between pitying himself and seeking distraction from his problem. Nately is a lovestruck kid gone moony over a prostitute. Colonel Cathcart is hardly Mephistopheles: he raises and raises further the number of missions his men must fly in order to allay his insecurity. Chaplain Tappan, perhaps the most decent man in the novel, is subjected to such petty humiliations as an insolent subordinate, paternal anxieties, a lack of honorable tasks and a plethora of inane ones.

Equally significant is Heller's position as the sole and ultimate arbiter of what is to be thought of his characters. He forecloses the reader's option of interpretation by the explicitness of his characterizations.

The chaplain was even more frightened of Colonel Korn that he was of Colonel Cathcart. The swarthy, middle-aged lieutenant colonel with the rimless, icy glasses and faceted, bald, domelike pate that he was always touching sensitively with the tips of his splayed fingers disliked the chaplain Inevitably, the chaplain's attention, as he cowered meekly before him, focused on Colonel Korn's midriff, where the shirttails bunching up from inside his sagging belt and ballooning down over his waist gave him an appearance of slovenly girth and made him seem inches shorter than his middle height. Colonel Korn was an untidy disdainful man with an oily skin and deep, hard lines running almost straight down from his nose between his crepuscular jowls and his square, clefted chin. (10)

After the above passage, no reader is going to like Korn, let alone identify himself with the colonel. Such characterizations are absolute and unambiguous, admitting of no other interpretation than that laid down by their author. Because Heller employs such techniques of character development -- instead of dramatization, for example, on the basis of which a reader could reach a personal opinion -- Heller's judgments on his characters are unchallengeable.

Heller has been faulted for using his characters as mere puppets; for manipulating them as he pleases, rather than letting them do what they would do were they independent, living persons.* Such criticism has merit, but it pays insufficient atten-

* This is the particular thesis of John Gardner, discussed more fully in Chapter VII.

tion to the effect of plot on the development of character. Catch-22's story does not unfold in the traditional manner, through the chronological interaction of characters who themselves evolve and mature as the tale progresses. Catch-22 is developed by Heller's leaping, lingering, and cross-cutting shifts of focus. In this environment, characters cannot develop; they can only appear. And indeed there are only two characters who change across the novel's course: Yossarian, and the chaplain, who finds he had sinned and it was good, and on the antepenultimate page vows to punch Captain Black.

The allegorical level of Catch-22 also affects Heller's method of characterization. Each of Catch-22's scenes is independent: in later scenes, characters do not act on the basis of what they have learned in earlier scenes. (Yossarian knows that Milo has literally sold out to the Germans on two occasions, but at the novel's end he still seeks Milo's aid in tracing Nately's Whore's kid sister.) Catch-22's allegory requires that characters do not change; they must remain constant to keep the allegory unambiguous.

The subordination of Catch-22's characters to their author's intentions is shown by their allegorical constancy. They are personifications of ideas: idealism, rationalism, bureaucracy, profiteering. They are Heller's creatures not only because of their manner of definition but in the way they are employed -- as arguments carefully placed in a thesis. Even

Yossarian is not so much a human being, a bombardier faced with the risk of dying and the hope of life, as he is a sort of rhetorical scales, a device for choosing among the arguments presented. If on the physical level they can be stereotypes, here they represent polarized concepts. No one could interpret Havermeyer or Colonel Cathcart sympathetically, or react hostilely to Orr or Dunbar. No possible reading of Catch-22 can acclaim M & M Enterprises as a distributor of comfort, progress, and enlightenment. On the ideal level as well as the corporal, in action as in origin, Heller's characters are precisely controlled by their creator.

Characterization by Dramatization in Jones' Works

It is ironic that Yossarian should be defined only by his actions. As such he has more in common with Pfc Robert E. Lee Prewitt than with most of his squadron-mates. For it is an open question whether Prewitt would be recognizable on the street. The only description of him is given in From Here to Eternity's opening sentence: "A very neat and deceptively slim young man in . . . summer khakis."¹¹ Later it emerges that he is a welterweight boxer -- i.e., fights at a weight between 135 and 147 pounds. Later still, at the novel's end, there is Warden's eulogy for him: "He was crazy enough to have made a good paratrooper, if he wasn't so small, or commando."¹² Of Warden himself the reader knows little more: that he has black hair and blue

eyes, is muscled powerfully, and is favored with a narrow bristly moustache and "hooked satanic eyebrows."¹³ "Massive, quiet-voiced, big-handed," "small but broad-shouldered" -- those two scant generalizations will describe Bell and Fife, two mainstays of The Thin Red Line.¹⁴

These characters might consider themselves fortunate to be so briefly described, because in Jones' fiction lengthy descriptions are nearly always given only of unsympathetic characters.

Major Thompson was a short barrelchested man whose OD blouse and summer pinks fitted like a glove. On his chest was a World War Victory ribbon with three stars and a Legion of Merit ribbon, joined on the same steel band. He peered myopically from his gold rimmed spectacles. He had the ruddy complexion and close cropped gray hair common to Regular Army officers of long service

. . . [Prewitt] had seen an enormous head and hogshead chest with deep concentric layers of fat over the even deeper layers of muscle that made S/Sgt Judson somewhat resemble Porky Pig in the Walt Disney cartoons. S/Sgt Judson was staring at him with the deadest eyes he had ever seen in a human being. They looked like two beads of caviar spaced far apart on a great white plate.(15)

These are the stockade commander and his vicar staff sergeant, allies in sadism. The only positive, sympathetic character whose description is particularized is Maylon Stark.

Maylon Stark was medium-built and husky. That was the only word to fit him, husky. He had a husky face, and the nose on it was badly bent and flattened huskily. His voice was husky. His head sat huskily on his neck, the way a fighter carries his chin carried in from habit. It was the huskiness of a man who hunches up his shoulders and hangs on hard with both hands. And with it Maylon Stark had a peculiar perpetual expression,

like that of a man who is hanging hard onto the earth to keep it from moving away, out from under him. The line from the right side of his flattened nose to the corner of his mouth was three times as deep as the same line on the left side; his mouth did not curl, but the deepness of this line made him look like he was about to smile sardonically, or cry wearily, or sneer belligerently. You never knew which. And you never found out which. Because Maylon Stark never did any of them.(16)

In Jones' fiction, a character's background is of as little importance as his appearance. Jones' soldiers are not uniformed Catholics, Jews, or Southerners; they are soldiers who happen to be Catholic, Jewish, Italian, or from Harlan, Kentucky. Jones was not concerned to give his Army an ideologically, sentimentally, or commercially satisfactory mix of ethnic groups. His soldiers, like individuals randomly encountered in the street, remain ordinary men, of neutral or ambiguous ethnicity, until some clue of surname or accent emerges. Even their adversaries are nearly always "Japanese men," men who happen to be Japanese. Milt Warden's Catholic upbringing casts no shadow over his work as a sergeant. Only at the novel's end, when he remembers "the Protestant girl back home in Connecticut that was the reason he first enlisted," may it be of some significance.¹⁷

In developing his characters, Jones subordinates each character's background to the character's actions in the present action of the novel. Biographic detail does not define. It explains some point already made, operating to provide an epiphany. The best example occurs in The Thin Red Line, when C-for-Charlie repulses a Japanese counter-attack.

In the excitement of the attack and defense they continued to fire into the seven bodies up the slope. When they ceased, only two bodies continued to move. Aiming deliberately in the sudden quiet, Witt the Kentuckian put a killing round into each of them. "You never can tell about them tricky suicidal bastards," he said. "Even when they're hit."(18)

Witt the Kentuckian: with that apposite Jones summons a state's bloody past. He thereby reveals in one small, frail-looking soldier the heir of seven generations of backwoods riflemen -- men who learned cold-bloodedness in their wars with Shawnee, redcoats, federal cavalrymen, revenue officers, union men and strikebreakers.

The method that Jones does use to develop his characters is the opposite of Heller's. Where Heller relies on biography and physical description, Jones passes over these in favor of the method Heller neglects, development by action. His characters are defined not by background or appearance, but by what they do.

"Wonderful day, aint it?" the KP, a tiny curly-headed Italian with narrow bony shoulders jutting from his undershirt, said to him. Scowling, he speared another spud ferociously and raised it, triumphantly, like a caught fish from the dirty water of the number 18 kettle.(19)

Thus is Angelo Maggio characterized. The physical details are scant; what animates them is the gesture, which suggests ad incipio the impishness which will bring Maggio into conflict with the Army. Even evil characters like Thompson and Judson are defined by their actions. Judson's dead-eyed ferocity is explicated by the beatings he administers. What defines Thompson as a sadist is the smile that crosses his lips when he tricks a pri-

soner into saluting him, knowing the man will be beaten for this mistake.

The Contrast Between Jones and Heller

The contrast between Jones' and Heller's differing means of characterization is no less diametric when one considers total effect. Catch-22's characters are interdependent. Its good and bad characters counterpoint each other. Corporal Whitcomb, who mails out form letters of condolence, might be ridiculous in isolation, but he seems downright callous and sinister alongside Chaplain Tappman, who actually cares about his military congregation. Within these groups, individual characters' peculiar qualities enhance those of their comrades: Scheisskopf's penchant for regimentation goes hand-in-hand with Captain Black's sadism, just as Nately's naive idealism complements Clevinger's idealistic rationalizations. Certain characters, like Dunbar and Doc Stubbs, are ficelles, externalized consciences of other characters -- thus dependent on them for their entire existence. All the book's characters, in fact, can be viewed as elements which Yossarian balances as he attempts to resolve his quandary.

Jones' characters, on the other hand, are independent. Each appears in his fellows' context, but within that context each is self-sufficient. Warden and Prewitt, who have adopted opposing strategies of dealing with societal impositions, exist on the strength of their philosophies alone, deriving only a minimal amount of substance from this contrast. The officers of

The Thin Red Line -- Stein, Tall, Band, Whyte, Blane, Culp, and Creo -- are all individual characters, not subtly different counterparts of some Platonic ideal of officer. Maggio, Andy Anderson, and Friday Clark, likewise, are simply Prewitt's friends, rather than personifications of part of his character.

Their differences in characterization also reflect the difference between Jones' and Heller's views of society. Catch-22's vividly personalized characters are obviously, undeniably unique beings. This furthers Heller's attack on the idea of society. Any assertion that Clevinger, Doc Daneeka, Orr, Sergeant Towser, Corporal Whitcomb, Chief White Half-Oat, and Yossarian have anything in common is patently ridiculous; these people are too individualized to share any social bond. Their only common factor is that they are all at risk -- which reiterates the conclusion Yossarian reaches, that individual interest is the only common interest. By contrast, Jones' belief in man as part of an aggregate finds expression in the initial, background anonymity of his characters. He treats his characters as soldiers -- men defined by a common corporate characteristic -- who can be distinguished from each other by individual details. (Crane had done so more explicitly by calling characters "the loud soldier," "the tall soldier," and "the youth.") Jones thus suggests that all men are merely variants on a common form. Underneath the trivial differences of individual personalities lies a larger, more characteristic similarity.

Orders and Roles of Characters in Jones' Novels

In writing Catch-22, Heller used what he had learned of the military to provide atmosphere and detail. Nonetheless, he wrote a fable, a didactic, author-directed tale in which the reality of the Second World War was incidental (recall his statement that Catch-22 actually deals with the 1950s and the Cold War). This meant, perhaps even required, a generalization of his treatment of military life. Jones was likewise concerned to communicate his conclusions about war and society. He had an additional purpose, however -- the purpose Pritchett had recognized when he described From Here to Eternity as an "instrumental recording of the soldier's life." Jones was indeed interested in recording facts. He did this, partially, in rebellion against the stylized depiction of war given by Hemingway and the adulatory treatment of war given by popular novelists. Naturalism also played a role: what better way to reject teleological explanations of life than by concentrating on a mass of detail? And there was a third reason, shown by the dedications of his first and his last novels: Jones saw his writing as a commemoration of his fellow-soldiers. For these reasons, he was determined to set down specifically what he had seen happen: what it was like to live in barracks, how it had been to fight the Japanese on Guadalcanal. He sought to recreate as much as possible of his wartime experiences.

To do this, Jones needed enough characters to re-enact

all the episodes he had experienced. Each therefore had to be self-contained and self-sufficient, a protagonist in himself. Because Jones had undertaken to remove the signs of his presence, he was compelled to work through his characters. Having limited his ability to speak from an omniscient vantage point, he needed characters who could see and report, observing the novel's events as they unfolded. Having foregone the option to comment directly, he needed characters in whose changing conditions he could comment indirectly, by dramatization. And having restricted his use of direct exposition, he provided it through the use of a background of minor characters. In his Army novels can be distinguished these three orders of characters.

First, there are minor characters -- characters who exist to people backgrounds, carry on subplots, emblemize themes, and surround major characters.

Second, there are observer characters -- characters whose motions lead readers through the events of the book, whose discoveries determine readers' experience. While Jones infrequently appears as narrator or judge, the fleshing-out of his novels is done by these characters.

Third, there are observed characters -- characters who are objects rather than subjects. In their combat-caused metamorphoses Jones illustrates his understanding of war's effect on men.

Determining into which category a character belongs are

different modes of characterization. Jones creates his minor characters from brief physical descriptions and the use of that character's distinctive, personal voice. Other characters' judgments aid as well. Observer characters are created by identification. Often their experiences are relayed to the reader in idioms as individual as those of minor characters, but in the main the reader identifies them, and comes to identify himself with them, because they are his guides and reporters. Observed characters are defined by the narration of their acts and thoughts. Nothing is seen through their eyes; the reader may know what they think, be told what they do, but does not experience directly what they feel.

A chart of Jones' characters and the categories is into which they fell is helpful:

	Observer Characters	Observed Characters	Minor Characters
<u>From Here to Eternity</u>	Prewitt Warden		Karen Holmes Stark Lorene Maggio Holmes
<u>The Thin Red Line</u>	Bell Fife Stein	Witt Welsh Storm	Doll Dale Queen Cash Mazzi Tills Tall Bead Band
<u>Whistle</u>	Winch Landers Storm	Prell	Women S/Sgts & W/Os Officers Surgeons

Prewitt, in From Here to Eternity, is almost exclusively an observer character. He is Jones' means of carrying out his book about the Army. If a scene must be portrayed, Prewitt walks onto that part of the set; if an observation is appropriate, Prewitt makes or hears it. Even if he has his own defining characteristics -- a thick Kentucky drawl, a trouble-maker's hubris -- his consciousness is congruent with that of Jones himself. The same is true of Milt Warden, who sets full half the novel in motion as he shakes down his infantry company and carries on an affair with his commander's wife. The narrative tracks his progress while his thoughts, constantly offered, pass judgment on Jones' behalf.

The best example of an observer character, however, is The Thin Red Line's John Bell. Bell seems carefully selected for his role. He is so neutral, reasonable, and sane that were all evidence presented on one page, he would be obviously over-qualified. Bell comes from Ohio, the heartland state of America's Middle-Western heartland. He is college-educated, and thereby established as competent to see clearly and comment wisely. He is educated in a technical field, however, engineering, and so is not prone to fit his observations into historical or sociological molds. Conjectures on the possible adultery of his wife make him subject to considerations of whether sex and combat are linked; but this notwithstanding, as closely as any human can approach the legal asymptote of the reasonable man, Bell does.

But John Bell standing rifle in hand and trying to shoot and run in the thick grass was able to see several important things. He was, for instance, the only man who saw Sgt McCron cover his face with his hands and sit down weeping. When they had first stood up, the fury of the Japanese fire had struck them like a wind-tormented hailstorm Four men of McCron's squad went down at once. On the right a young draftee named Wynn was shot in the throat and screamed, "Oh, my God!" in a voice of terror and disbelief as a geyser of blood spurted from his neck. Ridiculously like a rag doll, he fell and disappeared in the grass Bell was astonished that he himself was not already struck down dead. He only knew, could only think one thing. That was to keep going. He had to keep going. If he ever wanted to get back home again to his wife Marty, if he ever wanted to see her again, kiss her, put himself between her breasts, between her legs, fondle, caress, and touch her, he had to keep going. And that meant he had to keep the others going with him, because it was useless to keep going by himself. It had to stop. There had to be a point in time where it ended. In a cracked bellow he began to harangue the remainder of McCron's 2d Squad. In back of and a little below him off in the center as he looked behind, he saw Milly Beck leading his men in a fury of snarling hatred which shocked Bell numbly: Beck who was always so controlled and almost never raised his voice. Still below him yet came Keck, roaring and firing Welsh's Thompsongun uphill. A silly phrase came in Bell's mind and he began to yell at the other men senselessly. "Home for Christmas! Home for Christmas!"

Keep going. Keep going. It was a ridiculous thought, a stupid idea in any case and he would wonder later why he had it. Obviously, if he wanted to stay alive to get home, the best thing to do would have been to lie down in the grass and hide.(20)

How an observed character differs from an observer may be seen in the comparison of two passages -- one dealing with Prewitt, the other with his later avatar, the observed character Witt.

Its cover, one of those Norman Rockwell paintings of Americana, Prewitt studied for a long, long time....

There was a Pall Mall ad in it that he liked. It was painted in bright color and showed some happy soldiers on the range. (There were lots of things about the Army now, in all the magazines, since the peacetime draft.) Three of these were in the prone position firing, and the other two were back on the ready line sitting on green grass, and one of these was holding up two cigarets He was a very happy looking soldier.

He studied this one quite a while, too, professionally admiring the artist's observation. The board stiff campaign hats that were definitely Regular Army, pre-draft, were there. The Infantry's robin's-egg-blue cord and acorns were on the hats [T]he clinking brassy tubes of cartridges heavy in the hand came back to him as he looked at it.(21)

Prewitt, and later Witt:

Witt, when he crawled out to take the point -- or post rather, it was, since they were no longer moving -- 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 had made his decision to volunteer himself back into the old outfit, and he had made his decision to volunteer for this thing, and he was a free individual human being as far as he was concerned. He was free, white, and twenty-one and had never taken no shit off nobody and never would . . . he could feel himself tightening all up inside with excitement, exactly like he used to do in the coal strikes back in Bloody Breathitt. The chance to help, the chance to save all his friends that he could, the chance to kill some more goddam fucking Japanese, he would show that fucking Bugger Stein who had had him transferred out as a malcontent He had not shot squirrel all his life for nothing, he had not made High Expert on the range for the past six years for nothing, either.(22)

Note the slight shift in Jones' reportages of these interior monologues. The shift is from experiential writing to narrative -- i.e., from seeing through the character's eyes to seeing what the character is thinking. The focus is no longer upon the reality before the character but upon the character

himself. Prewitt-Witt's mental processes may be thought of as a filter or lens. In Prewitt's case, the reader looks through the filter; but with Witt, with observed characters, the reader looks at the filter itself.

Other things distinguish the observed character from his observer comrade-in-arms. Observer characters instigate plot. Observed characters appear not of their own accord, so to speak, but at the author's discretionary direction, or as figures within the vision range of observer characters. Their appearances have a still-shot, static quality. The action turns to bear upon them, whether they are summoned up by Jones --

While C-for-Charlie . . . was cautiously beginning its first 1000 yard jungle trek, at least two of its partisans were doing everything in their power to catch up with it[;] Mess Sergeant Storm and Acting-P.F.C. Witt, unknown to each other, and for different reasons, were both doing their best to find the company.(23)

-- or appear as figures moving into the sight of observer characters:

The man he had addressed stood up suddenly. He was a small, frail-looking man, and the US helmet shell . . . looked like an enormous inverted pot on his small head and almost hid his eyes. He marched up to where Welsh half reclined.

"Hello, Firs' Sarn't," the small man said with a rapacious grin.

Only then did Stein . . . recognize that this Witt was their Witt, . . .(24)

Observed characters are also subject to definition by other characters in a way observer characters are not. Early in From Here to Eternity, Milt Warden warms himself up for seducing

Karen Holmes by challenging the intellectual pretensions of his clerk, Mazzioli. Not content with ferreting out Mazzioli's delinquencies in completing forms, he insinuates (truthfully) that he knows more about Van Gogh and Gauguin than Mazzioli does; and completing the interview with a snarl of orders, he stalks off. The clerk's discussion, that morning, had centered on psychology. Mazzioli, watching Warden leave, decides "happily" that his First Sergeant must be "a manic-depressive, or a paranoiac."²⁵

With the trilogy completed, it is easy to see that Mazzioli may indeed have been correct. In the novel's context, however, Mazzioli is meant to be unreliable: his assessment of Warden is a clear mistake. In The Thin Red Line, however, Fife can look at Witt during an argument and realize:

There was something oddly snakelike about Witt at certain times such as this -- like a coiled rattler ready to strike and certain it is right and, although this was only instinct, or perhaps because of that, completely satisfied in its own tiny mind. You know it is useless to argue with it.(26)

Fife is not reliable on Welsh: he does not see that the harshness with which Welsh treats him at the novel's end is actually Welsh's attempt to make him want to seek medical evacuation. On Witt, however, Fife is meant to be reliable: his observation helps define Witt's character.

It is often difficult to decide whether a character is major or minor. In From Here to Eternity this is relatively easy. There are two strands to the novel, each built around a

main character, Prewitt and Warden. Whistle, too, presents no problem. A harder task is posed by The Thin Red Line, which chronicles the history of an entire infantry company and records the experiences of at least a dozen notable characters.

Function, rather than depth of characterization or frequency of appearance, determines a character's centrality. Major characters guide the reader through the book, carrying on the fighting or manifesting its effects. Minor characters illustrate one aspect of heroism, represent one archetypal or stereotypical military personality, or take part in one incident. They may be as fully developed and as memorable as major characters, but they lack major characters' scope. Don Doll and Charlie Dale appear more often and fight harder than Welsh, and Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Tall is seen nearly as often as Captain James Stein. But Stein provides one crucial vantage point, overseeing both his men and his superiors, and Welsh's slide into hard-boiled nihilism protests war on Jones' behalf. Doll, Dale, and Tall have less central, less critical roles. Doll is the soldier who plays hero. Dale -- accurately characterizable as a mean little son of a bitch, as short and authority-hungry as Napoleon -- represents the man who is driven by ambition. Lieutenant Colonel Tall is the competent West-Point Regular, the professional officer who worries about his soldiers' welfare because their morale affects his strategy's viability. Their characterization is complete, but their functions are restricted.

Jones' Method of Character Development:
The Example of Cash

Be they observer, observed, or minor, all Jones' characters are developed in like manner. The process is demonstrated by the development of The Thin Red Line's Pfc Cash.

Cash first appears as one of a group of soldiers, who have just been told of the bayonet-killings and mutilation by the Japanese of two Americans captured that afternoon.

Bell had never seen such reactions on men's faces. Big Queen turned red as a beet with rage and muttered something about cracking skulls, . . . McCron's eyes got vague and faraway Cash, a tall powerfully built Ohio draftee who had been a cab driver in Toledo and was known in the company simply as "Big Un," on the other hand grinned. He had a cold, gleefully tough face anyway, as hard and of the same texture as an uncracked walnut, and when he grinned and licked his lips like that, his blue eyes squinted, he looked positively and spinechillingly murderous. All he said was "Okay" in a very soft, breathed voice. He said it several times. Bell's own reaction was one of sickness.(27)

Cash then disappears from the story for three days. C-for-Charlie Company makes an attack. It is inconclusive, and a second assault on the enemy strongpoint is put off until the next dawn. One man now comes forward to join the survivors of Captain Gaff's assault: "Pfc Cash, the icy-eyed taxidriver from Toledo with the mean face."

Cash is seen through the eyes of Lieutenant Colonel Tall. At first glance, Tall regards him as a "great oaf . . . with [a] stupid request for personal, heroic vendetta" against the Japanese. But then Tall recognizes the sincerity of Cash's

request in the enlisted man's "huge, murderous face and icy, if not very intelligent eyes" -- and in the sawed-off shotgun Cash has carefully clutched through the confusion of the previous day. Tall says that Cash may go. "Yes, Sir! Thank you, Sir!" Cash calls after the departing officer.

Big Un's cry of thanks after the Colonel had not been without his own little hint of sarcasm. He had not been a hack pusher all his life not to know when he was being deliberately snubbed by a social better, high intelligence or low. As far as intelligence went, Big Un was confident he could have been as intelligent as any -- and more intelligent than most -- if he had not always believed that school and history and arithmetic and writing and reading and learning words were only so much uninteresting bullshit which took up a man's time and kept him from getting laid or making an easy buck. He still believed it, for his kids as well as himself. He had never finished his first year of high school and he could read a paper as well as anybody.(28)

And so Big Un Cash seats himself beside Witt, Bell, Dale, and Doll, who have all but forgotten the atrocity of three days earlier. There he sits, "toying with the bandolier of shotgun shells and slipping them in and out of their cloth loops, his face a stolid mean mask." The others look at him and his gun, "a brandnew, cheap-looking automatic with its barrel sawed off just behind the choke" -- "a mean weapon," Jones comments -- and notice how well gun and bearer fit each other. They remember Cash's history in the company, how "everybody was a little afraid of him," and realize that "despite the fact that they were now seasoned veterans of this particular assault and could look down on Big Un from this height of snobbery, they were all somehow a little reluctant to try it."²⁹

The assault goes forward. As it opens, Cash gives Lt Gaff "a hard, mean, gimlet-eyed grin that was not much help." The attack succeeds, Cash killing five Japanese with his shotgun's five shells. Having swept the bunker's topside clean, and grenaded the machine-gun ports, each member of the assault team is surprised to find everyone else still alive.

And now in the strange, numb silence -- still breathing hard from the fight, as they all were -- Big Un, who still had not yet got his rifle unslung, advanced snarling on the three standing Japanese. Taking two of their scrawny necks which his big hands went almost clear around, he shook them back and forth gagging helplessly until their helmets fell off, then grinning savagely began beating their heads together. The cracking sound their skulls made as they broke was loud in the new, palpable quiet. "Fucking murderers," he told them coldly. "Fucking yellow Jap bastards. Killing helpless prisoners. Fucking murderers. Fucking prisoner killers." When he dropped them as the others simply stood breathing hard and watching there was no doubt that they were dead, or dying. Blood ran from their noses and their eyes were rolled back white. "That'll teach them to kill prisoners," Big Un announced, glaring at his own guys.(30)

Later in the campaign, point man on a patrol looking for a water hole, Cash is cut down by a Nambu machine-gun, and bleeds to death. Bell sits beside him. "Just dont forget to write my old lady I died like a man," Cash says, breathless from hemorrhage, and he keeps muttering this instruction until his breathing stops. Then Bell looks "back down at him who was no longer Big Un, no longer anything."³¹

Jones develops Cash by three complementary, mutually-validating methods. Jones himself offers description of and insight into Cash; he supplies other characters' appraisals of

him; finally, he presents Cash directly. Validating and predicating each other, these methods characterize Cash by revealing a series of particular, sequentially-appropriate increments of detail, just as Charles Bovary, meeting Emma Roualt, notices first a young woman, then her face, dress, hair, and hands.

Each step in this characterization builds upon its predecessor. Jones introduces Cash with a physical description. Col Tall confirms this description by his appraisal of the hulking private. His physical presence thus established beyond question, Cash is tangible enough for Jones to slip inside his thoughts to reveal that what has been thought of him is in fact true: the mean, hulking exterior does in fact conceal a tough, narrow personality. This makes it easy to understand the unease Cash rouses in the assault group, and in C-for-Charlie. And ultimately, when he takes his unknowingly-ironic vengeance on the Japanese, the reader learns first-hand of his brute-like ferocity.

In this appears the final contrast of Jones' characterization with Heller's: the reader is allowed to make up his own mind. The information Jones furnishes is documentary, not conclusory. Given the evidence -- what Cash believes, how Cash acts -- the reader is permitted to decide what he thinks of Cash. The grim irony of Cash's vengeance demonstrates. Unlike Heller's ironies, which are created by the author's direct pairing of opposites, it arises from a recognition the reader must make himself.

Chapter VII

THE CONTRAST IN PLOTTING: PRE-DETERMINISM IN HELLER, EXPERIMENTATION IN JONES

The contrast between Jones and Heller, between a novelist who sought to work from behind his material and another who did not hesitate to display his mastery of it, affected the corpus of each man's work as well as individual novels. At its heart lies a difference in belief as to how much of his authorial prerogative -- his power to direct the narrative -- the writer should exercise.

The difference between these approaches is illustrated by an anecdote from the life of a writer whose work, in its combination of Midwestern realism with unreal fantasy, bears some resemblance to both Jones and Heller: Frank L. Baum, author of The Wizard of Oz. While at work on the book, he found himself bogged down. His characters, he complained to his wife, wouldn't do what he wanted them to do. Within a few days, however, he was once more writing at full speed, and she asked him how he had solved the problem. "It was simple," Baum explained. "I let them do what they wanted to do."

Jones' and Heller's different views of the novelist's relationship to his novel has meant that different relationships

obtain among their individual novels. Heller's work amounts to three distinct examinations of a common theme. Jones' Army novels, by contrast, form an integrated body of work. The trilogy's three volumes are linked by recurring motifs and re-examined themes.

This identity of subject matter -- and, more important, the continuing process of reinvestigating materials -- allows Jones' development as a writer to be more readily examined than Heller's. Heller's work breaks down into three particular exhibitions of talent; each particular novel stands on its own merits. In Jones' work, however, the author's reworking of the same subject allows comparison of earlier and later writing. Whistle uses a rhetoric subtler and more complex than From Here to Eternity: it relies upon connotation and symbolism, shows a greater sensitivity to language, and manifests a greater understanding of its characters and events. This suggests that Jones' talent matured over his career as a writer. Heller's talent, by contrast, has not developed beyond the radically innovative, original, and distinctively personal style Heller achieved in Catch-22. Something Happened revisits the first novel's rhetorical vocabulary without expanding it, and Good As Gold actually retreats toward the structure of conventional fiction.

Heller's Fiction: The Author as Czar

Heller was once invited to speak on "The Personal Dimension in Fiction." His comments reveal the belief that a writer

enjoys absolute power over his narrative.

JOSEPH HELLER: "The Personal Dimension in Fiction" is, to my mind, the dimension that best distinguishes fiction from other kinds of literature and from other forms of art. In nothing else I can think of is an artist or craftsman allowed more latitude or granted more opportunity for bitterness, spite, vanity, ambition, fanaticism, and all other kinds of self-indulgence. . . .

The author of the novel has an infinity of choices. He can move swiftly or slowly. . . . He can move everywhere he wants to in time, thought, place, history, allusion, fantasy and reverie. He can digress with any enthusiasm, and even take revenge upon an old girl friend by writing her in unkindly.(1)

Heller's comments on the genesis of Catch-22 and Something Happened show that Heller used this prerogative authority.

Q. In the process of writing Catch-22 [The Realist's interviewer asked Heller] did you ever change your mind about how you were going to end it?

A. No. The end was written long before the middle was written. I suppose right after I sold the book, I was riding on the subway one day, and I actually wrote the words to the ending . . . and I never changed it once.

I couldn't see any alternative ending. It had a certain amount of integrity, not merely with the action of the book -- that could've permitted anything -- but with the moral viewpoint of the book; the heavy suffusion of moral content which is in there, it seemed to me, required a resolution of choice rather than of accident.(2) (emphasis supplied)

This statement confirms Catch-22's role as a morality novel, as a work whose author has selected and controlled his material to support a predetermined conclusion. It corroborates evidence present in the book itself -- the absolute, unambiguous qualities of its characters, and its neatly Manichean opposition of society and individual, eros and thanatos, which leaves for another novel

the resolution of when a man should risk his own life to prevent the Nazi conquest of Europe -- that Catch-22's conclusions are based not on Heller's study of its transpiring events but on Heller's original intentions. Heller's characters do what their author wants them to do.

Speaking to The Paris Review, describing the writing of Something Happened, Heller offered another example of how quickly, completely, and early he conceived his novels. His comments reemphasized the predetermined nature of his plotting.

In 1962 I was sitting on the deck of a house on Fire Island I was waiting for something to happen(!), wishing I had a book to start. My novels begin in a strange way. I don't begin with a theme, or even a character. I begin with a first sentence that is independent of any conscious preparation. Most often nothing comes out of it: a sentence will come to mind that doesn't lead to a second sentence I was alone on the deck. As I sat there worrying and wondering what to do, one of those first lines suddenly came to mind: "In the office in which I work, there are four people of whom I am afraid. Each of these four people is afraid of five people." Immediately, the lines presented a whole explosion of possibilities and choices -- characters (working in a corporation), a tone, a mood of anxiety, or insecurity. In that first hour (before someone came along and asked me to go to the beach), I knew the beginning, the ending, most of the middle, the whole scene of that particular "something" that was going to happen; I knew about the brain-damaged child and, especially, about Bob Slocum, my protagonist, and what frightened him, that he wanted to be liked, that his immediate hope was to be allowed to make a three-minute speech at the company convention. Many of the actual lines throughout the book came to me -- the entire "something happened" scene with those solar plexus lines (beginning with the doctor's statement and ending with "Don't tell my wife" . . .) all coming to me in that first hour Eventually I found a different opening chapter . . . but I kept the original [first line] . . . to start off the second section

INTERVIEWER: Do you have last lines that come along with those first lines?

HELLER: I had a closing line for Something Happened before I began writing the book. It was "I am a cow." For six years I thought that was good Then I wasn't all that happy with it, and finally I discarded it. But it seemed good at the time, and besides, I can't start writing until I have a closing line.(3)

John Gardner's Analysis of "Moral Fiction"

The predetermined underpinning of Heller's writing has been independently noted -- by John Gardner, in his critique of modern writing, On Moral Fiction.

Art, says Gardner, "is good (as opposed to pernicious or vacuous) only when it has a clear positive moral effect, presenting valid models for imitation, eternal verities worth keeping in mind, and a benevolent vision of the possible which can inspire and incite human beings toward virtue, toward life affirmation as opposed to destruction or indifference."⁴ True art, Gardner continues, can be recognized "by its careful, thoroughly honest search for and analysis of values."⁵ Essential to it is the creation of believably substantial characters. A writer, like any other craftsman, needs good tools: fiction can uncover truth only if its representations of reality, the reagents of the experiment, sufficiently resemble their real-life counterparts. This is the starting point. From here the writer must treat what he works with as if it were real. The process runs as follows:

Moral fiction communicates meanings discovered by the process of the fiction's creation. We can see the

process working when we look through the drafts of a certain kind of writer's work. Thus we see Tolstoy beginning with one set of ideas and attitudes in Two Marriages, an early draft of Anna Karenina -- in which Anna, incredible as it seems, marries Vronsky -- and gradually discovering, draft by draft, deeper and deeper implications in his story, revising his judgments, stumbling upon connections, reaching new insights, until finally he nails down the attitudes and ideas we find dramatized, with such finality and conviction that it seems to us unthinkable that they should not have burst full-grown from Tolstoy's head, in the published novel.(6)

Gardner specifies steps.

Making up a scene, [the writer] asks himself at every step, "Would she really say that?" or "Would he really throw the shoe?" He plays the scene through in his imagination, taking all the parts . . . and when he finishes the scene he understands by sympathetic imitation what each character has done throughout and why, the fight, or accident, or whatever, developed as it did. The writer does the same with the total action. Throughout the entire chain of causally related events, the writer asks himself, would a really cause b and not c, etc., and he creates what seems, at least by the test of his own imagination and experience of the world, an inevitable development of story.(7)

And Gardner concludes with a final caveat: "To learn about reality by mimicking it, needless to say, the writer must never cheat. He may establish any sort of givens he pleases, but once they are established he must follow where, in his experience, nature would lead" ⁸

Gardner's fight is against "the artist who has no strong feeling about his characters -- the artist who can feel passionate only about his words or ideas" and who thus "imitates human nature in the movements of his puppets, but . . . does not worry as a father worries about the behavior of his son." ⁹ Among those

responsible for non-constructive, non-moral fiction -- alongside John Barth, Robert Coover, Norman Mailer, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon; the villains of Gardner's essay as Tolstoy is one of its saints -- Gardner lists Joseph Heller. Focusing on Heller in the company of Mailer and Vonnegut, Gardner writes:

Focusing on "message" and indifferent to real human beings, as represented by their characters, they take either no position or else smug, slogany positions. In place of wisdom and careful analysis, products of the artist's will and compassion, they offer, if anything, cant, cynicism, or dramatic gimmickry -- interesting and arresting infernal entertainment, but nothing that will hold, nothing that will help.(10)

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None of the three cares enough about his characters to use them as anything but examples in a forced proof. The novelist's "message," in each case, is only loosely related to the characters: they exist for the sake of the predetermined message, not as subjects for the artist's open-minded exploration of what he honestly can say.(11)

Predetermined Plotting's Effect
on Heller's Fiction

Gardner had called Heller's novels "forced proofs." Heller's comments indicate that both Catch-22 and Something Happened, if not forced proofs, were each an illustration of an idea conceived at one single moment. (The one change Heller reveals making is from "I am a cow" to "Everyone seems pleased with the way I've taken command"; a change which alters only the expression of an unaltered conclusion.) The risk of this approach is that it can limit the use of a writer's creative intelligence. It can foreclose him from taking second looks -- from

following Tolstoy's example.

Aggravating this risk of creative prejudice, in Heller's particular case, was a reliance on structure. In both Catch-22 and Something Happened, events are less important in themselves than as components of the novels' cyclical organization. Events have their impact not at the time in Yossarian's or Slocum's lives that these events occur; they are allowed to have impact when Heller recognizes that their effect will be greatest. Snowden's death would not be half so dramatic were it not presented as the climax of a foreshadowing cycle of incremental revelation. Slocum's life would be less of an angst-ridden tedium were its events not continually repeated and rehashed.

When a writer uses narrative structure to make his points, he must focus on telling his story, lessening his concentration on determining what that story is. Moreover, in Catch-22 and Something Happened, novels built of shifts in time, locale and characters, there is no way for plot to develop as a self-perpetuating chain of experiences and decisions. The need to slot particular cerebral and emotional stimuli into particular niches of the plot requires that the situation portrayed be essentially static. In these circumstances, the author's initial idea will dominate the story.

Gardner's observation holds: Heller's plots owe more to their author's original intent than to their characters' interaction. One should, however, hesitate to accept outright his

verdict on Catch-22. Under the theory laid out in On Moral Fiction, the novel fails because it lacks interaction by substantial characters. It succeeds, however, by the standards of Absurdist literature: it creates the impression of a nonsensical universe, reiterating the substance of its vision with its thoroughly nonsensical structure and diction. Moreover, Catch-22 deals more closely with reality than Gardner recognizes. Catch-22 anticipates what in the Latin-American context has been called magic realism, a style whose hallmarks are exaggeration and condensation. Heller has compressed into one small island and one limited group of characters all the events and forces of the Second World War: all the facts, all the rumors, all the ironies, all the humor, all the tall tales. Thus concentrated, the novel's forces become archetypal; its tall-tale anecdotes and characters, validated and made comprehensible by its detail, deal with reality from this mythic dimension. But notwithstanding Catch-22's success, Gardner's analysis offers a diagnosis of a problem which affects Something Happened: a disharmony of tones.

The Disharmony of "Something Happened"

In his interview with The Realist, Heller had given his assessment of the business world:

I cannot imagine anybody who's really ambitious, anybody with any real talent, anybody of any real intelligence, choosing to place himself within a large organization, where he functions in relationship to dozens or hundreds of other people, because every contact is an impairment of his efficiency

At the same time, the company, the organization that these people manage, is incredible. I mean, nothing in my book -- nothing in the wildest satire -- goes beyond it. The inter-office rivalries; the mistakes in communications; the difficulty of finding people to promote who can do a job well -- the amount of waste in the life of any corporation, at least the ones I've been with, is just extraordinary.

Now, on the other hand, it's hard to find anybody you'd classify as an intellectual as being associated with a business. To me, and I think to most people who have a high degree of intelligence, creative intelligence, business is boring after a certain point. There are really no new challenges.(12)

A willingness to consider business as interesting might have led Heller to explore the possibilities spun off from the events of a business novel. The above conclusion was not likely to do so. From this fixed idea came the world of Bob Slocum -- the dread-filled, tawdry, decaying world exhaustingly portrayed in Something Happened.

Heller discussed with The Paris Review the tone of his second novel.

INTERVIEWER: Do you find it restricting to tell the novel through the limited persona of Bob Slocum?

HELLER: It's true that I myself could have been much funnier, much more intelligent, much cleverer with words than Slocum is. But I must limit him, because if he had all my attributes he wouldn't be working for that company; he'd be writing Catch-22.(13)

This discussion shows that Heller was aware of the need to coordinate Something Happened's style with its outlook. Whether he effected this coordination, however, is open to question.

D. H. Lawrence observed that the mysticism of St. John of the Cross was like a sponge from which the Christianity could

be squeezed without affecting the mysticism. Much the same can be said of Catch-22 and its literary cleverness. One could press out of Catch-22 all the veteran's gripes and fears, all the realistic details of bombing missions and the Second World War -- in short, squeeze out of the book all of its ostensible subject -- without affecting the literary devices used to structure and narrate the story. There would remain a time-scheme that rejected linearity, placing later scenes before early ones. There would remain fragmented scenes which slip unexpectedly into each other. There would remain adjectives that transmogrify instead of clarify, and sentences that contradict the sentences immediately preceding them. There would be satire balanced by displays of innocent humor. Overall, the writing would be clever. These are the characteristics of Heller's literary style.

In Something Happened one finds all the literary devices that appeared in Catch-22. In the first novel, Nurse Duckett found Yossarian wonderful and was already trying to change him. In the second, Bob Slocum remarks of his daughter: "She is a strong-minded girl who is far too weak to withstand a popular trend."¹⁴ Alongside such recognizably Hellerian contradictions can be spotted the author's use of inappropriate yet apt language. Captain Black is full of "torpid enthusiasm"; Slocum, sexually aroused by women he meets in the city, carries lust home to his wife "like cooling Chinese food."¹⁵

The fragmentation of Catch-22, in which the narrative

jumped from one scene to the next, has become a long, continually-interrupted interior monologue. Where Catch-22 relies on contradictions, Something Happened relies on restatement and differentiation; where Catch-22 opposes, Something Happened associates. Instead of a fragmented narrative there is a single flow, its mainstream spinning off into eddies and backwaters. Parentheses break into sentences, develop into full paragraphs of digression, then end -- returning the reader to the theme of the original sentence. Every statement is qualified, countered, re-stated, or re-examined by a succeeding aside.

Sometimes, he has hinted, he will not do as well as he is able to on written reports in order to escape being called upon to read what he has written aloud from the front of the classroom as an example to others of what is superior. (He lacks the true will to win.) He never likes to be called upon in class unless he is positive he has the right answer. (He almost never, his teachers tell us, raises his hand to volunteer a reply.) He is a gifted, hard-working student; he is inhibited; he is a quick, intuitive learner. He is afraid to be wrong. He always seems to know much more about everything than he is disposed to reveal. (He thinks a lot. I can't always make him out.)(16)

As in Catch-22, there are retold incidents whose details differ with each retelling. Bob Slocum's consciousness is a cable twisted together of different strands of thought; within this continuum motifs and scenes reoccur, different strands coming to the top of the cable. Slocum remembers his flirtation with Virginia Markowitz, considers his family members, mistresses, and what he must do at work, recalls his mother. But where Catch-22's cycles spiraled into climax and conclusion, in

Something Happened there is no incremental revelation, no building of suspense. The same scenes merely occur and recur.

In Something Happened, Heller has his points to make. His attack is against blind conformity -- neurotic adherence to illusory social conventions and a corresponding dread of personal responsibility and liberty, which result in the unrelieved banality of Slocum's understanding. But if the indictment is damning, it may be misprosecuted. Something Happened is badly flawed by the disharmony between the world it presents and the tone in which this world is presented.

The problem can be variously described. It may be understood as a mis-congruence of viewpoint. Bob Slocum is, as Heller himself recognized, not as bright as his creator -- but he nonetheless tells his story in a style that is distinctively Heller. (Slocum, in fact, enjoys the services of a first-class comedy-writing team; Heller has stated that many of this neurotic businessman's lines were first uttered by Heller's friend Mel Brooks.)¹⁷ The problem can also be discussed in terms of how tone contemplates theme. In Catch-22, to use Clinton Burhans' expression, Heller had a thunderstorm to match his stylistic fireworks. Not only did he have the clear-cut, dramatic perils of the air war and the sensual excitement offered by Italy; he also had authenticating touches of detail -- details observed by characters whose desire to live focused their attention on such vivid minutiae. In Something Happened, working through a

character who misunderstands everything he encounters, Heller lacked such materials. Moreover, the world is apparently just as gray as Slocum sees it. Slocum's conclusions are unreliable, but there is no sign that his perceptions are equally wrong: Heller never intervenes to supply names for "my wife" and "my son," to hint at colors that Slocum has missed. And, matched with such drabness, Heller's clever writing eventually ceases to amuse.

Harmonization in "Good As Gold"

If Catch-22 demonstrates the potential of Heller's style, Something Happened demonstrates its limits. It can creatively distort reality, fracturing and rearranging it to illustrate connections and conclusions otherwise invisible. It can function effectively, however, only when matched with a complementary viewpoint and vision. These were lacking in Something Happened. In Good As Gold, however, Heller supplied them both.

Bruce Gold seems at least as close to Joseph Heller the novelist-academic as Yossarian was to Joseph Heller the citizen bombardier. This works to the novel's advantage by making its humor credible. Good As Gold may remark that Gold's favorite tools of academic research are scissors, pencil and Scotch tape, or that

Gold wrote the most enticing titles and descriptions for the college catalogue, and no one was more successful at originating popular new courses[;] Gold was the architect of an illicit and secret policy of detente that permitted members of the German Department to give courses in remedial English . . . in exchange for votes on critical issues at faculty council meetings[;] Italy

and Spain were reeling as a result, Classics was deserted, and France had been isolated.(18)

One cannot ascertain whether such observations are Gold's or Heller's. Bruce Gold is certainly intelligent enough to coin these phrases; they are not out of tune with his character, as Slocum's witticisms often were.

The clever observations Gold makes, furthermore, are in keeping with Good As Gold's subject. When Gold researches the Jewish experience in America, he deals with a story involving heroic virtues: the courage it took to leave one continent to settle in another, the self-sacrifice, discipline, and ingenuity displayed by a people who in two generations raised themselves from the tenements to the universities. The novel's characters are archetypes, tall-tale composites drawn from real men and women. Its satire fastens itself to specific, deserving targets: Virginia aristocrats who have never felt deprivation and will never feel it; short dumpy Jews who grow taller, slimmer, and blonder with each year spent in government service; academics who rework theses into books, turn criticism into poems, and edit old collections of essays into new collections of essays.

Good As Gold features, moreover and oddly, a general lack of Hellerian tricks. Except for the intermittent jets of vitriol against Henry Kissinger, the humor is friendly and tolerant, recalling Sinclair Lewis in its tone of amused, observant acceptance. The double-talk Ralph Newsome offers -- "I can do whatever I want once I get permission from my superiors" --

recalls only faintly the earlier books' contradiction and paradox. It pokes fun at Newsome; it does not argue that the world is absurd. Furthermore, the chronology of Good As Gold is linear. The action is divided itself into subplots, but it does so conventionally. Gold interrupts his work on the Jewish experience in America to visit Washington, then returns to his writing -- instead of recalling and recalling again, as Yossarian or Slocum might have done, his thoughts on the subject. The time sequence is distorted only once, and then only to compress into one moment the forces leading to Gold's heart seizure. And as Heller opens this section, one remarks the following passage:

Once again Gold found himself preparing to lunch with someone -- Spotty Weinrock -- and the thought arose that he was spending an awful lot of time in this book eating and talking. There was not much else to be done with him. I was putting him into bed a lot with Andrea and keeping his wife and children conveniently in the background. For Acapulco, I contemplated fabricating a hectic mixup which would include a sensual Mexican television actress and a daring attempt to escape in the nude through a stuck second-story bedroom window, while a jealous lover crazed on American drugs was beating down the door with his fists and Belle or packs of barking wild dogs were waiting below. Certainly he would soon meet a schoolteacher with four children with whom he would fall madly in love, and I would shortly hold out to him the tantalizing promise of becoming the country's first Jewish Secretary of State, a promise I did not intend to keep. He would see Andrea's father, Pugh Biddle Conover, one more time before his tale was concluded, and Harris Rosenblatt twice.(19)

Adding to the passage's noteworthiness is the fact that the rest of Good As Gold does not follow this revelation of authorial intent. Gold does see Pugh Biddle Conover once more and Harris Rosenblatt twice; he does fall short of being named Secretary of

State. He does fall in love with a schoolteacher. The details of his Acapulcan holiday resemble substantially those outlined. What matters, however, is the omission of two succeeding events important enough to merit mention here: Gold's heart seizure and the death of his brother Sid, which recalls Gold to his kinfolk and friends. These omissions -- made in the only passage in Heller's novels where the author uses the first-person singular to claim outright his dominion over the narrative -- suggest that the novel ran away from Heller. They insinuate that the events triggered by the forces Heller had been orchestrating overpowered his original intentions and wrote their own conclusion to the novel. Good As Gold, thus, not only marks a down-playing of stylistic theatrics by Heller. It may also demonstrate a change in his fundamental attitude toward his work.

The Author As Observer:
Plotting in Jones' Fiction

Twenty years before Gardner argued that the novelist should bind himself to write what he believed would happen to his characters as they interacted, Jones had admitted following the same process. The Paris Review asked him how he "went about building the structure of a novel," and Jones replied:

I don't "go about it." I work it out as I go along. I begin with a problem that interests me or excites me, like that of individualism and the fringe-society of jazz Then I take a character who, to some extent, represents the abstract idea of the problem. Not as a symbol, though; I don't like making symbols out of characters. No human being is really a symbol In this type of novel, the problem is

there, and I can actually give it a concrete written definition. I always try to do that. But instead of laying out the abstract idea -- if A is put against B then C will result -- I take the people, one of whom will more or less represent A (but who has the right to not represent A, if he so chooses), and one of whom will more or less represent B. Then when I set A against B, maybe Z or X will result, instead of C. Because by allowing that unknown to exist in there, I won't actually be able to know what will happen until it writes its own answer. Because after all, this problem, whatever it is, is a question which I haven't answered, and which I don't feel qualified to answer, wouldn't presume to answer, for myself or anybody else. And by doing it that way, I'm letting the people write their own story themselves. For example, I had written three hundred pages of Eternity before I realized that Warden was going to have an affair with Karen Holmes. So I had to go back and bring that about. But even then I didn't know how it would end. I knew only that because of their situation it wouldn't, couldn't work out.(20)

If Heller is an a priori novelist, Jones was an empiricist. He did not direct; he second-guessed.

How seriously Jones took his belief that "the [characters should] write their own stories themselves" is shown by one of the Army trilogy's complications.

In the original conception [Jones wrote in a foreward to Whistle], first as a single novel, and then as a trilogy, the major characters such as 1st/Sgt Warden, Pvt Prewitt, and Mess/Sgt Stark were meant to continue throughout the entire work. Unfortunately the dramatic structure -- I might even say, the spiritual content -- of the first book demanded that Prewitt be killed in the end of it. The import of the book would have been emasculated if Prewitt did not die. . . .

It may seem like a silly problem now. It wasn't then. Prewitt was meant from the beginning to carry an important role in the second book, and in the third. I could not just resurrect him

I solved the problem by changing the names. All of the names. But I changed them in such a way that . . . a marked similarity, continued to exist, as a reference point, with the old set of names. . . .

So in The Thin Red Line 1st/Sgt Warden became 1st/Sgt Welsh, Pvt Prewitt became Pvt Witt, Mess/Sgt Strange became Mess/Sgt Storm. While remaining the same people as before. In Whistle, Welsh becomes Mart Winch, Witt becomes Bobby Prell, Storm becomes John Strange.(21)

Given the fact that his trilogy dealt with one subject and group of characters, Jones' practice of letting a story "write its own answers" to the issues it involved meant that his completion of the trilogy was a process of reexamination and reinterpretation. (Indeed, Jones was to a certain extent obliged to reinterpret his characters because of Prewitt's death. His infantryman, First Sergeant, and Mess Sergeant characters retain their essential identities, but they nonetheless are different people.)

This process discernibly affected Jones' writing. His later books show a broadened understanding of his materials and a more complex treatment of them. His initial conceptions of his characters are qualified; minor details become foreshadowing motifs. The literal-level narration which led Pritchett to dismiss From Here to Eternity as an instrumental recording is supplemented by a rhetoric which makes its points through connotation and episodes which verge on the surreal.

Reinterpretation of Theme and Character

Jones' Army trilogy is linked by reworked themes. The continuity of these themes unifies the trilogy, while their variations mark off the work's progress. When Jones returned to

matters he had written of earlier, he added weight to what had begun as minor or innocuous. From Here to Eternity, for example, really begins in medias res. The careful reader will note that the events of Jones' Army trilogy (earlier even than Prewitt's service with Warden in A Company, mentioned in Chapter Eight) begin with Maylon Stark. The first action between any of the book's characters was Stark's affair with Karen Holmes, at Fort Bliss. In From Here to Eternity this matters little, except to Milt Warden. Twenty-six years later, however, when Jones realized how Whistle would end, he reached back and seized this chance to give his saga a camouflaged symmetry. He chose to conclude Whistle with Strange's plunge into the North Atlantic. The books opened with a sexual encounter and ended with a death; Mess Sergeant Stark began the trilogy, and now Mess Sergeant Strange completes it.

A second reworked theme is that of the changing relationship of Jones' First Sergeant character and his weapons. Milt Warden possesses a .45 pistol and a Star Gauge match-grade 1903 Springfield rifle. The former he cocks and holds to his temple, index finger flat against the trigger; the latter he carries as a member of the regimental rifle team. The guns, here, are personal accoutrements emblematic of both Warden's professional competence and his penchant for taking self-made dares. In The Thin Red Line, similarly, the weapons of Eddie Welsh illuminate their bearer's mental state. The reader sees

Welsh inspect his personal arsenal: "He had already gone over his new Thompsongun and the pistol he had pre-empted from Mac-Tae's supplyroom [to say nothing of the eight-shot Garand rifle which he already carries as standard issue]. And if they had handed out sawed-off shotguns, he would have had one of those."²²

What the reader does not see -- occurring off-camera, so to speak -- is what Welsh does with these weapons. His Thompson-gun turns up in the hands of Sergeant Keck, providing covering fire for B Platoon's rush. Later still, Witt finds alone on a jungle trail a wounded soldier, left as a sentry, who waves a pistol in greeting. "Welsh left me his pistol," the man comments.²³ Welsh's accumulation of firepower shows the intensification of his contemptuous rage against mankind and its wars. His disposition of his guns proves that he retains a self-sacrificing concern that will not let him rest easy while his men are in danger.

The First Sergeant's hunger to be first is insatiable, his compassion ineradicable. The frustration of both these drives is what has undermined Whistle's Mart Winch, who has learned he is neither personally invulnerable nor able to save his men. The stolen grenades and liberated pistol that Winch hides under his pillow symbolize his illness. What first appeared as emblems of virility and ability end as the last, dangerous, futile refuges of a madman.

Using increasingly sombre variations, Jones expanded the

roles of characters as well as objects. The young Air Corps officer who flirts with Karen Holmes at the end of From Here to Eternity prances like a satyr across The Thin Red Line and Whistle. He appears four times, three of them as a lieutenant-colonel. In The Thin Red Line he cuckolds John Bell. In the last volume he appears simultaneously in Cincinnati and St. Louis, instructing Linda Sue Strange in sexual technique and entering a darkened house arm-in-arm with Winch's estranged wife. With the glamor of his military specialty, his Stateside stationing, and his rank, he is the antithesis of Jones' infantrymen.

In narrating Winch's final breakdown, Jones drew on this for his subtlest irony. When Carol Firebaugh decides to share Winch's apartment, she announces to her family that she is moving in with her lover, but she lies about his identity. An enlisted man, even a warrant officer on Second Army's command staff, would be unsuitable for a Luxor college girl. She claims instead that Winch is a commander in the Navy. A Navy commander is the rank equivalent of -- an Air Corps lieutenant colonel. This final, ironic promotion completes Winch's ruin. More than anything else, this lie sums up the hell into which he is led by the war effort's feverish acceleration, a steady downward tunnel of ostensible rewards and satiations.

Continuing Re-Definition: Prewitt, Witt, and Prell

It is in Jones' handling of Prewitt that one sees best how Jones altered a character as his understanding of that char-

acter altered. Jones' treatment of Prewitt -- and of his successors, Witt and Prell -- represents a cutting down to size of his Infantryman character. In the first half of From Here to Eternity, Prewitt is too good to be true. He comes from that favorite backland of Socialist Realist writers and local-colorists, the coalfields of Appalachia; he has grown up young and tough, like Huck Finn, thanks to a life on the bum. He combines a boxing career with a natural aptitude and mystical reverence for the bugle. He is a crack shot with a rifle and impresses others with his knowledge of machine-guns. He believes in the equality of all men, shows a knack for deflating intellectual pretense, and can persuade a professional prostitute to love him. By the novel's end, he is even capable of passive resistance.²⁴

Witt and Prell are less sympathetic characters. No one will identify as easily with them as with Prewitt. Witt is simply a tough little first-rate infantryman -- who comes, significantly, from the same county as Fatso Judson. He is hard-bitten and hard-headed as only an Appalachian mountaineer can be, with a sullen pride which often flares into resentment and rebellion. Prewitt is concerned for all men's welfare; Witt's goal in combat, as he conceives it, is "to save all his friends that he could [and] kill some more goddam fucking Japanese."²⁵ Prewitt ponders the mysteries of sex and romances an ambitious prostitute; Prell is more than willing to take part in Whistle's hotel-suite orgies, but he is leery of marital entrapment. Prewitt

drinks, but Witt and Prell fall down drunk. Prewitt sympathizes with the oppressed masses, but Witt has fought in the Kentucky coalfields' strikes-cum-blood feuds. Witt is less intelligent than Prewitt, less tolerant of what he calls niggers. Unwilling or unable to think in abstracts, he praises or blames only individuals; he is capable of seeing the Army's defects only as flaws in his commanders.

Prewitt seems a first-novelist's fictional alter ego. Clearly he is romanticized. Two articles sum him up between their titles: "James Jones' Dead-End Young Werther," and "Rear-Rank Robin Hood." But Prewitt is sociopathic as well as virtuous; though sinned against, he is no saint. Angered at an unfair demotion, which in fact costs him no rating, he transfers away from his friends and into an environment he knows will be hostile -- looking for trouble. When the field-hand's daughter he sleeps with will not move into town with him, he looses against her a stream of indignation. He starts a fight because he will not accept an obnoxious fellow-soldier's gratitude. Jailed for striking a sergeant, he refuses to cooperate in his own defense, thereby sending himself to the stockade. On his release he kills a prison guard, then deserts. While hiding out with his prostitute girlfriend, he fancies and pays for sex with her roommate.

The above synopsis omits all Prewitt's virtues: his

friendship with his squadmates, his loyalties to them, his essential (if overweening) integrity, his willingness to learn. On balance these make him a sympathetic character -- surely no reader has ever been relieved to see him machinegunned by the MPs. And yet within the noble, knocked-about, tragic Robert E. Lee Prewitt, the artist and the individualist, there lies this unpretty core. One would expect such things of Witt, who puts extra bullets into fallen Japanese, or of Prell, who dies in a bar-room brawl he picked.

Prewitt is not his successors; but there is a part of him that could have become them, once the romance had been stripped away. This deglamourization occurs within From Here to Eternity. The passages that win sympathy for Prewitt, by establishing his artistic and personal integrity, occur early in the book. At this point, Jones concerns himself with describing Prewitt's background. When Jones begins dramatizing Prewitt's actions -- begins following Gardner's course of "sympathetic imitation" and moral exploration -- Prewitt's flaws become visible.

For much of the novel one can ignore these flaws. There are justifications for Prewitt's rebellions: the jockstrap NCOs' harassment of him, and Dana Holmes' approval of their actions. Prewitt's unwillingness to be compromised is so admirable that it overshadows the fact that Prewitt refuses to take honorable ways out. (He could, for example, work in Stark's kitchen. He could

transfer to Pete Karelsen's Weapons Platoon, where he would be no less a straightduty soldier and where his knowledge of machine-guns would be valuable and appreciated.) Jones passes so quickly over these alternatives that the reader may miss these hints that Prewitt's integrity may be only stubbornness. Sympathy with Prewitt may interfere with the reader's appreciation of what Prewitt is doing. Jones spends much of the novel establishing Bloom as an obnoxious character; the reader long looks forward to Prewitt's taking a poke at him. When the fight actually occurs, however, it is actually Prewitt who triggers the violence, bouncing a coffee-mug off Bloom's head. And Lieutenant Culpepper is so much a fool that one hardly blames Prewitt for letting him offer a foolish defense at Prewitt's court-martial -- even though thereby Prewitt throws away a valid defense, ensuring that he will go to the Stockade.

Here, for the first time, the reader senses that Prewitt may be less than an ideal man. The reader learns it when Prewitt realizes why Jack Malloy opens up to him alone: "He came to know him well enough to realize that the sole reason The Malloy let him get behind the curtain shrouding his past was not because Malloy saw him as an equal who would understand, but because to Malloy he was an inferior who openly needed help."²⁶ The Prewitt who puts his soul into his bugling and deflates Tommy's high-brow platitudes would hardly have been Malloy's inferior. For the first time Jones has presented a character who is superior to

Prewitt. This de-romanticization prepares the reader for the Prewitt who cannot shake the idea that it must have been the Germans who bombed Pearl Harbor -- because he harbors an unlettered hillman's belief in the power of the British navy. Prewitt is no longer a second Werther. He has become a simple rear-rank private. Warden, going through his pockets, is surprised that such a troublemaker could write "The Re-enlistment Blues" and plan to read the same books he himself has read, and the assessment does not surprise. Jones has stripped away the aura surrounding Prewitt. Shaking off his own romantic misconceptions, he has prepared his readers for Witt and Prell.

Connotation and Preternaturalty in "Whistle"

While Jones was redefining his characters, he was also learning to write on levels other than the literal. From Here to Eternity and Whistle represent the endpoints of his continuum. The earlier book's message is conveyed entirely on the literal level. When Prewitt seduces Lorene or Warden wins heavily at stud poker, nothing more need be inferred from these events than that the two characters have been lucky at love and cards. Whistle, by contrast, relies to convey its message on concepts never literally stated. Winch's prowess at football, basketball, diving, track, checkers, chess, and ping-pong now hint at his compulsion to pretend Fate is not inexorable and haphazard by filling his days with artificial rules. His fantastic winnings

in Jack Alexander's poker game represent now an ironic apotheosis, chance handing him undreamed-of success as he slides into break-down.

With this use of suggestion went a new reliance upon the connotations and shadings of meaning of particular words. The tone is set early in Whistle, when Jones states that Winch "accommodates" a woman eager for sex. It matters here that this word casts Winch in a female light. It thus questions his masculinity and foreshadows his deterioration.

On his return to San Francisco, stepping onto his soap-box in Washington Square, Winch bawls at the crowd of servicemen what might serve as the epigram to Whistle: "Soldiers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your guns!" For him it is not just a joke:

The concept . . . was one he had had quite a while. It had occurred to him first on Guadalcanal, last year, lying up under a mortar barrage. He had developed and expanded it later, playing with it at times when he sat alone drinking, or watched from a ridge with the company commander as their overheated, mud-breathing platoons tried to advance. He had summarized the whole concept in the slogan he worked out for it.(27)

The point of substituting guns for chains is twofold. While parodying Karl Marx, it plays on words to summarize Jones' conclusions about modern war. Gun is Army slang for penis.^{*} Make the substitution, and the cry becomes a warning -- issued by

* Drill sergeants, teaching their charges to call their fire-arms rifles, made them recite the barrack-square jingle: "I have a rifle and I have a gun: one is for killing and one is for fun."

Jones through Winch -- that war wastes and ruins, emasculating those who fight it. One can imagine Yossarian shouting agreement from the crowd.

And, finally, there is the name of the city where Jones' returning servicemen enjoy orgies more frenzied than any in their pre-war imaginings: Luxor. At first glance this seems only a pseudonym for Memphis, a mere transposition of ancient Egyptian cities' names. But Jones debated with himself whether such a re-naming would be correct, and finally decided to set at the opening of Whistle the following explanation:

Luxor in fact does not exist. There is no town of Luxor, Tennessee. There is no Luxor in the United States.

Luxor is really Memphis. I spent eight months there in 1943 in the Kennedy General Army Hospital. I was 22.

But Luxor is also Nashville. When I was sent back to duty from Kennedy General, I went to Camp Campbell, Kentucky, which was close to Nashville. Nashville supplanted Memphis as our liberty town. Luxor has recognizable traces of both. . . .

So I have called my city Luxor and used the Memphis that I remembered. Or imagined I remembered. People who know Memphis will find my city disturbingly familiar. And then suddenly and even more disturbingly, not familiar at all. They should not think of it as Memphis, but as Luxor. Sole owner and Prop., Jas. Jones, who must also take full responsibility.(28)

For a man who called in Mississippi-born friends to help him remember street names and coordinate other geographical references, to call a city by a false name must have been a decision

hard in the making.* The reason Jones finally did so seems to have been what Luxor really means. Luxor is cognate to luxury -- lechery or lust archaically, in modern usage extravagance or carnality. To Jones, Memphis had been the City of Worldly Pleasure, Babylon blazing in purple and gold neon. By calling it Luxor Jones could hint at his feeling that the war had corrupted America, turning its women into harlots and seducing its men into furious getting-and-spending. This, more than his fictional city's kinship to Nashville, seems the reason Jones picked the name.

From such connotative underlining, it was simple to step beyond realism altogether. The dreams and hallucinations that plague Jones' soldiers do not reach surrealism, and they are not described with enough accuracy to qualify as realistic descriptions of hallucinations. What Winch and Prell are experiencing is emotion, tremors signaling general collapse, which Jones chooses to represent as visual perceptions. But Whistle contains passages which are clearly other than realistic. They too are

* Consider how Jones had earlier charted part of Prewitt's journey from the alley in which he kills Fatso Judson to Alma's house on Wilhemina Rise:

"He crossed Beretania and King on McCully Street that ran clear down to Kalakaua. There was Fern Street and Lime Street and Citron Street and Date Street and he remembered from somewhere that Date Street crossed Kapiolani Boulevard and the Territorial Golf Course clear into Kaimuki. . . . [A]fter that he did not remember the streets he used to angle up through Kaimuki to Waialae where he hit Wilhemina."(29)

not surreal, but there is about them something extra-normal: they fit too exactly the tone of the story, demonstrate its points with supernatural coincidence. Preternatural is the best term. Twice in Whistle the entire narrative does twist into the preternatural: once in the hospital prison ward, and again in the long, vaguely-pastoral episode of Landers' desertion to Barleyville, Tennessee.

The prison ward could stand among Heller's hospital scenes. It is a long ward with barred windows, peopled by mental patients, felons, and a gaunt German POW who paces up and down the cots while drinking a bottle of milk; and against this visual background, loudspeakers blaring out sermons by radio evangelists. What matters most, however, is what Landers hears his first few nights:

At night sometimes, when he had first come in, Landers heard a man screaming faintly from one of these [mental] wards on the floor below, and yelling over and over something like, "Get them out of there, goddam it, get them out of there." It seemed very much in keeping with the whole place. But then one night he did not hear it any more, and the scuttlebutt came around that the old-timer 1st/sgt who had been doing the screaming had been discharged out of the Army and moved out to a Veterans' Administration hospital somewhere. The rumor said he had been a sergeant in a company on Guadalcanal in Landers' old Division.(30)

The sergeant is not Winch; Winch is sitting at these moments in his office across the quadrangle of buildings. But the reader knows that nightmares have dragged Winch time and again through his worst day of the war, a day on Guadalcanal when the Japanese spotted his men in the open, and that he has awakened shouting

what he shouted that day: "Get them out of there, get them out of there! Can't you see the mortars got them bracketed!"³¹ The coincidence stretches realism. The reader knows that Winch is slipping out of balance mentally. That he and the other unknown sergeant cry out the same warning insinuates that Winch's madness is not an isolated case, but rather part of a war-induced epidemic sweeping the whole Army -- just as at the end of Catch-22 the quota of missions has increased for squadrons other than Yossarian's.

The second preternatural episode is not surreal. Its feel, instead, is mythic or magical, though these qualities are disguised by Jones' realistic treatment of its events. In his flight to Barleyville, Landers steps for a moment out of the wartime bustle of Luxor. He knows already what lies ahead for him, should he stay in the Army. In Barleyville he learns what civilian life has become and will be in postwar America. He is the hero of a folk epic, on the eve of battle, being shown his alternative fates by a wise woman or sorcerer.

Landers has the choice, he discovers, between a short, fierce, unhappy struggle for honor, and a long, tolerable, corrupt existence. Staying in Barleyville would assure him survival and even prosperity. He would be absorbed into the American heartland, become a participant in the unchanging cycle of rural life. But if Barleyville is eternal, it is also corrupt. It is a place where the chief law officer flouts the law,

selling illegal whiskey, welcoming fugitives from justice, and manipulating the electoral process to preserve his power. It is a place where a deserter can be judged a good choice for sheriff. The folksy way in which Charlie Waterhouse sidesteps law and morality does not excuse his malfeasance. It demonstrates, instead, just how rotten the community has become: in Barleyville, the people regularly re-elect Charlie Waterhouse. Illegitimate births are a commonplace. Men marry only to avoid the responsibility of military service. Baptist matrons condone each other's adulteries. Vice has eaten away all but a sheltering veneer of hypocrisy. Luxor was riotously wicked; Barleyville is crooked and shabbily sordid. There Landers can survive the war and live a long, prosperous life. All he must do is marry a self-absorbed nymphomaniac, raise children not his own and father children he will not raise, and join in -- indeed, as deputy sheriff, referee -- the general perversion of ideals.

Heightening the reader's perception of Barleyville's unpleasantness is the episode's structural position. The Barleyville episode of Whistle counterpoints the Stockade episode of From Here to Eternity. Each comes near the end of the novel that contains it. Each involves a perversion of justice. In the first, an innocent man is imprisoned; in the second, a man guilty of desertion is free to walk a town's streets without fear of challenge. In each an experienced, uncannily omniscient, successful man offers his experience to a younger man faced with a

critical decision about his life; and Charlie Waterhouse bears a passing physical resemblance to Jack Malloy. The contrast between the two episodes shows how much war has altered the world for the worse. Jack Malloy offered Prewitt a way to retain his integrity, though at the cost of liberty or life. Charlie Waterhouse guarantees Landers' survival, at the cost of integrity. In From Here to Eternity, the recommendation of a man who knew the world was to adopt passive resistance, in the hope of bringing reform. In Whistle, the recommendation is to yield altogether. And Landers knows the answer he must give as certainly and quickly as Achilles or Cuchullian -- or Yossarian -- knew theirs. Refusing to be corrupted, he returns to his unit.

Conclusion

Over the continuum which spans a full quarter-century and whose endpoints are From Here to Eternity and Whistle, the evolution of Jones' craftsmanship is paralleled by a maturing of his perspective. Time Magazine was correct to note the resentment that suffused From Here to Eternity. When it came to the Army's way of suppressing individuality, Jones was unrestrainedly scathing. "Certain of the Stockade scenes did happen," Jones wrote in his libel disclaimer. "They did not happen at the Schofield Barracks Post Stockade but at a post within the United States at which the author served, and they are true scenes of which the author had first-hand knowledge and personal experience."

In Whistle, however, one finds almost a recantation.

The Army way was to achieve expertise by handling en bloc larger and larger numbers of similar objects, including casualties. While saving time and enhancing efficiency in the upper levels of bloc-manipulating, this method passed all time loss and inefficiency straight down to the lowest level of individual unit -- where it enhanced and multiplied time loss, waste, human error, discomfort, all inefficiency at the individual unit level. Namely, each man. In actual fact, it was not just the Army way. It was the way of all large organizations. Such as factory forces, universities, big offices, and all hospitals, Army or otherwise.(32)

The bitter young novelist who stressed his personal experience and insisted that punctuation be done to his eccentric specifications had vanished by the trilogy's end. His successor placed in WW II a Bill Mauldin cartoon in which one tired soldier told another, "You'll get over it, Joe. Once I wuz gonna write a book exposin' the army after th' war myself."(33)

The difference may be only that between an angry young writer and a successful middle-aged family man. It might also be ascribed, however, to the process which Gardner described and Jones practiced, a sympathetic imitation which taught about reality. The more Jones learned, from reinvestigating his materials, the more he may have been willing to pardon. The process of writing his trilogy had affected his technique to make this suggestion plausible.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation compares the fiction of James Jones and Joseph Heller. This contrast has been between a writer who treated the individual as an element of a human collective and one who has questioned the very legitimacy of social bonds; between a writer who, in the Naturalist tradition, treated reality as a comprehensible realm and a writer who has used the real-life basis of his fiction as material to be recast to make an Absurdist statement; and between a writer who sought to work from behind his material and one who has never hesitated to display his mastery over his subject.

The marked contrast between Jones' and Heller's techniques reflects these writers' fundamentally different artistic outlooks. With Jones' view of the individual as part of the social group and the physical world corresponds his view of the novelist as a catalyst, an intelligence which functions to bring together the reagents of the fiction -- materials drawn from the real world, and functioning within the novel as they would in reality. Jones' use of solid, credible characters, and his reliance upon their interaction to generate the action of his novels, were also in keeping with this belief. The better to deemphasize his authorial role, he relied upon a colloquial style, believing it the least obtrusive.

Heller's jealous defense of the independence of the individual shaped his fiction in equivalent ways. Heller's fiction argues that the individual's only true interest is his own, his only true guide his own choice and conscience. In writing his novels, Heller has acted accordingly. He has created two-dimensional characters who are recognizably their author's creatures; he has plotted their interaction to illustrate points worked out in advance by him. His style calls attention to the presence and paramount role of the author.

Jones offers an example of the novelist as witness. He has seen how an army functioned as a collective entity and had undergone himself the deindividuation of the soldier. His testimony bears upon these matters: how society compromises individual interests, enhancing as well as restricting, and how the subjects of this process react. His growth as a novelist consists of an increasing attentiveness to the task of communicating these experiences. The mingled sentimentality, self-pity, and deliberate poor taste of From Here to Eternity are succeeded by the sober narrative of The Thin Red Line. If Whistle repeats From Here to Eternity's brutality and squalor, it also employs a rhetoric which, for the first time in Jones' fiction, abandons the literal to rely upon connotation and suggestion. Present in all these books are Jones' strengths: a talent for characterization, a grasp of detail and procedure, a visceral intensity, often decried but always admitted, and a concern to tell the

entire truth as he understood it.

Heller's conception of the novelist's role has allowed him greater opportunity to demonstrate his abilities. If his books are illustrations of preconceived ideas, Heller's talent as an illustrator is considerable. He has managed to be both clever and thorough. In Catch-22 he produced a novel of extraordinary structural sophistication and linguistic facility, in which the word-play's quirks and ironic flashes complement the confusion of the cyclical narrative. Something Happened offers equivalent complexity, although its very thoroughness makes it formidable. Heller's reliance upon banality is hazardous; it requires both a continuing recognition of Bob Slocum's unreliability and a resolve to endure a tedium broken only by jarringly unharmonious witticisms. It is a novel more to be understood than enjoyed. Good As Gold deals in comedy rather than Absurdity; but if for this reason it seems less than daring, this novel shows a depth of characterization and a warmth not found in its predecessors.

From Here to Eternity was arguably the most notable novel, in terms of acclaim, popularity, and memory, to emerge from the Second World War. Catch-22 remains one of the most notable books of the 1960's; it reflects, and probably helped trigger, that decade's rebelliousness. It may yet serve as the book called for by historian C. Vann Woodward, a new Quixote to laugh into impossibility the idea of modern war. This surface contrast, however, and the contrast between Jones and Heller in

terms of vision and technique, should not obscure these writers' agreement on fundamental human values.

Both Jones and Heller reject the idea of man as social automaton, whether this idea is expressed by Sam Slater's society of "perpetual apprehension," or by the perpetually mobilized world dealt with in Catch-22. They recognize and affirm the individual's duty to his fellows. Half of their credo is resistance. Prewitt stands his ground when the MP's challenge his identity as a soldier, choosing neither to run nor shoot. Yossarian takes off running, but his choice is the same: to reject violence and to preserve personal integrity. Both writers insist that such individual stands are essential to the integrity of the mass. Yossarian's rebellion causes even Appleby and Havermeyer to question the necessity of flying missions. Prewitt's death confirms Warden's decision not to accept the officer's commission he has received.

The credo has a positive half: the alternative to automatism is honor. The loyalty with which Jones' infantrymen support each other reflects the same responsibility upon which Yossarian learns to act. And this loyalty springs from the all-tolerating love that Bruce Gold finds enveloping himself and his family -- the same chafing, imperfect, ultimately unsnappable bond that links Prell, Winch, Landers and Strange. Jones and Heller build upon this common ground.

ENDNOTES

Chapter I. JAMES JONES AND JOSEPH HELLER: AN OUTLINE OF
CONTRASTS

1. Joseph Heller, Catch-22 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 11 (hereafter cited as Catch-22).
2. James Jones, The Thin Red Line (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 101.
3. James Jones, WW II (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1975), pp. 216-217.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. Ibid., p. 196.
6. Ibid., p. 201.
7. Ibid., p. 38.
8. Catch-22, p. 325.

Chapter II. REALISM AND ROMANCE IN JAMES JONES' FICTION

1. V. S. Pritchett, review of From Here to Eternity, by James Jones, in The New Statesman and Nation, 12 July 1952, p. 44.
2. Leslie Fiedler, "James Jones' Dead-End Young Werther: The Bum as American Culture Hero." Commentary 12 (September 1951), 253 (hereafter cited as Fiedler).
3. Ibid., p. 252.
4. Ibid., p. 253.
5. Ibid., p. 254.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. James Jones, From Here to Eternity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 131 (hereafter cited as From Here to Eternity).
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