

EXPLORING SATIRE IN THE EARLY POSTMODERN  
AMERICAN WAR NOVEL

by

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my great-grandfather, Jack Vincent Ciancio. He served two tours of duty as an Army Corpsman in the 156<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment of the 27<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry Division from the fall of 1939 to the spring of 1946. He married Francoise Leonard in 1948, and together, they had three daughters. I remember him as a gentle, jubilant man.

I also dedicate this work to my great-grandfather, Gordon Emmett Holman, who went to Seattle, Washington when he was sixteen years old to look for a job at the onset of World War II. When he found no available work, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1943—with, of course, the permission of his mother, Ella Brokaw Holman. He served in the South Pacific during most of his tour of duty. He was wounded during one of the battles in the South Pacific and received the Purple Heart. After his honorable discharge in 1945, he returned to Orr, Minnesota and married Olga E. Johnson. They had one son and two daughters. He loved his family, worked hard, and possessed a wonderful sense of humor.

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## ABSTRACT

After the Second World War, young soldier-writers such as Norman Mailer, Irwin Shaw, James Jones and Joseph Heller responded to the cultural impact and horrors of World War II by engaging a satire that was meant to not only expose problems of society, but inspire change. Too often, readers mistake satire for pure entertainment. Although satire has a longstanding reputation as comedy, satire is a vital weapon for democratic societies to challenge lies, corruption and the abuse of power. By focusing attention on a diverse range of satiric expression, this thesis aims to fill a gap in the scholarship on early postmodern American war novels and the way they attack systems that objectify and dehumanize human bodies for the agenda of war.

## INTRODUCTION

In this study, I will closely examine four early postmodern war novels inspired by actual events. The focus of this research is concerned with the way postwar satire became a powerful weapon in fiction for ridiculing the patriarchal values and institutions responsible for the Second World War. Though satire is often viewed as a secondary literary agent, minor, ephemeral, or lacking in aesthetic refinement, satire epitomizes the late modernist and early postmodern efforts towards regeneration and renewal. The literature of early postmodernism concerns itself with the dissolution in society brought on by several complex changes to social, cultural, political, philosophic and economic factors. For this study, historical context is crucial to understanding the satirical impulses in war fiction that *really* started developing in the 1920s. It is important to notice the condition of the world at the time of early postmodernism's emergence, and the earlier influences that heavily inclined satire to objectify and dehumanize bodies in postmodern American war fiction.

After the Great War, modernity fully understood that war was never a strict matter of victory and defeat, but shapeless, agonizing and immeasurably destructive. American writers like Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, for example, began to uncover the absurdity and dehumanizing effects of war in works like *A Farewell to Arms* and *Three Soldiers*. These writers expressed an embarrassment of all the so-called progress of modern-man. Americans were shocked by the sight of their elegance and pride despoiled. They had little use for the language that occupied prewar literature. In a quotation given to the *New York Times* in 1915, Henry James said that the war had "used up words; they

have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tires” (Whalan 19). James’ statement expresses the obscenity of political and military idealism, marking a shift away from the formal literary style of 1920s modernism toward the disillusioned, farcical literary style affiliated with the lost generation.

The thing that had given modernists so much impetus as writers was the profound change that happened to American morals after the First World War. Virtues like pride, industry and thrift were no longer reliable, causing an enormous feeling of disenchantment for the American people. But what the late modernist authors only discovered, the early postmodernists knew well—they grew up in a time of national crisis and took violence as a given. Unlike the writers who lost so much hope and optimism, the postmodernist authors were less shocked by what they saw. Their emotions were readily detached. In Marina Mackay’s 2007 study, *Modernism and World War II*, she affirms:

The literature of the Second World War was always going to be different: that it does not take as its *raison d’être* the position that war is stupid, wasteful and ugly is certainly not because writers mistook violence on the grand scale for anything other than what it is, but exactly because, after the Great War, they took it as a given (5).

The authors who published books about their experiences during the Second World War express a satire that was inevitably different from their fathers’.

“It is one of the conventions of literary criticism that World War I produced great writers but World War II did not,” says Kenneth D. Rose, lecturer of twentieth-century American and social history at California State University (185). Although novels like *The Naked and the Dead* and *Catch-22* share much in common with the war novels produced after the first war—both saturated in extreme fury—the unconventionality and



overtly irreverent style of early postmodernists pushes the limits of obscenity further than what was previously acceptable. The first war, with its volume of educated soldiers, increased the popularity of “the soldier-writer”; by World War II, the next generation of soldiers were well-prepared to perpetuate the canon of war literature (Higonnet 14). They were not, however, well-versed in the classics, like the soldier-writers before them. The language of the literature coming out of World War II is noticeably even more satirical—often sounding informal and slangy, rotten with vulgarity—than the literature of the lost generation writing about the First World War. The style shifts away from the “rhetorical and dignified high style put into the mouths of the heroes and heroines of epic and tragedy” (Hodgart 122). Early postmodern war fiction is exceptionally brutal, often denying its subjects of complexity and individual significance altogether.

In his book *After the Lost Generation*, a critical study of the writers after the First and Second World War, John Aldridge chronicles a feeling of loss and disappointment surrounding the 1940s. He says, “...the best young writers of the second war and its aftermath have not had the advantage of either the perspective or the values of another more stable age” (Aldridge 238). Aldridge argues that the angry and rebellious literature of the 1920s possessed a certain negation that was a monumental value in high modernist literature. Thereby, after World War I, fictions were dramatized and accepted for a value overcome by anger and upheaval. But in the next few decades, *that* value lost its literary worth. The nothingness where all things cease to matter has no value, and after the Second World War, all a writer could do to make the literature compelling and give it

value was revel in the raw violence of the war and sensationalism of shock (Aldridge 186).

For this study, I have chosen to closely examine and make several references to four American novels by different authors from the postmodern period. *The Naked and the Dead*, by Norman Mailer, was published in 1948; it was based on his experiences with the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment in the Philippines. Also published in 1948, Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* borrows from his own experiences in Europe with the U.S. Army during the war. James Jones published *From Here to Eternity* in 1951, which is loosely based on his experiences leading up to the attack on Pearl Harbor with the Hawaiian Division's 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry. And finally, I chose to include Joseph Heller's classic war story *Catch-22*; although it was not published until 1961, he began writing it in 1953. Like his main character Yossarian, Heller enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1942 at the tender age of nineteen and subsequently served on the Italian front as a B25 bombardier. I chose these fictional war stories due in large part to their understanding of social behavior related to personal experience. Their works are bitter, outraged and merciless, attacking the driving forces of world war.

In the first chapter of this study, I will focus on the outrageously flawed heroes of early postmodern literature that efface traditional representations of battle. During and after World War II, the modern fictional hero in the United States—the American G.I.—reflected a gruesome world with a mixture of horror and an overt satirical wit. The recurring course of action in postmodern fiction, suggests the author of *America's Humor* (1978), was the pattern of the quest amidst an absurd world “turned opaque and

inexplicable, or become meaningless...The nightmare world, alienation and nausea, the quest for identity, and the comic doomsday vision” (Blair & Hill 470). The novels of Mailer, Jones, Shaw, and, especially Heller occupy an *Alice in Wonderland* world where everything is absurd and nothing makes sense. Borrowing from the literary style of writers following World War I, early postmodernism obeyed the historical obligation to generate concern for the once unimaginable horrors imposed by unprecedented recent violence (Mackay 7). Likewise, satire is a fundamental ingredient for expressing the ridiculously horrifying circumstances of World War II.

The characters of postmodern fiction, mostly soldiers, guard their composure with humor. Dignity and sanity take the form of extreme obscenity (Fussel 253). The soldiers are cynical, crass, and extraordinarily afraid—they are not romanticized or glorified—they are nervous, they swear repeatedly, drink excessively and frequent brothels whenever available. Cynically, the writers reduce them to caricatures and character-types, devoid of exceptionality and uniqueness. They are often depicted as objects or animals, satirizing the objectification of the male body in war. Kurt Vonnegut’s sense that soldiers were animals being marked for slaughter starts here. Mailer, Shaw, Jones and Heller candidly express their disdain for the military’s abuse of boys and men through the profane, offensive dialogue between characters. Some of the remarks attack the latent homophobia inherent to the military climate of the 1940s. In doing so, they challenge the dehumanizing, homogenizing mechanism of the American war-machine. In wartime, the 1940s gendered all members of society. The expectations of men and women were both

distinct and extreme. In war, the individual is of little importance; he or she is only valuable as a commodity.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will examine the way war literature satirizes the sense that women are property. Just as men were expected to fight in battle, women were expected to give birth and provide sexual services. Feminine roles supported war as symbols of national victory, prizes, prostitutes and even victims of rape (Goldstein 251). Mailer, Shaw, Jones and Heller sharply confront the treatment of women in the arena of war through crude, journalistic descriptions of soldiers' dealings with them. American women represent patriotic objectives in pin-ups and advertisements. In the European theatre, however, foreign women serve as conquests for the sex-starved soldiers. Often, it is difficult to separate the humor from the sickening horror of mankind in stories detailing the sexual atmosphere of World War II. The melancholic genius of early postmodern literature reveals the commodification of the female body at war, exposing the absurdity of war's priorities with a methodically vicious bravura.

The third chapter will focus primarily on the most imminent component of early postmodern satire. Violence. Up to this point, my study is focused on mostly living bodies. However, for the *Kingdom of Violence*, I turn my attention to the authors' use of dead and dying bodies. In early postmodern literature, it is satire's habit to procure a reader's sympathy by amplifying the author's hardened attitude toward suffering. Mailer, Jones, Shaw and Heller use this method to evoke pity amid brutality, however uncanny. Targeting dead bodies, their novels employ two elements of the grotesque distinguished by Jonathan Greenberg in his book *Modernism, Satire and the Novel*; sportive grotesque

and terrible grotesque. The sportive grotesque is ludicrous, comic and playful and is often accompanied by irony, caricature and cartoon to exaggerate and deform its targets with the intent to ridicule the occasion that gives rise to their state. The other element, the terrible grotesque, adds a fearful component that takes the jesting one step further to move the reader from laughter to anxiety. Drawing from John Ruskin, one of the leading art critics of the Victorian era, Greenberg asserts:

Reason withdraws as perception, memory, and fantasy are intermingled in a phantasmagoric collage. The recombination of conscious and unconscious material, of the real and the fantastic, creates that juxtaposition of the ludicrous and the fearsome that Ruskin saw as the essence of the grotesque (60).

Early postmodern writers aggravate readers through the grotesque deformation of the body, its foul odor and contorted, shocking appearance. Their ironic detachment and laughable disconnectedness as writers invites the readers' feelings of defensiveness, prompting an anti-war reaction from its audience. Early postmodernism's fractured and estranging modes both mimic and undermine the devastation of combat and the accomplices that sustain the egregious impulses of war.

By their rebellious nature, early postmodernist forms renounce the senselessly habitual, unthinkingly cooperative perspectives that make war possible. The emotional degradation and shock of World War II linked a generation of writers with a new fiction engaging extreme grotesquerie and cynicism. Satire was employed as a weapon for questioning the commodification of both living and dead bodies, male and female. Early postmodernism's wayward subversion undermines the patriarchal impetus of war by exposing the dehumanizing, objectification of humans for the purpose of war. The

rhetorical achievement of the four novels I reference for this study destroy the myths that glorify battle, villainize military institutions and show war itself as the true enemy of man.

## CHAPTER ONE

## SONS OF WAR



Figure 1. American troops drinking on Christmas Eve in 1942, probably near Takoradi, Gold Coast British West Africa (Atherton).

Early Twentieth Century America

The boys and young men who set out for the First World War were inveigled by delusions and fantasies. In John Dos Passos' World War I novel *First Encounter*, he describes the future for young American men as a "blank page to write on"; it was going to be a war to end all wars and culminate in "a reign of peace and justice" (Aldridge 59). Almost twenty years later, the generation of the next world war were under no such grandiose impressions. From the drunken prosperity of the 1920s to the sobering desperation of the 1930s, the backdrop of their childhood was an America at war with

herself. “They could remember nothing but domestic unrest, fumbblings at peace conferences, Asiatic invasions, and South American revolutions. They came to consciousness in the midst of breadlines, strikes and milk riots” (Aldridge 117).

Postmodern writers like Norman Mailer, James Jones, Irwin Shaw and Joseph Heller were inflicted with the challenge of establishing themselves as novelists in a world of absurdity. The spoiled values of writers from the Lost Generation were no longer there to borrow from. Authors like Fitzgerald could at least talk about the damnation of America after the collapse of extravagance and values. For the young writers of the Second World War, there were no longer the same values to lament, and hope of recovering the past was ridiculous. From his 1951 text, *After the Lost Generation*, John Aldridge remembers, “The generation of the Forties could never be lost because the safe and ordered world had never been theirs” (118). Young American writers no longer had the values of the 1920s or 1930s to lose and dramatize. Instead, satirizing war and violence became an important ingredient for shocking readers.

Boys who grew up after the First World War were expected to exhibit a hardened, hyper-masculine demeanor. Especially after the Great Depression, a pervasive attitude about masculinity was very much engrained into the lives of World War II soldiers from a young age. Social institutions epitomized one brand of manhood in particular—aggressive, strong, courageous and unquestionably heterosexual (Jackson 8). In *The Male Body at War*, Christina Jarvis refers to a quote from World War II veteran Edward Wood, warning American soldiers, “There are enemies out there, boy, to get you if you go soft...you’ll get carved up if you aren’t hard as a rock on the killing grounds” (Jarvis 90).



Wood reveals how the idyllic standards of maleness in American culture suggested that boys were supposed to be tough. By the time they became teenagers and young men, images of muscular, hyper-masculinized bodies offered a symbol of national strength in public artwork, civilian conservation corps literature, and recruitment posters featuring robust, brawny depictions of soldiers. As the U.S. entered the Second World War, military institutions processed males into physical property, privileging strong, youthful bodies that represented the “re-strengthening of America” in the wake of the Great Depression (Jarvis 72). Even Uncle Sam underwent physical changes. For example, James Montgomery Flagg’s well-known 1917 “I Want You” recruitment poster from World War I was reconstructed to portray a burlier, more youthful version of Uncle Sam. Artists like Colonel Tom Woodburn and Ernest Hemlin Baker began to create cartoons of Sam that were powerful and active forces in the war, reflecting the importance of manhood and muscle in the rebuilding of America after the Great Depression (Jarvis 14). It is not surprising, then, that the authors who wrote immediately after the war satirized the brutish insensitivity of American values using mimicry. Their blasé tones not only parody the aggressive male standards of their country during childhood and early adulthood, but confront the institutions responsible.

In his war novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, Norman Mailer creates a character named Red Valsen, a kid from a small mining town in Montana, as an instrument of satire to reflect the resurgence of virility amidst extreme desperation in America before the Second World War. In the novel, Red’s father is killed in a mine shaft explosion in 1925. As the oldest male in the household, Red accepts responsibility for his family.

Though he is only thirteen, there are other boys who are even younger than him working in the mine shafts. For the rest of his adolescence Red works ten hours a day, six days a week. In the winter, he only sees the sun on Sundays. Mailer wraps up the grim picture of child-labor with the detached line, “Puberty in the coal dust” (Mailer 223). This simple sentence imitates the kind of insensitivity boys like Red experienced during childhood. Through characters like him, Mailer mocks Americans’ grim condition before entering the war. Mailer denies Red the romantic humanist approach to characterization used by earlier modernists like Hemingway, and instead gives him a charm so miserable that he evokes comedy only by the description of his extreme poignancy (Gregson 6). But Red’s situation was hardly laughable. In his late teenage years, he decided to leave home in search of a new life. However, when the stock market crashed in 1929, unemployment rates for nonagricultural workers jumped from approximately 3% to 9%, and by 1933, one in four men were jobless (Badger 18). The Depression marked the beginning of Red’s long voyages in the hobo jungle jumping trains and working on farms in exchange for a hot meal. His attitude was cynical, and he felt that his country had stolen his youth and abandoned him. Once overseas, fighting in World War II, Red told another combat soldier named Wilson, “No one’s gonna ask you what you want to do...They just send you out to get your ass blown off...a man’s no more important than a goddam cow” (Mailer 199). The ironic aspect of Red’s opinion is his bitter, yet casual acceptance of the dehumanization of the American soldier. His cynicism affectively satirizes the mistreatment of men during the Second World War. Applied as an argument against the

commodification of American men, Red undermines the purposes of war, suggesting that men are simply outsourced like many other American products.

### Caricature and Typing

Joseph Heller makes the bureaucracy of war a frequent victim of mockery in his novel *Catch-22* by using caricature to hint at the absurdity of men as beasts or mindless machinery. Heller strays from humanist stress on individual characters, and instead uses caricature to satirize the institutions that perpetuate war, turning men into commodities. Heller's caricatures often deploy images of soldiers transformed into animals or objects—both of which are disposable goods. In *Character and Satire in Postwar Fiction*, Ian Gregson promulgates that Heller “obsessively depicts his characters as turned into things or broken pieces” (6). His satire triumphs because it emphasizes the lack of fullness and being in characters. In Jon Woodson's *A Study of Joseph Heller's Catch-22*, Judith Ruderman comments that the characters are not given complex, vivid lives. They are not given vivid, unusual characteristics or complicated lives; they are simple creatures (33). Although this is a pessimistic view of human kind, it reveals the contemptuous laugh of the satirist. His technique is reduction. Heller satirically devalues his victims by reducing their stature and dignity to animals or machines in order to rebel against the commodification of the boys and men sent to fight in World War II. For instance, after an Assyrian bombardier named Yossarian is wounded in the leg, he rouses the anger of one of the nurses in the hospital by leaving his bed. She scolds him, “I suppose you just don't care if you lose your leg, do you?” Yossarian answers, ““It's my leg.”” Nurse

Cramer retorts, ““It certainly is not your leg...That leg belongs to the U.S. government. It’s no different than a gear or a bedpan”” (291). Nurse Cramer’s assertion that Yossarian’s leg does not belong to him is Heller’s way of signifying the inkling that individual soldiers are not their own, but instead, property of the U.S. Army. The playful quality of his prose is mirthful, but simultaneously operates to deflate the military.

Likewise, in the first chapter of *Catch-22*, a faceless, nameless man—so devastatingly bandaged his face and body are unrecognizable—lies motionless in a hospital bed. His state of existence is outrageously pathetic. “He had two useless legs and two useless arms ...sewn into the bandages over the insides of both elbows were zippered lips through which he was fed clear fluid from a clear jar” (10). Months after his death, he is replaced by an identically disguised soldier, gauzed in bandage from head to toe. Everyone in the hospital assumes it is the same person, which casts the doppelgangers as symbols of the inhumanity and senselessness of the war. The depthlessness of the indistinguishable soldier draws attention away from his subjective interior, flattening him into a caricature rendered lifeless and mechanical. In the novel, “The soldier in white was more like a stuffed and sterilized mummy than a real guy. Nurse Duckett and Nurse Cramer kept him spick-and-span” (Heller 168). Heller’s descriptions reduce him to an inanimate object rather than a person. Gregson adds that in postmodern, postwar fiction, this technique is comparable to the older literary traditions of authors including Dryden, Swift, Pope and Dickens. Like theirs, postmodernist caricature depicts humans as objects. Says Gregson, “the most important overlap between postmodernism and caricature is in shared anti-humanist assumptions which lead to a subverting of realism and it’s

assumptions” (Gregson 3-4). Although the indiscernible soldiers’ portrayal is humorous, the suffering of the man beneath the bandages is very real.

A similar, yet distinct kind of satire is noticeable in *The Naked and the Dead*. Instead of objectifying his characters literally, Mailer uses a satirical device known as typing to expose laughable errors in human behavior as well as deride the cohesion of the military. Often used by satire, typing is a prevalent device in stage comedy and ironic humor. It implies that the type-figure can never step out of the role imposed on him or act in freedom. “To be reduced to a type is a less fearful circumstance than to be reduced to an animal, madman or machine, but it is unpleasant enough” (Hodgart 120). Mailer presents America via the character-types of an amusing collection of soldiers, from the Southern-redneck and Mexican-American to the Boston-Irishman and New York Jew. He includes a welder from Brooklyn, a malingerer from New Jersey and a petty criminal from Chicago known throughout the novel as “Polack” (Lennon 87). Says Bradbury in his book *The Modern American Novel*,

Mailer conventionally takes naturalist types—the petty racketeer, the Southern cracker, the Brooklyn Jew, the Montana wanderer—and puts them on to a Pacific battlefield where ‘the individual personality is just a hindrance’ (149).

Mailer’s assortment of characters runs parallel with what Jeanine Basinger includes in a poem from her book *The World War II Combat Film*: a leader who dies, an inexperienced youth, the comic, the cynic, one black or Hispanic and one representative from Brooklyn, Texas, and the Middle West (Fussel 190). Mailer’s characters almost match this exact paradigm. Criticizing the contradictory fascism within America, Mailer lampoons America’s own war-machine by taking a jab at the facelessness of soldiers. His characters

are types of people, but not individuals. Their names are races and geographies. On one hand, Americans were supposedly fighting against fascism, but on the other, it was evident there was fascism and racism within the United States before, during and after the Second World War.

Mailer's fictional character Julio Martinez, for instance, struggles to find satisfaction as a Mexican American in San Antonio, Texas before 1941. From a young age, he notices that his opportunities as a minority are limited. He can be a bellhop; he can pick cotton; he can even run a small store, but he cannot become a doctor or a lawyer; he cannot be a big merchant or a chief. Instead, he becomes the counterman at a hashhouse scraping fat off the griddle and stirring the chili. Even the prostitutes look through him. One day, much to his dismay, he impregnates a local girl named Rosalita. He thinks, "...there are prettier girls than Rosalita...[she] will grow fat and children will run through the house...He will dig ditches in the road" (65). As young Martinez contemplates his unalluring options as a Mexican American, a solution comes to his mind.

"Tired? Restless? Knock up a dame? Join the Army" (65). Though he will never be white Protestant, an aviator, a financier or an officer, he can still be a soldier. The narrator quips, "Little Mexican boys also breathe the American fables" (67). And in that instant Mailer docket Martinez as a coward and satirizes the recruiting tactics of the American military. Martinez advances from counterman to buck private, and eventually, to sergeant. Although he becomes well-liked by the other soldiers, he was constantly used as the subject of jokes because of his heritage and otherness. Martinez is known by his

Army unit as *Mex* or *Japbait*. Through this character, Mailer captures the panoply of geographies present in army units. The reductive quality of Martinez' nicknames mimics the racism imminent within America's own armies.

In Irwin Shaw's 1948 novel *The Young Lions*, the men in the barracks deploy several stereotypes against a character named Noah Ackerman, also known as *Jew-boy*. They jeer, "I don't mind you killing Christ, but I'll never forgive you for not washing that stinking window" and "I actually heard...of a Jew who volunteered [for the Army]...I swear to God. They stuffed him and put him in the Museum" (289-91). These jokes emulate the mean-spirited condition of the late modernist and post-modern world. Such abuse during World War II was experienced daily. The historian Arno Mayer recalled his involvements in the U.S. Army as much like Noah Ackerman's: "I experienced a kind of anti-Semitism I wasn't prepared for. It reached a point where I had a couple of teeth knocked out" (Mart). Stories like Mayer's serve as a basis of absurd humor in postmodern war fiction, yet simultaneously antagonize uncomfortable truths about America's discriminatory history. When authors like Mailer and Shaw represents these kinds of experiences in their fictional renditions, they exposed the racism and stereotypes imminent within U.S. Army Units. Their fictional renditions validate an anti-war agenda by illuminating the victimization that comes with war in a painfully truthful light.

### A Colorful Language

The language of the postmodern American war fiction coming out of World War II is noticeably colloquial, obscene and slangy. Mailer, Shaw, Heller and Jones use

character dialogue to conjure a universe that mirrors and parodies their experiences of war's reality. Major characters are archetypes of humanity when the facades of propriety and artificial civility are removed. The dialogue, rooted in sarcasm, irony and satire, provides a reflection of the interior motives, beliefs, fears and goals that existed beneath the physical exteriors of characters. The absence of polite language and gestures of social conventions reveal a glimpse of the values and motivations of the soldiers in the Second World War. Often the dialogue of characters is rich in spews of profanities and lewd jokes. In *The Young Lions*, an omniscient narrator animates:

There were boys and young men all over the halls, lounging, smoking, spitting, talking loudly in the concrete accents of the New York streets...And the dame I was with said, 'My aching back, they're killing American boys' an' I said, 'I'm joining up in the mawning to fight for democracy, Clara,' and she cried and I laid her, right there in her own bedroom, with her husband's picture watchin' in a sailor suit. I been tryin' to lay that broad for three weeks and I was thrown out at first base every time I got up to the plate. But last night she was like a cage full of overflowin' tigers, and she nearly bust the springs loose from the bed with patriotism' (Shaw 167).

After the downfall of innocence in the First World War, postmodern novelists wielded crude invectives freely, criticizing a world at war through the words of its forsaken children. Yet, even though the characters' conversations are colored in laissez-faire indifference, they are only a comical bravado masking underlying reservations. On the next page, Shaw's narrator adds, "The rough jokes, the cynical estimates, were all on the surface, embarrassed attempts to hide the true depths of the feeling that had brought them to this place" (Shaw 168). The low-brow, coarse conversations between men in postmodern war fiction served as important expressions of satire because they gave the authors a place for anti-war feelings and remarks to be discoursed.



Discussing the intentions of postmodern writers in his book *Wartime*, Paul Fussell claims, “Their main technique of subversion was, of course, obscenity” (253). Norman Mailer said that it was nowhere but in the Army of the United States that he learned the joy of surprising and comically offensive outbursts. “The obscene humor of the army resonated happily in Norman Mailer and would be a staple in *The Naked and the Dead*” (Lennon 60). Whatever objections his characters had about their involvement in the Second World War were expressed in the form of obscene humor. According to Mailer, the vulgarity of the American soldier exerted an honest and human force epitomizing the American democratic spirit by taunting the military posturing and rhetoric that led to the most deplorable bureaucratic lies of the war (Wenke 30).

*The Naked and the Dead* features the obscenity of early postmodern language in wartime with a colorful variety of swear words. This is the language of satire—coarse, informal and typical of the blatant talk between two friends. He used the word “fuck” and variations of it more than 400 times in his 872-page war novel. Before it was officially published, Mailer’s editors convinced him to replace the word with “fug”, “fugging” and so on. Although he complied, the changes hardly affected his meanings. In the middle of the novel, two soldiers provide a perfect sample of the canny, profane vernacular of the war. Gallagher tells Brown, “the fuggin Army...I bet they get more fuggin casualties out of guys getting into fuggin boats” (Mailer 25). In this moment, Gallagher is able to criticize the U.S. military. Postmodern writers used this kind of satire as a means of expressing their opposition to the treatment of men during the Second World War. The

characters give voice to fatalistic complaints that both comically accept and parody the inevitability of victimization (Wenke 30).

Historically, American soldiers in World War II were often court-martialed for using insolent language towards their superiors. The most threatening invectives commonly referred to homosexuality. Homosexual encounters were judged through the lens of gender. Thereby, the active participant—“the one who inserted his penis in anal intercourse or received oral satisfaction”—was less guilty (Jackson 13). The submissive partner, esteemed as feminine, was the adversary to the model soldier, who was supposed to be dominant and masculine. Actual insults alluded to imaginary situations in which the superiors were cast as the feminine role: “god damned cock-sucker,” “two-bit cocksucker,” “kiss my fucking ass,” “I’ll fuck you, you savage,” “Where is the cocksucking major?” and “...Come and take a suck at this if you want to” (Jackson 32). Besides exploiting the cruel, homophobic views of the military, this kind of rhetoric directly attacks its leaders based on an unequal balance of power and pleasure. On the flip side, when soldiers wished to mock the unjustness of their position or comment on the abuse of superiors, the roles were reversed. “Men described themselves as being fucked, screwed, bugged, or, most commonly, browned off. To be browned off was literally to have been anally penetrated...” (Jackson 32). In one example, before going overseas, two characters from Irwin Shaw’s *The Young Lions* talk about the unfair treatment of soldiers in their company. A certain Brailsford urges Whitacre to transfer. He says, “A man’s got to protect his ass in the Army. It’s a cinch the Army aint interested in protecting it” (323). Brailsford’s satiric remark directly scrutinizes the superiors of military institutions,

confessing soldiers' disparagement for belonging to the U.S. government. His comment furthermore denotes the latent homophobia in the American military.

Towards the end of the Depression, "Roy Helton's 1940 Harper's article 'The Inner Threat: Our Own Softness' captured fears that America had become a soft, feminized nation" (Jarvis 18). Before the war began, mass unemployment posed challenges to the breadwinner model of masculinity; many women were forced to enter the workplace in the 1920s and 1930s, and a few writers went so far as to call the United States an effeminate country. In pursuit of reviving exemplary masculine standards, it was necessary that men wholly exclude women and queers from their image. Popular psychological writers like J.B. Watson gave parents advice on how to groom boys into men. His 1928 book titled *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, he warned mothers about the threat of overdoing maternal affection and transforming sons into "whining, dependent mama's boys". Watson cautioned Americans, "'Mother love is a dangerous instrument...Never hug [boys] and kiss them, never let them sit on your lap'" (Kimmel 147). Rhetoric like Watson's emphasized the nation's objection to males who did not uphold rigid expressions of masculinity. "Childhood taunts like "fairy, queer and fag" projected an aversion to homosexuality (Jackson 9). It was as if young American boys were being groomed into soldiers from the moment they were born. To this day, the sexism and homophobia of the thirties linger over the decade like unrehabilitatable thunderclouds," wrote Andrew Yerkes in his book, *Twentieth Century Americanism* (67).

During this time, sexuality was an increasingly cumbersome marker of identity relative to gender. The emergence of female progress after the First World War

threatened mens' patriarchal status. Considering the escalating necessity of masculinity during wartime, the military viewed homosexuality as a moral outrage, or "a crime against masculinity" (Jackson 14). In the armed services, same-sex relationships were court-martialed offenses, and servicemen could be kicked out if discovered. In *From Here to Eternity*, James Jones uses a homosexual case to express the total hypocrisy and ridiculousness of America's outspoken homophobia. When a character named Bloom discovers his enjoyment for having sexual relations with other men, he becomes so terrified and ashamed of being gay that he commits suicide. "His death portrayed a tragedy, absurd and unnecessary," says Jones' daughter in a written piece about her father's novel (K. Jones). For its time, this was a risky insert on Jones' behalf, calling out the far-reaching influences of society and the over-extending arm of the military in personal affairs. The future of the American military depended on the traditional family unit to survive—a mother and a father to produce children for the next generations. It is no wonder, then, that the military monitored sexual activities as carefully as farmers control the reproduction of their livestock for future economic gain.

### The Quagmire of the Soldier's Body

An irony in postmodern war fiction is noticeable in the way male bodies are actually depicted, in spite of ideal standards and the comedy of their physical inadequacies. The American men who were sent to the war were hardly men at all. Although a small number of them were old enough to remember the Great War, most were fresh out of high-school or in the thick of college. In *The Naked and the Dead*,

published in 1948, Norman Mailer satirizes war's brutality by emphasizing the youthfulness of many of the infantryman in the army through a character named Roth, who deliberates, "His bunkmate and his bunkmate's friends were all young, probably just out of high school, and they laughed a lot at stupid jokes and wrestled with each other and swore... They were all stupid, Roth thought. All they could think about was getting women" (Mailer 50-51). Roth's comment is satirical because it revels in criticizing the relentlessness of America's war-machine. By November 1942, the United States became a participant in the war—not just a bystander. Thus, the eligible ages were expanded from men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-six to men of eighteen and thirty-seven ("Draft age is lowered..."). They were the ironic products of a war that was supposed to end all wars, grew up amidst extreme despair and were delivered into the mouth of Ares himself.

World War II—"the greatest calamity in human history"—claimed 27,600 lives every day at the rate of one death every three seconds (Atkinson). Although they were expected to be macho killers, soldiers were plagued by constant fear, causing them to blunder and even lose control of their bodily functions; in literature, their behavior is associated with the infantile, which positions the characters of World War II fiction somewhere between children and men. This blurry paradox makes war's remorselessness easy prey for satirists in late modernist and postmodern war fiction. For example, Mailer employs satire through one of the characters in *The Naked and the Dead* to mock both the remorselessness of war and the military's obsession with masculinity. After a character named Woodrow Wilson is shot in the gut, his innermost fears are revealed in a

shameless light. He hears the Japanese talking in the field ten yards away. Wilson thinks, “If them Japs get me...He felt a choking horror. Tag ends of all the stories of Jap torture flicked his brain. Sonofabitch, they’ll cut mah nuts off” (Mailer 515-6). The hilarity of Wilson’s concern for his genitalia reflects the significance of manhood to the Second World War. Wilson’s boyish alarm is comparable to *Catch-22*’s character, Yossarian, who shudders with disgust at the sight of the wound on his thigh and screams repeatedly, “I lost my balls! Aarfy, I lost my balls!” (289). This scene addresses the psychological and social constructs associated with the importance of male physicality during wartime. The phallic narcissism of postmodern fiction lampoons the valor connected to war—especially since the emasculating proximity of fear was widely evident among troops. “The cruelest myth about combat stress is that cowards break down and heroes don’t. In World War II, psychiatric casualties were often seen as ‘mommies’ boys,’ spoiled brats without manliness” (Adams 95). Although they were supposed to be courageous warriors, the young men who served in the Second World War were often afraid. Unlike the movies, there was no climax in which battles were won. There was an array of fantastic destruction and survivors were often left confused and afraid. The battlefield served as a source of extreme misery for combat soldiers. “They hallucinated the dead coming back to life, wept unaccountably or uncontrollably, became prey to morbid fears that they ‘would do something terrible, like kill somebody [on their own side] or shit on the floor’” (Adams 95). After 1945, postmodern war fiction expressed the apocalyptic nightmare setting in which combat occurred as an absurd, meaningless world with “the comic doomsday vision” that plagued its participants (470). This is evident in Shaw’s *The*

*Young Lions* when Michael Whitacre, one of three central figures in the novel, walks dreamily down the line of his camp's pup-tents and thinks to himself about how wonderful it would be to be killed on that day (Shaw 516). Whitacre's eerie desire for relief from a world of hell penetrated the thoughts of even the most ordinary characters, greatly influencing the anti-war novel's message that would come out of the 1940s and 1950s. The men were shocked by the once-unimaginable horrors surrounding them.

The smell was perhaps the most conspicuous mark of war. Men sweated all day in the same clothes for weeks and nobody bathed. Their clothes rotted with the smell and became stiff on their backs, giving them a rash that burned and itched. From *The Young Lions*, the narrator sordidly reports, "The human race was only bearable when the obscene juices of living were being constantly washed away. You became dulled to your own smell, of course, otherwise you will kill yourself... (Shaw 246). Amidst violence and supreme upheaval, grown men lost control of their bodily functions. In his book *Six War Years*, World War II journalist and veteran Barry Broadfoot recounts the agonizing experience of living in a state of constant dread. When their unit was hit by German fire, a young Canadian soldier overheard his sergeant cursing to himself.

I asked him if he was hit and he said no, he had just pissed his pants. He always pissed them, he said, when things started and then he was okay. He wasn't making any apologies either, and then I realized something wasn't quite right with me... There was something warm down there and it seemed to be running down my leg... I told the sarge. I said, 'Sarge, I've pissed too,' or something like that and he grinned and said, 'Welcome to the war' (*Wartime* 278).

The unpleasant side-effects of the Second World War were absurd and became material for satire to authors like Mailer in *The Naked in the Dead*. In the novel, a nervous young

man named Hennessey hid in his foxhole. While explosions go off around him, he is surprised to discover himself sobbing, terrified and resentful.

...His thighs felt hot and wet, and at first he thought, I'm wounded. It was pleasant and peaceful, and he had a misty picture of a hospital bed. He moved his hand back, and realized with both revulsion and mirth that he had emptied his bowels...He was beginning to get the giggles again (Mailer 37).

This scene infantizes Hennessey in a way that possesses the ability to invoke sympathy from its reader. Few images satirize the agents of war as menacingly as a grown man so frightened he becomes incontinent.

In 1949 the U.S. Army Medical Department published a large volume of psychiatric reports on battle stress and emotional disorders. Therein, psychologists attempted to normalize men's anxieties—since stress and anxiety were sensible and ordinary responses to war's violence, men exhibiting these reactions to the war were removed from medical facilities and returned to the battlefield immediately (Kimmel 162). "At least fifty percent of combat soldiers soiled themselves at some time; a last order before battle was 'keep your assholes tight'" (Adams 104). Soon, soldiers' indifference to suffering became satirical in and of itself. In Shaw's *The Young Lions*, "Noah and Burnecker went past the man in the foxhole. He threw them their dogtags and looked at them curiously. 'How was it back there?' he asked. 'Great,' said Noah. 'More fun than a strawberry social,' said Burnecker" (Shaw 482). Their attitude, latent in sarcasm, is indicative of the illogical reality in which they were forced to exist.

Ideal soldiers would have been fearless, but Mailer continued to satirize institutions of war by presenting realistic men in his novel, using one of the well-liked



guys named William Brown as his mouthpiece. Brown confesses that everyone is full of fear. He tells the men that he's "scared all the time" (17). Soldiers were traditionally supposed to be brave and heroic, but in reality harbored great apprehension. For characters like Robert Hearn—a lieutenant in *The Naked and the Dead*—being afraid feels like a betrayal to his own self. Later in the novel, this pessimism becomes apparent through Hearn's disappointment.

The impulse to cover his head and wait passively for the fight to terminate was very powerful...With everything, with the surprising and unmaning fear was a passionate disgust with himself. He couldn't quite believe it. He had never been in combat before, but to act like this... (Mailer 510).

Through Hearn, Mailer critiques the dehumanizing standards of masculinity perpetuated by war. Hearn's character reveals the deep shame that accompanied the failure to sustain impossible masculine ideals. In the study *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz reason, "This parade of emotionally incapacitated men was in itself a shocking contrast to the heroic visions and masculinist fantasies that had preceded it in the British Victorian imagination" (63). The poetic image of the courageous, masculine figure no longer made sense. For the male authors that emerged from the Second World War, comedy and satire were more fitting literary mechanisms to convey the reality of their felt experiences.

### Benefits of War

Although they were certainly not under the impression that war would be a thrilling and dignified experience, the young Americans who were sent overseas to fight *did* tend to see the conditions of war more positively than their English counterparts. In

the *PBS* television series “The War”, Sam Hynes talks about the advantages of going overseas to fight. He says that for a teenage middle-class, lower-class kid in Minneapolis in 1941, chances for excitement were limited.

You could drive a car fast, you could get drunk, you could take a girl out and try and get somewhere and fail. That’s local excitement...it was hard to imagine what an exciting life might be, and suddenly you could be a pilot or a submariner or an artilleryman or any damn thing, but it was something exciting and it was something adult. All of a sudden you could just choose to be an adult by writing your name...Now I’m potentially a combat fighter pilot—an ace! Or I’m the commander of a submarine going into Tokyo Bay (“When Things Get Tough”).

The word “adult” implies the youth and foolhardiness of so many American soldiers. For many of them, the war provided a liberation from the censures of Puritanical America and the discovery of fraternity, fun, casual sex and alcohol (Miller 28).

For Americans, the alcoholic atmosphere in the Second World War was very different from the first one. Due to the likes of do-gooders, Christers, YMCA officials, teetotal lecturers, anti-saloon-league zealots and other temperance fanatics, the troops of the Great War were kept under close surveillance. Drinking was banned in all U.S. army camps; but by the time the Second World War began “...the notion that everyone has a perfect, even a Constitutional, right to a binge was thoroughly established in the United States” (*Wartime* 96). By the Forties, drinking to combat nerves was a common, accepted occurrence among American troops. James Jones, the author of *From Here to Eternity*, recalled getting “blind asshole drunk” every chance they got.

We made our own “swipe” by stealing a five-gallon tin of peaches or plums or pineapple from the nearest ration dump, and putting a double handful of sugar in it to help it ferment, and then leaving it out in the sun in the jungle with a piece of cheesecloth or mosquito netting over it to keep out the bugs. It was the most godawful stuff to drink, sickly sweet and smelling very

raunchy, but if you could get enough of it down and keep it down, it carried a wonderful wallop (Langer 264).

In an atmosphere of constant peril and uncertainty, the comedy of soldiers' drinking habits takes readers beyond the marked, recorded events of the war. In the second and third chapter, it is important to remember, too, that often the impaired judgement of soldiers led to the most deplorable of their actions.

In between scenes of combat, Jones indulges the in-between-spaces where men wait for action anxiously. The drinking itself is never satirized or questioned, but is used as a way of lubricating men's private thoughts and creating spaces where men speak candidly about their grievances, satirizing the architects of war. The informal mannerisms like heavy drinking take apart the traditional war hero and present him as a real human, shameless and often foolish. There is a poem by Timothy Corsellis, killed at the age of twenty, that features this more realistic side of soldiers. In the poem, he admits that he was ready to sacrifice his life "in one expansive gesture" for a worthy cause. What he did not see was the many hours of monotony and boredom.

We sat together as we sat at peace  
 Bound by no ideal of service  
 But by a common interest in pornography and a desire  
 to outdrink one another... (Fussell 126).

His poem reflects the ever-present acquisition of booze behind the lines. Drinking was a staple for combatting soldiers' emotions and rebelling against the confines of position. In *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel asserts, "Drinking together cemented manly solidarity, even as the traditional artisanal conviviality was superseded in impersonal factories" (92). Alcohol is a key ingredient in postmodern fiction coming out of World

War II for convincingly depicting the conversations and fears of soldiers, which in effect, satirized the damaging consequences of war.

In Jones' *From Here to Eternity*, a conversation between two men take place over drinks. "Warden grinned happily, watching the lovely beautiful brilliant shuttling of the bottle as it wove and wound and spun the web of unreality, of talk about them both, relaxing into it..." (J. Jones 171). Then, while they converse, Jones inserts a thought that exposes an attitude of cynicism unraveling the idealized masculinity that soldiers were expected to uphold. "The soldier's greatest hobby, [Warden] thought as he listened to his own voice talking, the bull session, add a bottle and you have his greatest joy, also his greatest escape..." (J. Jones 172). Many of the painful truths about being a soldier in World War II center around the ritual of drinking liquor. The soldier's fear of being linked to the feminine counterpart and showing too much emotion was suppressed by drinking. Because of the deeply engrained ideas about masculinity and the impulses of war, many American men's only way of showing affection toward one another was through meanness and insults, usually encouraged by alcohol. In *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer used the easy-going, familiar style of satire to mimic the brutality of the armed services. Sergeant Croft, drunk, expresses his fondness for the men in his unit, saying:

'You're all good guys. You're all chicken and you're all yellow, but you're good guys. They ain't a goddam thing wrong with you...Japbait here is the best goddam friend a man could have. Mex or no Mex, you can't beat him. Even ol' Red who's a dumb mean ol' sonofabitch, and I'm gonna shoot him someday, even ol' Red means all right in his own stupid way' (Mailer 202).

Though Croft wouldn't ordinarily speak to the men in his unit so openly and casually, the alcohol enables him to let his guard down. His profanities are a mark of the time and place. Drinking serves an important role in postmodern war fiction for voicing truth, even as it suppresses it, and stripping war of its dignity.

In *From Here to Eternity*, a Hungarian correspondent sits with American troops in a bar, fills his water tumbler with whiskey and cynically shares his own theory about the capitalist system in America. Through this character, also drunk, Jones satirizes the wealth that emerged during the Second World War. He says,

‘Look around us now...What do we see? Unparalleled prosperity. Every man who wants to work, with a good job. Every woman, who in normal times could not be trusted to rinse rubber nipples, now doing precision tooling at eighty-seven dollars a week. Mississippi traffic policemen who in peacetime made eleven hundred dollars a year, now full Colonels, with pay starting at six hundred and twenty a month. College boys who were a drain on the family fortune, now Majors in the Air Forces, making five hundred and seventy dollars a month. Factories working night and day, no unemployment, everybody eating more meat, going to more movies, getting laid more often than ever before. Everybody alert, happy, in good physical condition. What is the source of all these benefits? The war (379).

This frankness reflects a painfully cruel actuality. In the midst of unparalleled violence, the Americans were thriving financially. When the stock market crashed in 1929, America remained in a state of economic crisis until the attack on Pearl Harbor. But despite the financial despair of America before the Forties, America emerged as a superpower. During the war, incomes doubled and the United States became the exemplary consumer economy (Bradbury 126). The author Irwin Shaw taunts the Americans' new reputation in his war-story classic *The Young Lions*. He wrote that a joke about the Americans was repeated twelve hundred times during the day overseas,

“‘What’s wrong with Americans?’ ‘Nothing. It’s just that they’re overpaid, overfed, overdressed, oversexed, and over here’” (Shaw 386). Ten pages later, Jones added a small window picturing a scene of the new and ironic economic situation, noting, “In the Thames Estuary off the India docks, a Merchant Marine seaman from Seattle prayed for a raid that night, because his wife expected another child in two months, and he got a bonus for every raid on his ship while he was in port” (Shaw 387). The seaman knows that a raid will increase the risk of danger, but it will also promise the security of a paycheck for his family back home. Shaw’s fiction satirizes the treatment of soldiers in the Forties by reducing them to the warrior and breadwinner roles reserved for males.

In *Catch-22*, Heller satirizes this exact dealing when Doc Daneeka’s wife is informed that her husband has been killed in action. Although she was initially grief-stricken, she is later delighted by the way things turn out. The Veteran’s Administration announce that she is entitled to pension benefits for the rest of her life, and the Social Security Administration inform her that she will receive monthly support for herself and children until they reached the age of eighteen. In addition, Doc Daneeka *had* carried four life insurance policies with a value of \$50,000 each, which Mrs. Daneeka readily claims. “Each day brought new unexpected treasures” (Heller 342). In her husband’s safety deposit box, she discovers \$18,000, and several other organizations offer her hundreds of dollars more as a burial allowance. “The husbands of her closest friends began to flirt with her...Her fantastic wealth just kept piling up, and she had to remind herself daily that all the hundreds of thousands of dollars she was acquiring were not worth a single penny without her husband to share this good fortune with her” (343). Depending on the

reader, the real irony and humor of her predicament is that Doc Daneeka is not dead. The letter was a complete mistake. But before the doctor could clear up the confusion, “Mrs. Daneeka moved with her children to Lansing, Michigan, and left no forwarding address” (344). Heller’s laughably sad story spoofs the military’s treatment of men as a disposable good and its ambivalent dismissal of their deaths. The soldier himself was a victim to his loyalties. To be loyal to his family, a man had to protect and provide. To be of value to the nation, he had to be willing to die. This realization carried with it deep psychological consequences (Adams 97).

The characters of postmodern war fiction are fashioned from real-life models. For postmodern authors like Mailer, Heller, Shaw and Jones, combining the youthful playfulness of the young male characters with the journalistic, anti-sentimental versions of their stories emphasizes the overwhelming sadness and detriment of their deaths. Through realistically detached, cynical voices, their fictions mock the absurdity of the Second World War and subvert the institutions that created it.

## CHAPTER TWO

## A SOLDIER'S FANTASIES



Figure 2. U.S. Marine Randall Sprenger adds the finishing touches to “Little Gem”, a pinup mascot adorning a B-29 fuselage in the Marianas Islands in February of 1945.

Victory Girls

Even though War and Love are seemingly oppositional forces, in myth and literature they are connected by the evolutionary struggle between life and death. “The Greeks were wise men when they mated the God of war with the goddess Aphrodite. The soldier must not only kill, he must give birth to new warriors,” says Robert Emmet



Meagher, professor of humanities, art and cultural studies at Hampshire College (26). He avows that warmaking and lovemaking are for the young people, “whose bodies are fit and whose passions run fast and furious” (25). In a philosophical memoir about his experience as a counter-intelligence officer in Italy during World War II, Jesse Glenn Gray theorizes that in wartime, people reproduce more rapidly because they are actively engaged in destroying other members of the species (Gray 63). For a group of people referred to as “the Greatest Generation”, the war years were both the fillip of a sexual revolution *and* an era of resurgent sexual conservatism. Girls of eighteen or nineteen years old were frequently marrying soldiers who were home on leave “and having babies quickly” with the knowledge that their new husbands would be gone for a long time and might never return at all (Rose 110).

Americans in the 1940s experienced an overwhelming sense of dread (Rose 1). There were many uncertainties. “Maybe humanity would be scared into a functional unity to remake the world, or maybe everyone would die,” says George Hutchinson, an English professor at Cornell University in his recent book, *Facing the Abyss: American Literature and Culture in the 1940s*. During and after the Second World War, Americans were vexed by existential guilt, ecological calamity and the destiny of human kind, all the while subsumed in an uproar of erotic love (Gray 62). In her 1988 book *Homeward Bound*, Elaine Tyler May expressed that for postwar Americans, “fears of sexual chaos” made “non-marital sexual behavior in all its forms...a national obsession” (93-4). Following the war, a profusion of erotic literature burst onto the mainstream publishing industry. “Most of the sexualized literature was by men and for men,” notes Joanne

Meyerowitz, a professor of history and American Studies at Yale University (302). The sexual liberalism that came after the Second World War stimulated an aggressive masculinism apparent in the writings of Norman Mailer, James Jones, Irwin Shaw and Joseph Heller. Nationalism was eroticized in purely heterosexual terms, and women were represented as byproducts of the American war-machine, a concept central to a patriarchal system, as explained by Carol P. Christ, feminist historian and theologian, in an article titled “A New Definition of Patriarchy: Control of Women’s Sexuality, Private Property, and War.” Christ’s definition of patriarchy is “a system of domination enforced through violence and the threat of violence. It is a system developed and controlled by powerful men, in which women, children, other men, and nature itself are dominated” (216). In the Second World War, patriarchy fortified the act of marriage as an attempt to control sexual expression. Even though ‘going all the way’ became more frequently admitted, sexual mores of the 1940s were extremely prudish by today’s standards. Victorian morals were hardly out of the picture. Many believed that pre-marital sex was a dangerous source of moral decline that would “sap the nation’s strength” (Meyerowitz 295). Despite the divide between public disapproval and private acceptance, pre- and extra-marital sexual behavior remained pigeonholed as immoral, maintained in large part by the U.S. military (Roberts 187). Thereby, getting married was highly encouraged.

Marrying a soldier was well-regarded as an act of womanly patriotism. In fact, many women admitted concerns about postponing matrimony until the war was almost over. One American woman admitted, “If we wait until men come back after this war lasts several years, they’ll pass us up for younger women” (Rose 107). Greater than ten

percent of the American weddings in 1941 were performed after the attack on Pearl Harbor, making the rate of marriage in the United States the highest ever recorded (106). Meanwhile, sexual tensions in the military remained high because service members were distanced from wives and lovers for many months, even years at a time. Soldiers were commonly plagued by feelings of isolation and loneliness. According to Joshua Goldstein in his book *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, “Reading ever-so slightly titillating novels, reciting bawdy verses, sneaking off to masturbate, and ‘foraging’ for local women (prostitutes or otherwise)” were the sexual opportunities behind the lines (Goldstein 337). For Mailer, exposing the sexual behavior of the GI was important, and *The Naked and the Dead*’s unflinchingly honest billingsgate was offensive to many readers of the early postmodern era. One reviewer notes that Mailer tries to convey that much of war’s misery “comes from the nature of the participants, and that their nature, in turn, is warped by the circumstances inevitable in the conditions of war and the climate of a military organization” (Dempsey). Characters like William Brown effectively satirize the dehumanizing effects of war’s deprivations:

All the time we’re out here beating our meat for company, doing it till it’s disgusting, but what the hell else is there? I oughta quit ‘cause it breaks down your confidence, and I’d be feeling stronger, but how can ya without a goddam woman and nothing to think about? All the men do it. Sure (Mailer 120).

In Mailer’s satiric writing, moral outrage and sadistic pleasure depend on the strength of the reader’s internal and external inhibitions. The humor relies on the undignified image of the American GI gratifying himself. Here, Mailer targets the old-fashioned views of the military, depicted as outliers from the consensus of the soldiers. Brown’s statement

exudes satire's insubordinate, anarchic reputation. While Brown speaks on behalf of the soldier community, publicly ridiculing his target to contest insufficiencies of wartime, he also revels in his own confession, savoring the cruelty inflicted on himself and the other men in his company with a shudder of both delight and disgust.

In a letter to his friend on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1944, an American soldier named Private Gray wrote, "army conversation has a beautiful simplicity and directness. It is all on one solid, everlasting subject... Women, Women, Women" (Goldstein 334). As they leave their site to meet the Navy at the beach, Mailer's characters convincingly joke about the inveterately carnal appetite of soldiers overseas.

'If they's a man here suddenly discovers he's left anythin' behind, that'll be just t.s. We ain't gonna come back.'

'Yeah, boys, don't forget to take your rubbers,' Red suggested, and that drew a laugh. Croft looked angry for a second, but then he drawled, 'I know Wilson ain't gonna forget his,' and they laughed again.

'You're fuggin ay,' Gallagher snorted (Mailer 20).

In this exchange, Mailer mocks the pent-up heterosexual craving of post-adolescent males while undermining the depraved arena of war.

Wilson giggled infectiously. 'Ah tell ya,' he said, 'Ah'd sooner leave my M-one behind, 'cause if they was to be a piece of pussy settin' up on that beach, and Ah didn't have a rubber, Ah'd just shoot myself anyway' (Mailer 21).

As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, American culture conditioned and trained boys for a warrior role early on in their youth, and as is the case in most warrior societies, gender became a tool for compelling men to fight. As an incentive, warriors were "rewarded with booty, slaves, women" (Goldstein 253).

In the case of the Second World War, American women were produced visually and textually as symbols of patriotic objectives. For example, a Palmolive advertisement from 1942 featured an illustration of a young woman with a photograph of a soldier in uniform, a letter, and a bar of soap. Palmolive asked wives across America, “When he comes home to you, will he find you as lovely as his heart has dreamed you to be? Day’s end or year’s end...will the sweet look of you, the soft touch of you...be just as he remembered?” The advertisement advised female buyers to guard their “loveliness” with Palmolive (Rose 237). Similar images are described in James Jones’ classic war-story *From Here to Eternity*. Flipping through several magazines from front to back, a soldier known as Prew looks for images of women. He prefers the drawings, since the photographs were usually more clothed than the small drawn ads showing oversized breasts and elongated legs:

Then there was a *Treeburn’s Facial Soap* ad, of a longlined blonde lying on a beach robe being kissed by a handsome head and shoulder of a man, a painting with a kind of unreal fuzzy outline, she lying there full length, stretched out, turned on one hip, her arms above her head, wearing a bathing suit that looked like leopard skin. There was the heavy-lidded, full pouting-lipped look on her face that women get when they really want it bad (152).

On another page, Prew stares at a shaded drawing of a skimpily dressed woman lounging. Jones mocks the artistic contributions to the war effort, affably detailing the product that is her body: “...and the T shirt fell lightly, swelling under the pressure of the perfect breasts. Shaded half circles and points of light hinted at the rubbery red nipples underneath. The clothes really made no difference; if the artist had left out two dozen lines it would have been a nude” (J. Jones 152). This appears to be a source of both comicality and disdain for Jones. Like the young men who were sent to fight, women in

wartime could not escape the commodification of their bodies. “The draft called men to serve their country, and women likewise received their orders: to be patriotic and support the war effort, in part by maintaining servicemen’s morale” (Hegarty 7).

In postmodern literature, the war novel typically glorified male heroism and praised feminine submissiveness, encouraging women’s willingness to subordinate their needs and desires to those of their men. The provocative, carefree appearance of the World War II pinup girl appealed to soldiers because it suggested sex without the real-life hesitations of real women. In *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer engages satire to literarily expose the erotic fantasies of masculinized soldiers with a precision of wit and graceful style not unlike Jones’.

Roth dreamt he was taking pornographic pictures of a model whom he had dressed as a cowgirl. She was wearing a ten-gallon hat and a leather fringe about an inch wide across her breasts, and a leather holster and cartridge belt slung at an angle across her hips. He imagined now that he was telling her which way to pose and she was obeying with a tantalizing insouciance. His groin began to ache, and he sat there, brooding, dreaming (Mailer 117).

Not only is the image of this woman salacious, it is submissive. Soldiers admired the women who lent their shapely figures to the cameras for pictures to be distributed to American boys overseas. Service members who were confident in their painting abilities notoriously adorned airliners with portraits of pin-up girls. From *The Naked and the Dead*, in what is, essentially, comedy, Major Dalleson gets an idea to make the troops “wake up” and pay attention:

He could jazz up the map-reading class by having a full-size color photograph of Betty Grable in a bathing suit, with a co-ordinate grid system laid over it. The instructor could point to different parts of her and say, ‘Give me the coordinates’ (721).

Mailer's movie-like scene depicts that just as men become products in wartime, so do women. It was not uncommon during the war to see a plane with a scantily-clad Betty Grable doppelganger cruising through the air alongside another aircraft boasting a likeness of the busty Jane Russel as nose art. Although, the most popular pin-ups were the more modest ones.

For example, Grable's favored pinups were more emblematic of home than sex. "She was the kind of woman for whom American men—especially American working-class men—were fighting. She was the sort of girl a man could prize" notes Robert Westbrook in his article titled "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James" (596). Grable's example prompted wives and sweethearts to send pictures of themselves in bathing suits wearing high-heels to American boys overseas. The caption of a *Stars and Stripes* photograph featuring a scantily clad blonde bombshell taking a bite from an enormous slice of watermelon contended, "she's linked us with the country we love—the goofy, funny, wise-cracking happy country that can produce the world's best tanks..." (Roberts 62). The pin-up girl was the girl left behind, the lover one yearned to embrace and the romantic writer of letters that preserved the old world. She was from "Anytown USA" and looked like someone the troops could envision going home to ("The Gorgeous Girls..."). She was emblematic of the cause to fight. The personal testimony and literature following World War II suggests that what American men were defending was less about "freedom" and "patriotism" than it was about protecting the territory occupied by girlfriends, wives and mothers back home. Returning to an unharmed America gave soldiers fuel to fight and hope of survival. With the Hollywood

pin-up stars and endearing snapshots of girls back home, the American woman served as a fundamental incentive.

### Prostitution

World War II offered Americans the opportunity to return to nature and consider members of the opposite sex as possible conquests of seduction. On the other hand, many foreign women were unopposed to sexual liaisons with the American troops, if only because the latter had food and cigarettes. Consequently, sex became a service to be traded for the necessities of life. From Mary Louis Roberts' nonfiction book, *What Soldier's Do*, the actress Simone Signoret was awed by the American K rations. They had meat, pie, cheese, powdered lemonade, chocolate, candy and chewing gum. They could make milk without cows by mixing water with a mysterious white powder! "Coffee—real coffee—was created from tiny little brown granules! And best of all, an omelet could be cooked without breaking any eggs!" (Roberts 117).

The French people were awestruck by the surplus of American food they witnessed as soldiers moved through villages and towns in Northern France. The Army mess halls were filled with meat, bread, soup, condensed milk, and fruit! Even the GI diet was a wonder. They had new foods like margarine—a butter that did not melt in the sun, and there was peanut butter, a substance described as a 'jam with peanuts' (Roberts 117).

In *Catch-22*, nearly all the women mentioned in the novel are depicted as sexual objects.

Of course, the female figure as commodity is a recurring motif in the literature of war.

When a woman finds herself without a home, food, or possessions, she still has a

sexualized body, which is valuable to the male warrior seeking a sexual outlet. Says

Gray, "It is not easy to grasp the full coarseness of this gross physical love" (65). Though



prostitution is not necessary for the combat of war, prostitution is a by-product of the situation of war.

In literature, the voice of the satirist is often condemnatory while seeming to delight in finding fault with its target. From a critical point of view, the speaker is not the same as the author, but a particularly conventionalized persona, “a voice internal to the work” (Bogel 2). For example, in *The Young Lions*, Irwin Shaw takes us through the private thoughts of a German soldier named Christian, whose story follows the defeats of the German army in Western Europe. Early in the novel, he is accustomed to the spoils of victory—a wealth of food, high-quality liquor and an assortment of prostitutes. Walking through Friedrichstrasse, a major street in Berlin, He notices the whores “were spectacularly well-dressed, real fur-pieces and smartly designed coats. The conquest of France, he thought, has had a beneficial effect on one profession, at least” (Shaw 149). Christian’s biting wit criticizes the proliferation in the marketability of the sexualized body, calling into question the shifting worth of human beings. In the memories and imagination of Shaw, prostitutes are not only reduced to objects, but to sexual parts that can be manipulated to the soldiers’ satisfaction. The emphasis on the prostitute’s physical attributes are complementary with military needs.

Contrary to Shaw’s telling renditions of soldier-life in Germany, though, it is important to note that much of the framework surrounding the war adopted a narrative that erased the raw physical sex of World War II. Many critics were wholly revolted by the depictions of soldiers as beasts or animals. However, soldiers on all sides of the war are targets of satire in Shaw’s *The Young Lions*. Their constant appetite for the female

body is compatible with eating and drinking, “a devouring of the woman as object” (Clayton 5). The process of sexual commodification involves turning bodies into economic goods. Just as sexualized images of women can be used to sell items like cleaning products or cosmetics, commodification of the body in wartime reduces the human being to a mere price tag. Shaw presents this cruel actuality in a blatant exchange between sailors in a European bar:

‘Twenty-five bucks,’ the young sailor said. ‘Twenty-five apiece, she asked. She said she never did it before and she’s married and she ought to get paid for the risk she’s taking.’  
 ‘Who does she think she is?’ the one with the hat on demanded.  
 ‘How much she ask you?’  
 ‘Nothing,’ Noah said, and he felt an absurd sense of pride. ‘And she wants to throw in a bottle of Four Roses.’  
 ‘How do you like that? The older sailor turned bitterly to his partner.  
 ‘You going with her?’ the younger one asked, avidly.  
 Noah shook his head. ‘No.’  
 ‘Why not?’ the younger one asked.  
 Noah shrugged. ‘I don’t know.’  
 ‘Boy,’ the young one said, ‘you must be well serviced’ (Shaw 52-3).

This interlude suggests the regularity with which soldiers engaged in the sex trade during World War II. Shaw knew the debauched cupidity of soldiers all too well. They sought after women with a frenzied intensity. Combat veteran and literary historian Paul Fussell remembers:

...sex surfaced with an insistence and violence which suggested that the troops had had too little for too long. In the months before the invasion London swarmed with prostitutes of all ages, who would either take you into one of the parks or vouchsafe you a ‘wall job’ or ‘knee trembler,’ standing up in a not so dark street around Picadilly. ‘I never saw so many whores in my life,’ one Canadian soldier remembers and another explains, ‘...You can just imagine, a vast battlefield of sex’ (*Wartime* 109).

Postmodern war writers like Heller and Jones were counterproductive to America's attempt at whitewashing sexual exploitation from the memory of World War II. From

*Catch-22*:

The enlisted men descended upon Rome in gangs of twelve or more with Gargantuan appetites and heavy crates filled with canned food for the women to cook and serve to them in the dining room of their own apartment on the sixth floor... (Heller 132).

Heller admonishes the discrepancy of wealth between the American soldiers and the Italian women with a pithy ambivalence, contesting the troops' ethical reputation dryly. The narrator discloses the covert attitudes of the men overseas, reasoning: "The girls had shelter and food for as long as they wanted to stay. All they had to do in return was hump any of the men who asked them to, which seemed to make everything just about perfect for them" (133). This jocular view is mercilessly insensitive to the dehumanizing arrangements of such financial imbalances. *Catch-22*'s truthful exhibition of prostitution is disturbing and raw. In the novel, most of the foreign women do not have names, but they are remembered by their outwardly features and items of clothing, like "the maid in the lime colored panties" (133). Nately's whore, for instance, is never given her own name, but is referred to as *his* piece of property. As a victim of war, she sells her body to survive, representing the desperation of a conquered people. Her story complicates the popular "Good War" myth, satirizing the systems of war's prevalence.

In *Catch-22*, the soldiers' preoccupation with parts of bodies displays the objectification of the female body with indifference. For ninety dollars, Nately, Hungry Joe, Yossarian, and Dunbar are escorted to a bordello in an unfamiliar part of town. "The amazing place was a fertile, seething cornucopia of female nipples and navels" (241).

The vast assortment of sexual prospects is a buffet of flesh, and the men take stock of the different shapes and sizes, fetishizing parts and pieces of the women in the process.

“There was bare flesh lounging everywhere, most of it plump, and Hungry Joe began to die” (244). Heller describes the scene with a dream-like detachment, acknowledging the absurd abundance of earthly delights with the cool jollity of the satirist. Yossarian and Dunbar exist in the background “pawing orgiastically at four or five frolicsome girls and six bottles of red wine” while Hungry Joe trails a parade of “the broadest-hipped young prostitutes” he could get his hands on (244). Meanwhile, Nately’s own whore hilariously ignores him, leaving him to discuss politics with a fat old man—presumably a pimp—resting in an overstuffed blue chair “like some satanic and hedonistic deity on a throne” (242). With his rotund figure and sloppy appearance, the old man embodies the gross prosperity generated from the influx of wealth of American soldiers.

Even on American soil, organized prostitution was regulated until late in the war. Regardless of the local opinions, military leaders felt it was good for the men’s morale. In Honolulu, prostitution near Pearl Harbor was notoriously obvious. However, with a ratio of several hundred men for each woman, soldiers anticipating “a hula girl under every palm” were greatly mistaken (Goldstein 345). Crudely put, in *Jones’ From Here to Eternity*, a character named Red sardonically affirms, “Private pussies don’t grow on no trees...a good shackjob is hard to find” (6). His affirmation stresses the sexual depravation on military bases while condescendingly revealing an attitude of disregard for females’ usefulness beyond sex. The female’s significance is reduced to a single

sexual organ. Later in the novel, after screwing things up with his old girlfriend, a young soldier named Prew thinks bitterly to himself:

All you got now is the old round, the whorehouses where you never find it either, plus the absence of the money that it costs you to look there and that you have to scrounge for and then never get, except on Payday when they're all so crowded that if you don't get your gun off in three minutes you have to take a raincheck (144).

The satiric element of Prew's rationale is evident in the reductive cynicism he applies to females. The depersonalization of the women in Jones' war story suggests that the only purpose they serve is sexual. The speaker is egoistic and unconcerned with the physical and emotional well-being of the women he uses to meet his own needs. This is an unflattering portrayal of the American GI, one that was unsettling to more conventional, puritanical views. Although the writings of Shaw, Mailer, Heller and Jones can seem misogynistic, they capture the structures of wartime with contemptuous authenticity. Their fictions function as tell-all novels, revealing the misogynist underbelly of the American army boldly. Their satiric tones mockingly deride the 'Good War' myth, asking the audience to reevaluate the worth of the human being.

### Rape

In the military, sexuality was repressed, yet a constant topic of conversation. Army standards praised unyielding courage, supreme physical prowess and an insatiable heterosexual drive. Marilyn Hegarty, in her 2008 book *Victory Girls, Kahaki-Wackies and Patriotutes* notes that soldiers often "received encouragement to see sexual adventures as proof of manhood" (89). In fact, men often acted with a sense of

entitlement to sex that resulted in acts of aggression and rape, which are linked to more traditional principles of the warrior elite. In the early postmodern literature of Heller and Jones, sex serves two purposes. It is first a side show to war's absurd and intermittent scenes of combat, and second, at least for the male reader, it is hilarious. For example, in Daniel M. Clayton's article "Whitewashing WWII Sexual Memory" he points out that GI sexual behavior is often a source of amusement, admonishing that "it's funny to think that some poor guy is so drunk in a whore's room that he asks, 'Where am I?' And a typical response to the quartermaster privates' sexual escapades noted above might very well be, 'Wow, what a man!'—someone to be admired, not condemned" (17). Yet, as Clayton emphasizes, there is a truth to sex in war that is never funny, which occurs when men, usually in a drunken sexual frenzy, cast aside their moral inhibitions and commit horrible atrocities. Contrary to what 'Good War' devotees have loyally ignored, American men were not perfect gentlemen. Often in war, men behave as beasts—the results, appalling.

While most of the sex in *Catch-22* seems to occur in mutual fun, the end of the novel begins to uncover the darker, increasingly appalling fruits of war. Bustling hurriedly through the chaos of Pianosa, Yossarian's thoughts turn to the corpse of a "happy, simple-minded" Italian girl who worked as a servant in the officer's apartment. He discovers the body lying still on the pavement outside of the building encircled by a mob of upset neighbors who glare away from him while pointing up towards the second-story windows (417). Upstairs, Yossarian finds the culprit, Aarfy, pacing the apartment nervously.

‘I only raped her once,’ he explained.  
 Yossarian was aghast. ‘But you killed her, Aarfy! You killed her!’  
 ‘Oh, I had to do that after I raped her,’ Aarfy replied in his most  
 condescending manner. ‘I couldn’t very well let her go around saying bad  
 things about us, could I?’ (418).

The cool, unaffected tone of Aarfy cues readers’ horror. Heller’s satire is an exceedingly scathing representation of the American GI. In this version, he is heartless and self-absorbed. Yossarian reasons, “You’ve murdered a human being. They *are* going to put you in jail. They might even *hang* you!” But it is Aarfy’s loathsome response that reveals the shady reality of the Second World War. He responds, “She was only a servant girl. I hardly think they’re going to make too much of a fuss over one poor Italian servant girl when so many thousands of lives are being lost every day” (418). His statement is appalling and callous, yet turns out to be accurate. Ironically, when the military police burst into the apartment, they arrest Yossarian for being AWOL, but nothing happens to Aarfy. In this rapid chain of events, Heller emphasizes the fact that the U.S. Army pays more attention to its own infrastructure than to victims of war. Furthermore, Heller’s derogative portrayal satirizes the nation’s perceptions of male sexuality, endorsing the notion that some female bodies are “just made for that” (91), reducing the female character to a mere sexual property. In a warzone, copulation is often an act of aggression. “Surely this kind of love is intimately associated with the impersonal violence of war,” says Gray in his memoir (67). The female is the victim and the soldier is the triumphant captor. This love is as cruel as the combat surrounding it. The conquest of the female, Gray notes, “becomes very like the conquest of the enemy, who forfeited

any right to human status or equality” (Gray 67). Especially in war, sexual lust reveals man detached from his humanity, which often leads to murder and rape.

Focusing on the symbolism of the phallus as a weapon, allegiance to the gun blurs the distinctions between rifle and penis. The bond between men and weapons is linked with socially constructed models of violent masculine needs. The sexual imagery parallel with weapons is an intrinsic part of a militaristic climate. In his article “Disarming Masculinities,” Henri Myrntinen argues that a large part of the military’s standard of ‘manliness’ sanctions the use of hostility, force and violence. He says, “weapons are used as status symbols but also as tools to achieve economic and social gains, wielding power over unarmed males and females” (37). Although, just as men are undermined in literature as the perpetrators of violence, they are often victims of a patriarchal society that fosters warrior-type behavior. For instance, the original Rifleman’s Creed—written during World War II by Major General William H. Rupertus—was doctrine adjusted by military leaders to say, “This is my rifle, this is my gun; this one’s for killing, this one’s for fun”. Rhetoric like this served as stimulating machismo for a generation of young men that were sent overseas to fight. The subtle distinction suggests the idea that the penis and the rifle are equally paramount to a warrior’s well-being and should be handled with extreme care.

Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* illustrates how writers developed a critique of the paradoxical relationship between the penis and artillery. Left to his private thoughts, General Cummings makes a connection between sex and violence in his journal. He jots: “It’s not entirely unproductive conceit to consider weapons as being something more than machines, as having personalities, perhaps, likenesses to the human” (568). He



pauses, reflects for a moment on the sexual imagery and then writes: “The phallus-shell that rides through a shining vagina of steel, soars through the sky, and then ignites into the earth. The earth as the poet’s image of womb-mother, I suppose.” Next he surmises that even the language of the military employs a sexual connotation, recalling a time in training class when the junior officer remarked, ““If you can’t put the shell in that big hole, I don’t know what you’ll do when you get older.”” Before finishing his journal entry, he makes the sardonic connection between rifle, the penis, and “the extension of man’s power”. In battle, thinks Cummings, men are more like machines than humans. His thesis concludes:

Battle is an organization of thousands of man-machines who dart with governing habits across a field, sweat like a radiator in the sun, shiver and become stiff like a piece of metal in the rain. We are not so discreet from the machine any longer, I detect it in my thinking. We are no longer adding apples and horses. A machine is worth so many men; the Navy has judged it even more finely than we. The nations whose leaders strive for Godhead apotheosize the machine (569).

Through the character of General Cummings, Mailer’s analysis of war is not a positive one. His senseless, distant representation of the Second World War offers an inhuman, satiric picture of what it was like for the American soldiers. Mailer’s analysis portrays war itself as the real enemy of the American GI. By focusing closely on the army unit, Mailer is able to portray militaristic pursuits as absurd and senseless, reducing the value of every human life to a commodity, a recurring symptom of the war experience.

Many of the novels produced shortly after the Second World War are not testimonies of a virtuous generation of proud heroes. Mailer, Heller, Shaw and Jones all exhibit guilty, self-doubting, insecure characters that do despicable things to other humans. The structures that justify war lose all credibility when one concentrates on the

depersonalization of any man or woman's life. Their fictions work to satirize war, questioning the motives of the military and the fundamental values of the American people. *The Naked and the Dead*, *Catch-22*, *The Young Lions* and *From Here to Eternity* confront the absurdity of war. Their means of expression come from a satiric, journalistic style mercilessly exposing the behaviors associated with the soldiers of World War II. Women's bodies are represented as property, as well as symbols of national victory. The uncomfortable truths that come out of their fictions leave readers horrified, left to contemplate the basis of their very existence.

## CHAPTER THREE

## KINGDOM OF VIOLENCE



Figure 3. U.S. soldier with a whitewashed Japanese skull adorning Navy Motor Torpedo Boat 341 on April 30, 1944.

### Trophies

To some American soldiers, the Second World War offered the possibility of retaliation against the foreign enemy who attacked Pearl Harbor. The United States' war against Japan was characterized by a degree of brutality that was vastly different than the concurrent war being fought against the European Axis. The American military often characterized the Japanese defenders as vile rodents or pictured them as monkeys, insects, reptiles, and bats. James J. Weingartner says that in the minds of many Americans, combat against the Japanese "assumed the character of a hunt, the object of

which was the killing of cunning, but distinctly inhuman creatures” (54). In fact, as an encouragement to enlist, official-looking ‘hunting licenses’ were distributed to young men of military age in some parts of the United States. They read:

Open Season                      No Limit

Japanese Hunting License

Free Ammunition and Equipment!

With Pay

Join the United States Marines! (55).

This kind of propaganda dehumanized the Japanese people in a way that justified killing them. In his World War II memoir, *The Warriors*, J. Glenn Gray explains that the “enemy is considered to be a peculiarly noxious kind of animal toward whom one feels instinctive abhorrence” (Gray 148). He recalls a story from another veteran soldier about the unexpected discovery of a single Japanese soldier hiding behind an area that was supposed to have already been cleared. The American troops knew that he was likely alone, and with this knowledge, they began using him as live target practice while he ran around the clearing frantically. They found this frenzy so hysterically exciting that they delayed killing him quickly. Gray comments, “None of the American soldiers apparently even considered that he may have had human feelings of fear and the wish to be spared” (Gray 150). Soldiers adopt the hunter mentality because of guilt and remorse that would otherwise inhibit their ability to destroy human life—a desperate attempt, perhaps, by confused young men to convince themselves that they have not just committed murder, but that they have killed a simple, inhuman creature.

On the fictional Japanese Island “Anopei” from *The Naked and the Dead*, one week after the Toyaku Line is breached, the remaining Japanese troops split up and scatter into the jungle. They hide by themselves or in small groups of two and three in attempt to escape the flood of incoming Americans. One night, before advancing through the territory with an entire platoon, Martinez is sent on a solo mission through the pass looking for signs of danger ahead. He is not gone long before discovering a single Japanese soldier guarding the trail. Knowing he would have to get past him, Martinez feels unsettled. “What was to keep him from touching him, from greeting him? They were men. The entire structure of the war wavered in his brain for a moment, almost tottered...” (594). If they weren’t in a war, perhaps they could have even been friends, but Martinez knows he must kill him if he expects to stay alive. Preparing for what he is about to do, Martinez experiences a sense of terrifying unreality as he begins to feel like he is trapped in one of his own nightmares. Lost in the realization of what has to happen, he mechanically tosses a pebble to the opposite side of the man. When the Japanese soldier turns his back to him, Martinez rapidly hooks his forearm around the opponent’s neck and thrusts a trench knife into his throat. When the struggle is over,

he had the mixture of relief and revulsion a man feels after chasing a cockroach across a wall and finally squashing him. It affected him exactly that way and not much more intensely. He shuddered because of the drying blood on his hands, but he would have shuddered as much from the roach’s pulp (595-6).

To kill the Japanese soldier, Martinez must silence his inner reservations. He feels conflicted between the competing desire to love his enemy, to reach out and touch him, and to slay him. The moral contradictions of such a war place combat soldiers in a

peculiarly complex position. Furthermore, this scene speaks to the duality of man, in its acute sense of the conflict within Martinez. A part of him is emotional and compassionate, but another part of him is detached and capable of extreme violence. Ultimately, the enemy soldier stands in the way of his clearly defined objective. Killing the Japanese soldier is both an act of fear and an act of aggression. After the struggle of killing the man is finished, he dismisses any guilt he might have felt by rationalizing that the enemy is not human, but rather, an annoying and repugnant pest. By brushing off the incident as nothing more than smooshing a bug, he assumes a posture that he hopes will protect him from deeper remorse and investment. The passage discloses how both Martinez and the Japanese soldier are victims of a world gone mad.

Mailer's fictional representation is consistent with historical images created by the United States that revealed the tensions between the Americans and the enemy in various forms of propaganda depicting the Japanese people as a loathsome, animalistic rival that absolutely needed to be eradicated. Such propaganda had a profound psychological effect on American perceptions of the enemy and prompted a racial hatred that led to deplorable consequences for the Japanese (Miles). In his 1988 collection of essays titled *Thank God For the Atom Bomb*, Paul Fussell features authentic photographs capturing the gruesome treatment of Japanese skulls in the hands of American soldiers, several of which served as souvenirs, trophies and even totems on Guadalcanal. These pictures were taken by the marines, who were proud of their achievement in dominating, conquering and humiliating the enemy that dared attack Pearl Harbor on a peaceful American Sunday.

One was displayed atop a pole, like a warning at the entrance of a 'native village' in a jungle film of the 1930s. Another was mounted on the front of

a ruined Japanese tank, looking forward like a radiator ornament of the period. Another was being boiled in a metal vat, and two marines were busy poking it and turning it with sticks (48).

Fussell notes that one of the marines was his host, and he was only a boy, “looking as innocent as Holden Caulfield or Jackie Cooper” (46). But even though the boys are young and innocent, the extreme aggression and hostility among them is a frightening preservation of the human’s capacity to destroy his own kind. Once American boys became soldiers, they were given licenses to kill. The dilemma was in transforming inexperienced young men into determined fighting machines with the composure to overcome the horrifying damage inflicted by modern weaponry. The shock of seeing other men hurt and mutilated perpetuated revelations that one might find themselves in a similar position at any moment. To preserve one’s nerve, much mental and emotional distancing was vital. Thousands of youths who may have previously felt resistance towards accepting the command to kill would discover in military life the ecstasy of destruction. However, while soldiers who took pleasure in acts of aggression no doubt existed, they were the exception, not the rule. In her book *Fear: A Cultural History*, Joanna Bourke argues that fear was the most defining emotion of battle, and if enjoyment was achieved it was only due to the extraordinary resilience of the human imagination (199). Was the sadistic impulse to take trophies, then, an antidote to fear? It’s certainly not that simple. Soldiers were subjected to a profusion of racist propaganda, underwent extreme psychological hardening and often employed the numbing effects of alcohol. Furthermore, the encouragement of combat training played a tremendous role in enabling

them to overcome reluctance towards killing and encouraged them to feel a sadistic sense of achievement in doing so.

In *The Naked and the Dead*, satire relies on grotesque imagery to arouse shock. After sharing four canteens of whiskey, five American soldiers decide to look for souvenirs among the dead and decaying Japanese troops in the fields surrounding them. Martinez wanders away from the group and notices a corpse whose mouth is open, exposing a row of gold teeth;

A discarded rifle was lying at his feet, and without thinking he picked it up, and smashed the butt of it against the cadaver's mouth. It made a sound like an ax thudding into a wet rotten log. He lifted the rifle and smashed it down again. The teeth spattered loose. Some landed on the ground and a few lay scattered over the crushed jaw of the corpse. Martinez picked up four or five gold ones in a frenzy and dropped them in his pocket (214).

Doing so made him feel a rush of excitement and fear. Such grotesque imagery analyzes the unreason of barbarism while exercising postmodernism's preoccupation with violence for the redemptive value of shock. In wartime, veterans were left with the heavy burden of accepting behaviors that in peacetime were regarded among the most heinous of crimes, for which they had not only been trained, but encouraged to carry out (J. Jones 246). Mailer's novel uncovers the absurd degree of brutality among American troops attending the Pacific theater in the Second World War. The exhibition of the molested corpse exposes the capacity for radical evil at the heart of the human condition while interrogating the illogical factors of war and national propaganda instigating it.



Corporeal Wounds

On the surface, early postmodern literature is recognized by an ambivalence towards pain and suffering. Yet on a deeper level its satire rigorously examines the influence of dominant social and psychological forces on an elusive dimension of the felt human experience. In the postmodern novel, satire often involves a grotesque aesthetic rooted in feelings of revulsion towards indissoluble nervousness, dread, and disgust (Greenberg 46). John R. Clark argues that “horror and grotesquerie are especially suited to the modern era...Very deliberately, much modern literature probes and portrays the swart and seamy side of the human condition,” in his book *The Modern, Satiric Grotesque and its Traditions* (5). Furthermore, Tyrus Miller points out that late modernism’s texts aim to inspire laughter by deliberately conjuring the distortion of the body through its joints and layers, its foul odors and moisture and an exaggerated ugliness that ends in laughter (54). In the novel, early postmodernism immerses the grotesque body in a space of sensory impressions that generates its own effects and its own primordial fear concerning the relation of bodies to the world.

By the late 1930s, the mutilated and unsealed body in literature was already undergoing a theoretical formation that would come to fruition in 1965, when the famous Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin published one of his most well-known texts, *Rabelais and His World*, in which he explores the carnivalesque and the grotesque. In the introduction, Bakhtin states, “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in indissoluble unity” (20). In Bakhtin’s

now well-known study of Rabelais' study of the carnivalesque, corporeal wounds are affirmed as the center of transactions between biological bodies and the earth. The body is thus most grotesque in the regions that are exposed to the outside world: the nose, mouth, genitals, anus and open wounds (26). Bakhtin also notes that the grotesque body is composed of many parts and pieces, dismemberment and mutilation, degradation, madness, parody and satire (2-3). The cruelty and aloofness of this realism makes satire possible. For Bakhtin, the grotesque is *always* satire, it is "caricature that has reached fantastic dimensions...exaggeration of the inappropriate to incredible and monstrous dimensions..." (2-306). Often, the grotesque animates the victim of its satire as an inhuman object, dehumanizing them in the process.

In literature, when a human is described as an animal, a plant, or a machine, the character immediately loses their human dignity and becomes the thing to which they have been reduced. These earthly details enable grotesque realism to degrade, to bring down to earth and turn their subjects into things. In *The Young Lions*, when a bomb is dropped near the car carrying Lieutenant Hardenberg, Christian hears a voice saying, "Get me to a doctor", but there was no face, "just a red and white pulpy mass, with the calm voice coming somehow through the red bubbles and the white strips of whatever it had been that held the side of Lieutenant Hardenburg's face together" (270). In a daze, Christian recalls where he has seen something like that before. "It was like a pomegranate, roughly and inaccurately broken open, veined and red and with the juice running from the glistening ripe globules past the knife down onto the shining ivory plate" (271). The grotesque realism expressed in this section of Shaw's novel equates the

damaged materiality of the human body to the inside of a piece of fruit. The almost hallucinatory image of the corpus exerting itself beyond the limits of normal physical endurance against the tremendous onset of pain showcases the vulnerability of the human body while at the same time reducing it to an organic, earthly property. Through the perspective of folk carnival, the grotesque image of the body is grasped as an essential player in the subversive quality of the satire that allows Shaw to provokingly mock oppressive authoritarian political hierarchies. The decimation of the wounded body prompts the positive renewal of a communal resistance towards oppressive causes. In this sense, postwar literary texts like *The Young Lions* function as a kind of critical discourse interrogating the politics of war.

*Catch-22* similarly confronts the physical messiness of death with the carnivalesque grotesque connecting the body to the earth, whereby Heller emphasizes the fact that dead bodies are simply waste. In his study on character and satire in postwar fiction, Ian Gregson addresses two names that stand out as reductive. The soldier who is killed only hours after arriving in Pianosa is named Mudd, as if to mimic his definitive fate. Likewise, Snowden is snow that is ‘cold’—the word he utters incessantly as he dies (Gregson 35). As death nears, the edges of Snowden’s mouth turn blue and he continues to repeat that he is cold. In a panic, Yossarian rips open Snowden’s flak suit and hears himself scream “as Snowden’s insides slithered down to the floor in a soggy pile and just kept dripping out...” His body, like the snow, melts quickly, too quickly to stop. “Man was matter, that was Snowden’s secret. Drop him out a window and he’ll fall. Set fire to him and he’ll burn. Bury him and he’ll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone,

man is garbage” (Heller 440). Dead, Snowden represents the unclear distinctions between the body and the outside world. The body is a hybrid: a mixture of animals, plants and earthly properties, like the dust and precipitation. Even before death, the human body is merely an organic property highly susceptible to stronger forces of nature. It can be characterized as a place “evoking monstrosity, irrational confusion, absurdity, and a deformed heterogeneity,” suggests Sara Shabot in an article about the grotesque body (229). In the early postmodern war novel, hyperbolic deformations of the body play a crucial role in mimicking institutions that valued the human body solely as property of the United States military. From its satire, it became increasingly clear that American soldiers, along with foreign soldiers, were completely dehumanized for purposes of war.

In civilian life, people find ways to disregard their most primitive, animal qualities. Bodily functions are discreetly and hygienically attended to, odors are politely camouflaged by sweet smelling perfumes and deodorants, and many individuals are privileged to work with their minds, where their feelings and ideas are valued. The combat soldier, however, “was forced daily to witness man as animal, scratching and gouging to live, dying, and decaying” (Adams 103). After the war, the canonically imposed violence of postmodernism revealed the constant fear of death that lurked beneath the principal characteristics of such writing. Postmodern literature then moved into a hyperreality in which the imaginary and the real intersect. For example, in Jones’ sequel to *From Here to Eternity*, *The Thin Red Line*, he describes the eerie space men enter after being injured: “They had crossed a strange line; they had become wounded men; and everybody realized, including themselves dimly, that they were now

different...They had been initiated into a strange, insane, twilight fraternity where explanations would be forever impossible” (45). Such abandonment of logic rejects the supposition that anything has meaning or value beyond shock. The postmodern epiphany is attended by a new degree of violence in the war novel, one that exposes the suffering of the men, the pitiless abuse of their bodies and minds, and the debilitating horrors of barbarity with a “nightmare outrage” that exalts them to new heights of drama (Aldridge 135).

### Dead Bodies

*The Naked and the Dead* is a peculiar title for an ostensibly grave manuscript. In an origins and principles book about satire, Matthew Hodgart makes a relevant distinction between the words *nakedness* and *nudity*. The nude, for instance, is represented by lazy Eros sleeping in the gardens and fountains of Rome, Aphrodite being falsely modest in Cyrene and Zeus wrapped in gold at Olympus. Nakedness, however, is used for degradation; the Greeks’ Phylax cases depicted men separated from gods, ludicrously exposed with erect phalluses protruding from their bellies. Even the implication of a naked man becomes victim to satire as he is “caught” or in the act of guilt or shame, like man’s first parents, Adam and Eve after their fall from grace—their once glorious nudity replaced by humiliation. The word *naked* in place of *nude* reduces man from god to beast (Hodgart 118).

Even so, Mailer aptly titles his World War II volume *The Naked and the Dead*, satirically addressing the grotesque reality of lifeless soldiers. Within the novel itself, just

one specific example of Mailer's casual and unsympathetic treatment of Japanese bodies pictures how unglorified fallen soldiers looked. In the seventh chapter "...they could see the twisted bodies of a few dead men, and they lay very far from repose, their bodies frozen in the midst of an intense contortion" (Mailer 210). His description continues to express the anti-sentimental sophistication marking postmodernism. One paragraph later, Mailer frolics with an image so grotesque as to question the morality of its own creator—one of satire's drawbacks. The ugly materiality of the human body for Mailer seems to be an amusing subject:

Another Japanese lay on his back a short distance away. He had a great hole in his intestines, which bunched out in a thick white cluster like the congested petals of a sea flower...his legs and buttocks had swollen so that they stretched his pants until they were the skin-tight trousers of a Napoleonic dandy. Somehow, he looked like a doll whose stuffing had broken forth (Mailer 211).

Though this is an accustomed scene to the veteran soldier, its frank depiction conveys an especially horrific image to its unexperienced reader. Feelings are only implied through the condition of the victim—his position laughably pitiful. In this way, Mailer's satire provides an understanding of the horrors of World War II. From *Modernism, Satire and the Novel*, author Jonathan Greenberg points out that the satiric description of grotesque bodies can be read as responses to or symptoms of life in modern society (Greenberg 42). Mailer's scene describes the perils of war in a way that is consistent with its construction. The overt grotesquerie of early postmodern fiction reveals the emotion of metaphysical disorientation amidst a backdrop of apocalyptic chaos that connected a young generation of veterans.

The early postmodern war novel displays the corpse's signifying power and haunting presence by exhibiting the nature of combat death, individual soldiers' desensitized reaction to dead bodies and what Christina Jarvis, author of *The Male Body at War*, calls "the gradual psychological hardening hat" that comes with the territory (167). In his World War II memoir, Glenn Gray writes that for the combat soldier, life was an expendable commodity. It mattered very little to the majority of them whether they survived or not. He writes, "The dead began to seem both unreal and yet commonplace" (99). In another scene from *The Naked and the Dead* Mailer animates the indifference of a soldier named Woodrow Wilson felt towards the dead:

He prodded a corpse with the butt of the Japanese rifle, and made a face. 'Goddam carrion, that's all we are, men, goddam carrion.' A few ribs were protruding from the cadaverous chest and in the late afternoon light they had silver sheen. The exposed flesh had turned a sickly brown-green. 'Look jus' like a shoulder o' a lamb,' Wilson stated (213).

In *The Best War Ever* Michael Adams documents that death and decay accompanied the troops everywhere they went; he states that in the places where it was too dangerous to retrieve the dead, bodies drained and decomposed into the mud. "Land crabs fed on them, as did dogs on other fields...where they ate out the tender throats" (105). The apocalyptic terror of the war became a common occurrence. "The decks of a fighting ship in action became littered with pieces of men. One sailor saw his mate blasted through a metal ladder, which cut him into symmetrical chunks" (108). The literary depiction of such violently fragmented bodies is understood by Bakhtin and Greenberg as a means of generating social bonds among the witnesses. From the perspective of carnival, grotesque imagery is grasped as an indispensable component in the subversive release of fright,

allowing emboldened characters to overcome their fear of mortality while at the same time mocking the logistics of war.

In the midst of combat, a certain emotional and moral desensitization occurs among troops and civilians alike. For veteran soldiers, an ambivalence towards death inhibits feelings of surprise, sadness and shame. Retired U.S. Army Ranger and psychologist Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman insists that as military members are conditioned to the gruesome scenes of war they become desensitized to moral considerations. “The maxim heard often by new soldiers, ‘You’re not paid to think,’ captures well the principle inherent in military training that fails to prepare young men and women for the moral density of modern war” (“Desensitization” 488). Regarding war, desensitization compromises feelings of pity, providing the scope for a strange satire evident in *The Young Lions* when the men pass an officer bent over with his unclothed buttocks sticking up in the air.

Hardenburg grinned, ‘Do you remember,’ Hardenburg asked, ‘what he looked like, squatting there, worrying about being constipated, when he heard the first shot? And how he looked when he tried to run? Trying to wave and hold up his pants at the same time...

Hardenburg laughed. As he laughed, the humor of the recollection struck him more and more forcibly. Finally he had to stop walking and stood still, bent over, his hands on his knees, gasping weakly, his laughter rolling wildly out into the wind (199).

Soon, Christian joins in the laughing, and like an infection, the laughter spreads to the entire group of men standing by the dead man with his head nearly disconnected from his body, his false teeth dangling from his lips. Soldiers shared an immersion in corpses. Dead bodies function in literature as a means of breaking down the barriers that separate individuals, bringing people together. Like satire’s grotesque use of the wounded body,



bodily fluids and waste, the corpse produces disgust and condescension because it calls to attention the fragility of the body and reminds the reader of his or her own physical limits. Sociologist Philip Mellor supports that an illusory encounter with a dead body produces hysteria because it calls “into question the meaningfulness and reality of the social frameworks in which [the subject] participates, shattering their ontological security” (Jarvis 163). In *The Naked and the Dead* and *The Young Lions*, these discourses invade, distort and deform reality in a way that draws attention to the seriousness of combat and its parody.

### SNAFU

Between September 1, 1939 and the formal surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945, an average of 27,000 people were killed every day. The exact amount of casualties is unknown, but historians agree that the toll exceeds 60 million, making the Second World War one of the greatest catastrophes in human history (“World War II”). Nothing was sacred and no one was spared. Everyone was expendable. In a first-hand account of combat in the Pacific, Eugene Sledge describes a dreadful realization. “Slowly the reality of it all formed in my mind: we were expendable! It was difficult to accept. We come from a nation and a culture that values life and the individual. To find oneself in a situation where your life seems of little value is the ultimate in loneliness” (100). While many American men had whole-heartedly believed enlisting was an act that would enable them to become a valuable part of the American war machine, they had not counted on losing their individuality. But in the military, conformity is key. While watching soldiers

file aboard a ship in their round mushroom-like helmets, John Steinbeck thought they looked like a row of vegetables bereft of their separate identities. “The soldiers themselves had learned that they as individuals didn’t count: America would survive, but many of the cogs in the war machine would not” (Adams 82). When people lose their identities, they lose sight of their agency and adhere to the agenda of dominating forces. Notions of reality are dislocated; the individual is displaced in a world of unreality.

Wars are living nightmares. Their psychological impact on soldiers is profound. Many soldiers return permanently withdrawn from the world by the haunting atrocities they were forced to witness. In combat, one’s senses are wholly overwhelmed by the once unimaginable; the mind and the body are charged with confusion, terror, and outrage at the sight of countless disfigured bodies, the sound of never-ending explosions and screaming, the foul reek of death and decay and the agony that accompanies extraordinary pain. The Second World War’s destruction and loss of humanity on such a grand-scale led to extreme cynicism and disillusionment with ideologies of progress, rationality and reason. From these conditions, participants acquired a numb, loopy humor that introduced such acronyms to military slang as SNAFU (Situation Normal: All Fucked Up), FUBAR (Fucked Up Beyond All Reason), SUSFU (Situation Unchanged: Still Fucked Up) and TARFU (Things Are Really Fucked Up). These invectives indicate an ironic acceptance of wartime’s devastation while at the same time mocking the ridiculousness of it all.

Postmodern literature exhibits a playful detachment that contrasts from the modernist appeal to seriousness, pureness and individuality. Within the postmodern

world, the boundaries between real and imaginary blur and the distinction between opposites dissolves. Evident in the novels to come out of the Second World War, an insouciant form plays with irony, cynicism, nihilism and commercialism to challenge the establishment of civilization, classification and order. The satire in these works initiates a destabilization of hierarchy and previously accepted norms to a subversive effect. After the war, the dream of a peaceful and harmonious society had collapsed. People reflected on society and human nature. They began to reexamine their traditional values and beliefs. Satire necessitated the reconsideration of normative social conventions and common sense. “Especially in postmodern America,” writes Steven Weisenburger in *Fables of Subversion*, “degenerative satire is realist narration backlit by fantastic outrage” (5). In this regard, satire is itself an act of violence; it aggressively exposes cultural forms that are dedicated to terror. The purpose of satire in the postmodern war novel is to deploy irony to destabilize patriarchal and capitalist values that idealize commodified beings. In its dislocated violence, postmodernism exhibits war’s potential with firm understanding that is vital for all if we are to survive, for it serves to elucidate an excruciating, unthinkable warning.

## CONCLUSION

In postwar American fiction, memorable writers from the 1920s and 1930s continued to produce laudable work. Hemingway, Faulkner and Steinbeck each became Nobel Prize honorees in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but as Malcolm Bradbury stated in *The Modern American Novel* (1983), “all three showed signs of being beyond their best work” (127). World War I produced a fiction of extraordinary technical experiment, but the new generation captured a changed America. She was now powerful, affluent, disoriented and grossly modern. Many of the war novels that emerged in postwar America came from the experience of young men within the military, depicting a world in tragic disarray. Encyclopedic tomes like Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*, Irwin Shaw’s *The Young Lions*, James Jones’ *From Here to Eternity* and Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* captured the essence of a world where liberal optimism and political action appeared powerless to militaristic supremacies. An emergent theme of depersonalization limited the importance of the individual. The early postmodern fiction revealed a sadness laced with absurdity that showcased characters in a broken world, victimized and commodified to appease militaristic goals. Its characters were often depicted as trash, excrement, animals and machines, marking a sense of lives made absurd by the corruption of industry, technology and politics. These novels mark a retreat from the self and use satire to represent society as an adversary force, cruel, vast and oppressive.

Many of the critics focused on Mailer, Shaw, Jones and Heller did not praise their war novels, nor did loyal glamorizers of America approve depictions of GIs in the European and, especially, Pacific theaters. Nevertheless, it does World War II veterans

little justice to valorize them. For centuries, warfare has been a dominant tenet of America's history. When we study war, it is too easy to become engrossed by the excitement of conflict, concentrating solely on the heroics, the drama and the thrill. However, it is imperative to shift our focus towards the lesson that war is always agonizing and immeasurably destructive. It should not be glorified or mythologized. The Second World War was the most wide-spread and destructive war in human history with more deaths, more injuries and more art destroyed than ever before or since. There were more men armed and economies mobilized than ever; battles were fought across continents and oceans, on the ground and in the sky. Civilians suffered horribly, making up half of the war's total casualties.

While statistics, dates and facts display the overwhelming magnitude and complexities of World War II, the horrific realities of the war are documented in personal accounts, letters, memoirs, diaries and novels offered by the men and women who were actually there. In contrast to the texts produced by official military historians, works by veterans offer future generations a deeper understanding of the war's overall history on an intimate level. Such primary sources reveal the fear, uncertainty and brutality of wartime. The latent satire in early postmodern war novels undermines the Good War myth that so many Americans have come to accept. The novels explored in this dissertation do well to expose the objectification and dehumanization rampant within the United States war machine. These works reveal a temper that showcases the comic self in a bloody history, victimized and commodified. In view of its moral ambiguities, the idea that the war was 'good' or 'noble' is absurd.

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