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RALPH ELLISON'S INVISIBLE MAN.

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The Fool as Mentor in Modern American Parables of Entrapment: Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Joseph Heller's Catch-22 and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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Introduction

Enid Welsford concludes her classical work on the fool with the following comment:

But if the Fool is an emancipator, if comedy is essentially foolery or clownage, does it not follow that the comic writer is committing the capital literary offence, and is producing that bugbear of the modern critic—poetry of escape? Well, certainly, that is precisely what he is doing, but whether you regard it as a capital offence or not depends upon your point of view. Many of our contemporaries combine Hamlet's idea that the world is a dungeon with a curious reluctance to unlock the prison door, a reluctance, however, which undoubtedly springs from courage, for it is due to the notions that the prison is coextensive with the universe and that therefore the only possible escape is the unworthy lapse into drugged sleep. On these matters it must simply be noted that equally sincere and intelligent thinkers come to completely incompatible conclusions. To those who do not repudiate the religious insight of the race, the human spirit is uneasy in this world because it is at home elsewhere, and escape from the prison house is possible not only in fancy but in fact. The theist believes possible beatitude, because he disbelieves the dignified isolation of humanity. To him, therefore, romantic comedy is serious literature because it is a foretaste of the truth; the Fool is wiser than the Humanist, and clownage is less frivolous than the deification of humanity. The world to me is but a dream or mock-show, and we all therein but Pantalones and Anticks to my severer contemplations. 1

It is my purpose in this study to examine the appearance of the fool in Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Joseph Heller's Catch-22, and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man. In these novels of the prisonhouse the fool, as mentor to the protagonist, offers escape, but neither
"the unworthy lapse into drugged sleep" nor a retreat to traditional Christian concepts of a life after death; rather, he shows the protagonist and the reader how to transcend social, psychological and metaphysical entrapment by his refusal to accept the terms of his confinement and by his affirmation of individual human value and potential.

Each of the novels on which this study is based is a variation on a similar pattern. The intent of this introductory chapter, therefore, is to define this pattern, first, by describing the metaphoric universe common to these novels, second, by outlining a basic plot structure which recurs with variations in these novels, third, by explaining the relationship of the fool to both the metaphoric universe and the plot structure of each novel and, finally, by introducing the primary versions of the fool and enumerating those qualities endemic to his character which enable him to be a viable mentor to the modern hero.

Two works are essential to an introduction of these themes and patterns: William Willeford's The Fool and his Sceoptor and E. E. Cummings' The Enormous Room. William Willeford explains the historical importance of the fool, isolates the essential elements of his nature, and thereby provides a theoretical basis for this study of the fool in modern American literature. E. E. Cummings' novel provides an early exemplar of a parable of entrapment,
prefiguring the novels discussed in this study in mode, basic plot structure and thematic concerns. Moreover, the Delectable Mountains of *The Enormous Room* are clear examples of each important version of the fool (except the lunatic) relevant to this study. Therefore, while Cummings' novel will not be discussed in much detail, examples from the novel will be cited that will help to define the pattern basic to this study.  

Since *The Enormous Room* is patterned after *Pilgrim's Progress*, it seems likely that the fictional mode of Cummings' novel has some relationship to that allegory. Furthermore, since *The Enormous Room* is similar in mode to the novels to be discussed in this study, an understanding of the form of Cummings' novel should help clarify that of the novels of Kesey, Heller and Ellison. Not only does *Pilgrim's Progress* provide the structure for Cummings' novel (and, hence, Bunyan is mentor to the protagonist as artist), but it also provides a philosophic framework which directly enables the protagonist to understand his experience by reinterpreting that framework and, thereby, to act effectively and rightly in his world (and, hence, Christian is mentor to the protagonist as active hero).

*The Enormous Room* is not an allegory since the incidents recounted are important in themselves as well as for their representative meaning and since representative characters and incidents are symbolic rather than narrowly
allegorical (consider, for example, the final portrait of New York as Heavenly City). Yet, the novel employs several techniques of allegory. First, the protagonist interprets his experience as representative; for example, he tells us that all Delectable Mountains are behind bars. Second, characters tend toward abstraction and are even given abstract names like the Wanderer, The Machine-Fixer or Apollyon. Further, the novel presents a very clear lesson to the reader. Thus, although The Enormous Room is not an allegory, it is very similar in purpose and technique to a literary form traditionally associated with allegory: the parable, "an illustrative story answering a question or pointing a moral or lesson." As parable, therefore, the novel answers the question, "how can modern man transcend entrapment?"

The novels of Kesey, Heller and Ellison to be discussed in this study are similar in mode to The Enormous Room. First, they address themselves to the same question posed by Cummings' novel. Second, in each novel the reader is reminded that the novel is representative, "an illustrative story." The invisible man proclaims, "who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" Bromden asserts that his story is "the truth even if it didn't happen," emphasizing the symbolic or illustrative nature of his parable; and at the end of Catch-22 several characters interpret the action of the
novel for the reader, thus, insuring his understanding of the parable. Third, although these novels are symbolic rather than allegorical in mode, many characters are clearly representative types; in fact the characterization approaches that of a good allegory. Big Nurse, for example, is less a person than an abstract representative of the Combine, personifying the power and the weaknesses of the mechanical society. In Catch-22 and Invisible Man, while characters are not quite as abstractly portrayed as the allegorical Christian, Pride or Apollyon of Pilgrim's Progress, they are often almost completely defined by their names: Minderbinder, Scheisskopf, Orr, Rinehart or Trueblood, for example.

The thematic concerns of these novels are similar to the basic concerns of most modern existential writers: "anxiety, death, the conflict between the bogus and the genuine self, the faceless man of the masses, the experience of the death of God" and the inadequacy of reason and of the intellect as means for confronting reality are the primary questions faced in these novels. Furthermore, these novels dramatize man's confrontation with existential questions in terms of a contest between traditional classical values (the values of modern society) and romantic values (the values of the fool).

In each novel, a protagonist is entrapped by classical forces and values, metaphorically presented as aspects of
the cultural and social machine: he is entrapped by the pressure for social conformity, by metaphysical despair in the face of a morally neutral, if not hostile, universe, and by a reliance upon ratiocination to the exclusion of all other means of perceiving truth. Furthermore, any hope of escape from entrapment by the machine is stifled by the protagonist's passive acceptance of his cultures' belief, patterned after the classical argument from design, that social, psychological, and linguistic forms are all patterned after a mechanistic universe and, therefore, are natural and unalterable. The metaphoric universe of each novel reflects this belief, portraying society, the mind, and the universe as confining and machinelike.

Mankind, of course, did not suddenly become entrapped by his acceptance of mechanistic values in the twentieth century. Throughout the history of literature artists have been concerned with the conflict between organic (romantic) and mechanistic (classical) values, often metaphorically representing the polarities of this conflict, respectively, as the garden and the machine. In The Machine in the Garden Leo Marx traces the encroachment of the machine into the garden from Virgil's Eclogues to Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. Generalizing concerning nineteenth-century American literature and history he states,
In America, according to Rostow, the economic and industrial take-off began about 1844—the year of the Sleepy Hollow episode—just at the time our first significant literary generation was coming to maturity. Much of the singular quality of this era is conveyed by the trope of the interrupted idyll. The locomotive, associated with fire, smoke, speed, iron, and noise, is the leading symbol of the new industrial power. It appears in the woods, suddenly shattering the harmony of the green hollow.

Like a presentiment of history bearing down on the American asylum. The noise of the train, as Hawthorne describes it, is a cause of alienation in the root sense of the word: it makes inaudible the pleasing sounds to which he had been attending, and so it estranges him from the immediate source of meaning and value in Sleepy Hollow. In truth, the 'little event' is a miniature of a great--in many ways the greatest--event in our history. 8

Hawthorne is conscious that the machine alienates man from nature and therefore from transcendent meaning. Whereas in the nineteenth century men could flee from the machine to the garden as Thoreau flees from Concord to Walden pond and thereby reestablishes communication with nature, the machine has completely displaced the garden in the novels to be discussed so that no escape is possible.

The Enormous Room, according to James P. Dougherty, is "a Walden for the twentieth century". In this modern Walden,

the conspiracy against freedom and against naturalness is now a great, ubiquitous machine, the mass society, which one cannot escape, as Thoreau did, by physical flight or rapport with nature. There is nowhere to go. Almost no one escapes from the room or even considers escape. Nature is hostile, its season an autumn dying away from Cummings'
nostalgic memories of high summer and an outdoor feast among his French comrades (pp. 174-3, 297), to a lonely psychological collapse during the first fall of snow (pp. 317 ff.).

Because "there is nowhere to go" to escape the machine, each man must create his own freedom and values in the machine's world. Consequently, The Enormous Room ends with a vision of New York, filled with "hurrying dots which are men and which are women and which are things new and curious and hard and strange and vibrant and immense, lifting with a great ondulous stride firmly into immortal sunlight." (pp. 331-32) In this modern Walden and contemporary Pilgrim's Progress, the only possible garden or heaven is not a place but a state of mind whereby a man creates an individual island of freedom and value.

New York can become the protagonist's heavenly city, therefore, if he transcends entrapment. Similarly in the novels to be discussed in detail in this study, freedom is imaged as an act of creative rebellion against the machine which occurs on the machine's territory and which depends upon the machine for success: the Indians rebel against the Combine and affirm their identity and freedom by fishing off the dam (Kesey); Orr escapes Catch-22 by rowing to Sweden on a U. S. Life-boat (Heller); and the invisible man confirms his identity by stealing electricity from Monopolated Light and Power (Ellison).

Prefiguring Bromden's entrapment in Nurse Ratched's
ward, Yossarian's entrapment by Catch-22, and the invisible man's entrapment by the factory, the modern world is portrayed as a prison or internment camp in The Enormous Room, where men are divided into the captured and their captors. The captured are associated with disorder (and therefore uncleanliness), emotion, childishness, individuality, humor, natural sexuality and the imagination and are good; their captors are associated with order (and cleanliness), rationality, maturity, collectivism, and sexual perversion (particularly sadism) and are evil. To become part of the machine, men give up their humanity, metaphorically becoming robots or dolls. For example, the alliance of Cummings' plantons with the mechanical culture is evidenced by their artificial parts: "One planton had a large wooden hand. Another was possessed of a long unmanageable left leg made, as nearly as I could discover of tin. A third has a huge glass eye." [p. 153] After his mental collapse Cummings (the protagonist) envisions these grotesques, who represent "law and order" [p. 199], as "a collection of vivid and unlovely toys... always absurdly marching...maimed and stupid dolls." [p. 308] The seriousness of the protagonist's collapse is signaled when he fears he may be becoming a doll [p. 317] and therefore mechanical and inhuman like his captors.

As James Dougherty explains, "Cummings prison...is a
world of personal encounters surrounded by the inhuman machine of state. Nothing mediates between them. Nothing can, for the Room contains just those people who a nation geared for war cannot tolerate: the human dirt who clog the machine and confuse its systems...they are the puzzling ones, the disorderly, the chaotic.\textsuperscript{11} As in any conflict between value systems, those whose values are not culturally recognized easily become victims or scapegoats to maintain the established order. Accordingly, Cummings explains, with just sarcasm, the inhumanity of the machine to The Wanderer:

\textit{Le gouvernement Francaise decided in its infinite but unskillful wisdom that The Wanderer, being an inexpressibly bad man (guilty of who knows what gentleness, strength and beauty) should suffer as much as he was capable of suffering. In other words, it decided (through its Three Wise Men, who formed the visiting Commission whereof I speak anon) that the wife, her baby, her two girls, and her little son should be separated from the husband by miles and by stone walls and by barbed wire and by law. Or perhaps (there was a rumour to this effect) the Three Wise Men discovered that the father of these incredibly exquisite children was not her lawful husband. And of course, this being the case, the utterly kind incomparably moral French Government saw its duty plainly; which duty was to inflict the ultimate anguish of separation upon the sinners concerned...If ever I can create by some occult process of imagining a deed so perfectly cruel as the deed perpetrated in the case of Joseph Demastre, I shall consider myself a genius. Then let us admit that the Three Wise Men were geniuses. And let us, also and softly, admit that it takes a good and great government perfectly to negate mercy.}\textsuperscript{4} pp. 227-28
Paradoxically, in the society supposedly moral, just and orderly, sexuality, emotion and irrationality still flourish, but, as it is apparent here, they are sublimated and perverted into sadism. Moreover, that there is no escape from the machine is demonstrated in the alliance of nation with nation and church with state in the administration of punishment, each taking a sadistic pleasure in punishing nonconformity as treason:

It is beautiful to consider the unselfishness of le gouvernement français in this case. Much as le gouvernement français would have liked to have punished Bill on its own account and for its own enjoyment, it gave him up—with a Christian smile—to the punishing clutches of a sister or brother government: without a murmur denying itself of the incense of his sufferings and the music of his sorrows.

Similarly, the driving force behind Big Nurse is sadism, and society as Yossarian sees it in the "Eternal City", is defined by the masochistic-sadistic complicity of the oppressed with the oppressors.

In opposition to this institutionalized cruelty, Cummings introduces his Delectable Mountains; yet these men, who epitomize goodness in the novel, are all very unheroic in the classical sense. In contrast to the stereotyped masculine hero who is mature, rational, educated, and bravely stoic, these romantic heroes are characteristically childish, sensitive, illiterate and emotional (often breaking into tears)—and each is a version of the
fool. The Wanderer is reminiscent of the eighteenth-century man of feeling; Zulu is portrayed as a noble savage (although he is Polish); Surplice is a simpleton and clown; and Jean le Nègre is a trickster.

Before explaining the important qualities of these versions of the fool, however, it is necessary to define the fool and to explore the traditional relationship of the fool to the polarities discussed so far as romantic and classical. In brief, the king (representative of organized society) is associated with order and rationality and the derived classical virtues while the fool (the outsider) is associated with chaos and the irrational and the derived romantic virtues. For the present, as Cummings reveals, the fool has been denied his rightful place in society since in the modern world fools are only found in prisons. \[ p. 307 \]

The following discussion taken from Willeford's The Fool and His Scepter explains the traditional significance of the fool:

In the kingship the exceptional power which is the basis of the royal claim should in a sense be domesticated. The kinds of forces which might, for example, be put to the use of sorcery would be transformed to the well-being of the kingdom. In modern terms the difference is something like that between lightning and the electricity that lights a lamp. The babbling fool is one prototype of our relationship to numinous powers. The king, too, must remain in touch with them; he must draw upon them when they promise to be useful and
counteract them when they threaten to be destructive to the kingdom. The fool stands beside the king, in a sense reflecting him but also suggesting a long-lost element of the king that, we may imagine, had to be sacrificed at the founding of the kingdom, an element without which neither the king nor the kingdom is complete.

Then Willeford explains the "long lost element of the king" and why it is important to the kingdom that the fool and king stand together.

At the foundation of the kingdom much had to be excluded, not all of it because it was necessarily 'bad' but because boundaries had to be drawn at the limits of the effective power of the center. For example, to make an ordered life within the kingdom possible, laws must be proclaimed that exclude many kinds of human behavior...\[but\] beyond the boundaries of the kingdom the magical field is still alive.

... ... ... ...

The kingdom must deal with specific magical influences \[magic is one value excluded from the kingdom\], but it must also deal with the generic fact of such influences--with the possibility that they may appear, with the necessity of constantly making allowances for them in thought and imagination. The fool as jester provides an institutionalized link with them. As mascot, decoy, and scapegoat he symbolically and in a general way embodies all of the processes by which vitality and meaning are dissolved and holds them relatively centered within his own person. He represents the possibility that such processes may become effective within the kingdom.

But in the last several centuries, with the frequent banishment of the fool from the kingdom, culture's capacity for recognizing the irrational, the magical, the religious, and the humorous has been greatly diminished, promoting the
triumph of the community over the values of individuality. Without the fool in his proper place we lose a living reminder of those elements of human nature that can neither be subjugated to the common good nor discovered through reason. 12

By entrapping or banishing the fool, however, society indirectly admits his importance. Certain Roman emperors had their jesters chained because they believed the fool had the power "with one word, with one laugh pitched to the exact pitch,...to destroy the kingdom as a singer will destroy a wineglass." 13 In a universe which is chaotic, any order which excludes the irrational and the chaotic is vulnerable since anarchy might encroach at any time. Therefore, the Roman Emperors fearfully kept their jesters near them as a concession to wholeness. Modern society, however, often ignores the fool while denying the importance of the values he represents. At the very best irrationality is exorcised by explaining it away rationally; for example, man's irrationality is made to seem controllable when it is given a name, the Id, and therefore categorized and seemingly explained.

The association of fools with the irrational is natural since fools include those insensible to reason because of stupidity, because of insanity, or occasionally because of possession by numinous powers. According to Willeford the fool is "in short, a silly or idiotic or mad person,
or one who is made by circumstances (or the actions of others) to appear a fool in that sense, or a person who imitates for nonfools the foolishness of being innately silly or made to look so." But the concept of foolishness is also intrinsically related to religion and mysticism: Christians are to be "fools for Christ's sake"; the Zen Buddhists revere the monk Ryo-kwan (the "Great Fool"); and in most religions of the world clowns mock deities during sacred rituals. Christian, Cummings' primary mentor, is a fool in this religious context. Furthermore, in many religions at least one deity is a trickster—a fool worshipped as a god; "Hermes in Greece, Loki in northern Europe, Maui in Polynesia, and Raven, Bluejay, Coyote, and Old Man in Indian North America" are a few examples.  

It is natural that the fool is at home in most religions, for the fool by transcending reason can partake of mystic experience:

There are kinds of experience in which general structure is less important than what William Blake called 'Minute Particulars' and in which the main polarities (for example, those of subject and object, pleasure and pain, form and substance, time and timelessness) lose their importance and with it their power to coordinate experience according to discursive reason....This condition is attributed to mystics; then again it is maintained that mystics have withdrawn from the primitive life force essential to it. Children, lovers, poets and madmen are often supposed to live in it....Many names have been given our relationship to it, the most common in modern Western though has been imagination—when that
word is used to describe a radical reconstruction of experience in the interests of immediacy, totality and a kind of meaning that is otherwise lacking.

The similarity between the mystic and the fool is revealed in the related experiences of being possessed by a spirit or overcome with laughter. If we laugh in response to a joke, we must be inside the experience of that joke at the moment we laugh, much as the mystic is inside his religious experience. And both the mystic and the fool are related to the artist because they react to life imaginatively. Thus, having experienced Being (Cummings' term for a life continually lived in a state of mystic or imaginative awareness), the protagonist of The Enormous Room becomes both fool and author; having experienced the world of the enormous room imaginatively, he is able, as a result, to achieve "a radical reconstruction of that experience" in art.15

Awakening in the enormous room for the first time, the protagonist describes it as "ecclesiastical in feeling" \(^p. 62\); then he asks if "this is a bug-house" \(^p. 64\). Hence, the relationship between the enormous room as prison for fools and religion and madness is introduced early in the novel. Lunacy and mysticism cannot be controlled or explained by reason, and both are potential threats to any social order. The fool, embodied in both lunatic and mystic, is both irrational and disorderly.
Both Yossarian and Bromden, for example, seem to be crazy to their fellows, and both threaten the status quo.

The fool's very appearance, moreover, graphically demonstrates his connection with disorder and chaos:

Between these two ways in which chaos may be worn as a disguise, as a lump or as scattered pieces lie various costumes in which the fact of disproportion is emphasized—for example, between the too long trousers and shoes of Charlie and his too small jacket, between the slovenliness and fastidiousness of his costumes. The element of disproportion is common to lumpishness...and to motley.

Various mentors in the novels to be discussed betray their identity as fools partly through disorderly or disproportionate appearance. Peter Wheatstraw wears Charlie Chaplin pants; McMurphy has a lopsided grin; and incongruity epitomizes Surplice's appearance and actions:

Surplice, trembling from the summit of his filthy and beautiful head to the naked soles of his filthy and beautiful feet, covered the harmonica delicately and surely with one shaking paw; seated himself with a surprisingly deliberate and graceful gesture; closed his eyes upon whose lashes there were big filthy tears....16 [p. 266]

Although the fool's phallic bauble primarily reveals his relationship to sexuality, when contrasted to the king's equally phallic scepter, the bauble also suggests his relationship to chaos. Whereas the bauble suggests the chaos of potential energy, the scepter symbolizes the formed, controlled power of the king. The king's sexuality
is channeled and controlled to promote an orderly continuance of life in the kingdom. Conversely, the fool's sexuality is neither controlled, sublimated or ego-motivated. Often the fool is licentious, but as Willeford explains, we do not judge him harshly: "Our permissiveness toward him derives, on the one hand, from the impersonality of his sexual interest—it is not so much that he wants this or that woman for himself but that he wants sexuality to flourish in everyone—and, on the other, from the attribute of fertility magic in that interest—he wants natural life to continue and magically furthers it, in himself, in us and in the world." In this regard, it is important in The Enormous Room that Jean is sexual attraction personified while the Wanderer is likened to a fertility God. He is "jovelike. This being might have been a prophet come out of a country nearer to the sun," and he is a man who loved his wife and children "as never have I seen a man love anything in this world." \[pp. 101 and 225\]

Moreover, the inmates, both male and female, risk cabinet and pain sec that sexuality might flourish in the internment camp.\[17\]

As a fool and ritual fertility figure, the Wanderer exemplifies the fool as the man of feeling and the natural man. Furthermore, he introduces two important attributes of the fool. First, he is a wanderer, or an outsider. As Willeford notes,
the amoral and asocial character of many fools is conveyed by the word 'idiot,' which is ultimately derived from the Greek idiotes, a 'private person.' The idiot is widely thought to be the primary model of the symbolic fool, who seems to have originated somewhere outside society and its normal laws and duties and to continue to belong to the 'outside' from which he came. The fool is often a 'private person' who gives symbolic expression to the problems of human individuality in its relation both to rational norms and to what exceeds them.

The fool, apart from the community, is usually a wanderer although he may occasionally be retained (usually against his will) by the nobility. As outsider, therefore, the idiot is a fitting mentor to the alienated man of the modern world. 18

Second, the Wanderer demonstrates the fool's identification with natural sexuality and his capacity to express emotion unashamedly. As fertility god, the Wanderer partakes of the fool's sexuality, but he is neither licentious, crude or savage (as early jesters often were). He is, rather, more like a nineteenth-century romantic's portrait of natural man, celebrating romance, love, the birth and growth of children, and emotion (refined products of the fecundity principle) and illustrating the fool's capacity to directly express emotion by weeping over the suffering of his wife, banishment from his family, or the selling of his horse.

Zulu, the noble savage, embodies the attributes of the natural man even more directly than the Wanderer can.
Moreover, he introduces to us the fool's powers of nonrational, nonlinguistic communication.

In one sense the modern Western nostalgia for 'the primitive' is an expression of our cultural and psychological situation, in another it is extremely ancient. The notion of being completely in the world and not separated by the human condition with its burden of culture is as archetypal as is the notion of being divided from the world. This condition of being in the natural world—and out of culture—is often conceived as primitive and the fool especially the wild or natural man—is one of the recurrent figures in which it is expressed. 19

Zulu is such a man—an "Is" [p. 231], who does not even need language for he has "an innate and unlearnable control over all which one can only describe as the homogeneously tactile." [p. 234] For Cummings, the "Is," the noble savage in tune with the natural world, lives in a state of particularity, partaking of a mystic and imaginative life in direct opposition to 'thinking' and to 'education'.

Of all the Delectable Mountains, Surplice is most obviously a fool: "He is utterly ignorant", the simpleton or idiot. Moreover, he clearly exemplifies Willeford's contention that the fool is simultaneously "too little there" (the idiot) and "too much there" (the lunatic, the seer, or the savior). Surplice's animal traits, for example, suggest the pre-human qualities of the fool. Less than human, Surplice is said to be like a "proud dog" [p. 258]. He is not only illiterate, but also innocent of the capacity to employ structured rational language.
Although he is a Pole, "he speaks words that are trying to be and never can be Polish." \[ p. 250 \]

He is also, however, "too much there." He takes pleasure in being a fool and a scapegoat, for "To be made a fool of was, to this otherwise completely neglected individual, a mark of distinction; something to take pleasure in; to be proud of...He would be a great fool, since that was his function; a supreme entertainer." \[ p. 262 \] In his innocence and simplicity, he transcends the humanity he cannot quite achieve, becoming both an artist and a Christ-figure who is martyred for his friends.

Explaining Surplice's role as martyr, Cummings writes,

The case of Surplice is a very exquisite example; everyone, of course, is afraid of les maladies vénériennes—accordingly all pick an individual (of whose inner life they know and desire to know nothing, whose external appearance satisfies the requirements of the mind à propos what is foul and disgusting) and, having tacitly agreed upon this individual as a symbol of all that is evil, proceed to heap insults upon him and enjoy his very natural discomfort. \[ p. 265 \]

Traditionally, the fool served as either a mascot (warning the evil eye away from the fool's master) or as scapegoat. Surplice serves both functions. Before his ultimate sacrifice (when he is sent to Fréjus) his brothers in captivity celebrate a "Last Supper" with, and for, him \[ pp. 267-68 \]. Furthermore, Cummings ends the chapter on Surplice with a poetic celebration of Surplice as fool and as artist, martyred because he made men dance and
therefore made them happy. $\text{[p. 268]}^{20}$

While the fool is usually either mascot or scapegoat, he often eludes his martyrdom, as do most of the fools in The Enormous Room (and in Catch-22 and Invisible Man). By a refusal to accept the assumptions necessitating his sacrifice, the fool escapes the logical necessity of his death. In a comic, or totally natural world, there is no sin and consequently no need for sanctifying sacrifice. Therefore, Surplice smiles while seemingly victimized $\text{[p. 265]}$, and the death of Jean le Nègre's child soul $\text{[p. 290]}$ is only illusory; Jean's desolation when threatened with cabinet gives way to more characteristic trickery when he steals and hides the towel. Since Cummings judges Jean, not Surplice, to be his finest mentor, he demonstrates his own rejection of the need for redemptive suffering, saying, "Of all the fine people in La Ferté, Monsieur Jean...swaggers my memory as the finest." $\text{[p. 270]}$

Cummings further describes him as "childish", but Jean is not really a child, but a trickster--the version of the fool most important to this study. As Roger Abrahams explains,

The trickster figure functions in society...like a small human being, a child. His delight in tricking is reminiscent of the similar pleasure children derive from tricking their peers. Indeed, in almost every sense the trickster is a child. He has no perceptible set of values.
except those dictated by the demands of his id. One could not say that he is immoral; he is, rather, amoral, because he exists in the stage before morality has had a chance to inculcate itself upon his being. 22

Jean exemplifies all the primary traits of the trickster. He is childish and sexual (natural). He plays tricks on the plantons and authorities and adopts disguises for the love of a prank (dressing himself in the uniform of an English Captain, for example (p. 274)). And, he epitomizes "inexhaustible imagination" (p. 280) in both his pranks and in his verbal playing. Moreover, as trickster he uses his imagination to promote disorder by breaking down boundaries, whether the logical boundaries of language by babbling nonsense, the order of the internment camp by his pranks (hiding things, for example) or the order of the military and social orders of France by passing for an English Colonel. Moreover, he obscures the boundary between illusion and reality with magic, pulling bills from his neck. 23

The trickster may be a god or a folk hero, but in either case he is comic and, therefore, eludes sacrifice. His relationship to fertility sacrifice, however, is instructive. Paul Radin explains,

The overwhelming majority of all so-called trickster myths...give an account of the creation of the earth, or at least the transforming of the world, and have a hero who is always wandering, who is always hungry, who
is not guided by normal conceptions of good and evil, who is either playing tricks on people or having them played on him and who is highly sexed. Almost everywhere he has some divine traits.24

The trickster of the American Indians was believed to have been sent to mankind to help him, but he was always too busy playing jokes on animals and on humans to effectively aid man. Consequently, he was called back to the heavens, but not before he ate a "last supper".

He perpetuates this last meal for all times, leaving in the rock the imprints of his kittle, of his buttocks and his testicles. He then departs and, since he is the symbol for the procreating power as such and the symbol for man in his relationship to the whole universe, he first dives into the ocean and ascends to that island-world over which he presides, that lying immediately under the world of earthmaker....25

This description suggests that the trickster is a comic version of a fertility god, his dive into the ocean and ascension serving as a ritual death and resurrection.

In this myth there is enough similarity to the Christ myth to provide a polarity between trickster and Christ: (1) both are intermediaries between the gods (or God) and mankind; (2) both are wanderers; (3) both are fertility gods; (4) both employ a last supper as a vehicle by which they may be remembered; and (5) both descend to the underworld and then ascend to the heavens. But in marked contrast to the Christ, the trickster does not suffer and does not die. His approximation of a ritual
death and rebirth is similar to that characteristic of American folk heroes, who, according to Daniel Hoffman, experience transformations which are "metamorphoses without being rebirths".

the metamorphic pattern of American life and of the American folk hero's career has its exemplars in linear motion through as many conditions of 'reality' as possible. These metamorphoses...are only outwardly comparable to the rebirth achieved by initiatory rites in cultures or institutions of sacred orientation. Their function, nonetheless, is a ritualistic one: not a rite de passage but a ritual or intensification, in which the powers of the self are affirmed, reinforced, and glorified by each demonstration of their successful use. These powers prove the self spiritually indomitable and adaptable to the wildest vicissitudes of fortune or nature.26

In the novels to be discussed in this study the mentors are primarily tricksters, comic heroes let loose in a tragic world. Not surprisingly, therefore, in each of the novels to be considered, a tension arises between the mentor as trickster and as Christ. In a universe which seems to be only tragic, even a comic hero may be sacrificed, for he is an alien in that universe and his values conflict with the established order. Hence, McMurphy becomes a sacrificial victim; Orr appears to have been sacrificed; and each mentor must be reinterpreted by the protagonist in the context of a tragic universe. (Or, the tragic universe must be reinterpreted in a comic context.) Yet these mentors are able to redeem the protagonists precisely because of their comic optimism: they revive hope and
ritually assert the infinite human possibilities available to the man of imagination.

Hence, as the man of feeling, the noble savage, the simpleton, and the trickster teach the protagonist of The Enormous Room to be a fool and, therefore, to create his own personal heavenly city in the midst of the machine, a fool, or several versions of the fool, teach the protagonists of each of the novels analysed in this study, first, to protect and foster his individuality, second, to escape entrapment in the overly rational order of his culture and, third, to define a positive, personal alternative to the values and modes of existence characteristic of the machine.

Several specific characteristics endemic to the fool's character equip these mentors to effectively help the protagonists combat the machine. First, fools "have a magical affinity with chaos....They reduce order to chaos in a way which makes a farce of the mythical pattern."

Standing beside the king, who embodies order, the fool traditionally is allied with all the forces which are excluded from that order. Part of his function, accordingly, is to attack that order by reminding the king and the citizens of the vulnerability of the kingdom. He ridicules the king, hence ritually discrediting the symbolic order of the kingdom, and, even more importantly, reminds the king and the kingdom of the deficiencies of the king which
may lead to anarchy, declaring that "The king's power is deficient because he is mortal in relation to the eternal model that he embodies. Thus, the jester may joke about the fact that the king must die...." If the king dies and if a continuity of kingship is not maintained, anarchy may break loose. The fool promotes this possibility of anarchy; "according to a common metaphor, desperately important to clowns and comedians, good jokes are 'killing'."^{27}

As the fool challenges the social order of the kingdom by ridiculing the king, he often challenges the metaphysical order by ridiculing the gods. For example,

At a Jemez Pueblo dance a clown is said to have sprinkled his fellows with sand and ashes in imitation of the ceremonial sprinkling with corn meal and pollen. The Zuni Newkwe clowns speak in Spanish or English before the gods, a thing taboo to ordinary people; once they even rigged up a telephone and pretended to converse with the gods, although the gods are not supposed to speak...desecration by clowns may contain obscene elements; it may appear to court misfortune and be performed by figures like the senile Navajo man and his transvestite wife. Other important transvestites in fertility rituals include "Bossy of the Morris Dance" and the "boys dressed as girls and girls dressed as boys" who in East Lancashire in the week before Easter go "around accompanied by the 'fool' or 'tosspot' and ask for presents of eggs."^{28}

By engaging in taboo behavior and by ridiculing the gods, the fool asserts the primacy of the individual over any sacred or social order; and because he can violate the sacred order with impunity, he dramatizes the limitations
of that order. In The Enormous Room, for example, the prisoners continually break taboos: because cleanliness is a value of Western civilization, they revel in dirt; because sexuality is condemned, they communicate with the opposite sex as much as is possible; and because Christianity is the established religion of their oppressors, they reject it, celebrating a "Last Supper" with a fool as Christ.

As the jester attacks the king and the ceremonial clown ridicules the gods, the modern fool may attack honored representatives of the modern mythic order, undermining them with ridicule and thereby introducing into the kingdom the threat of chaos and with it the hope of freedom from a confining order. As Enid Welsford explains, "Whenever the clown baffles the policeman, whenever the fool makes the sage look silly, whenever the acrobat defeats the machine, there is a sudden sense of pressure relieved, or a birth of new joy and freedom." Thus, when Jean le Nègre undermines the order of French society or of the internment camp with his pranks, the protagonist feels relief; when McMurphy undermines the order maintained by Big Nurse with practical jokes, Bromden experiences hope that he will be freed from the oppressive order mingled with fear that chaos will break loose if that order is attacked.

Furthermore, the alliance between chaos and the fool
is revealed in cinematic slapstick comedy which characteristically lacks coherent plot structure and, moreover, which traditionally contains scenes in which all order breaks down. For example, what normalcy of plot or conduct to be found in a cinematic fool show may dissolve into a totally chaotic pie throwing sequence or aimless chase scene. In such scenes the fool's anarchic behavior becomes contagious and all order, at least momentarily, breaks down. Utilizing the fool's technique, the inmates of Nurse Ratched's ward throw a chaotic party in which they ridicule the existing order and its mythic basis by celebrating an anti-mass directed against the sacred religion of Freud. Similarly, the inmates of the enormous room rebel enmass by acting, or sounding, like animals, producing erratic and cacophonous animal noises and thereby violating society's taboo prohibiting uncivilized behavior.

Second, although the fool possesses the capability to transform the mythic order into chaos, he appears to be harmless (as Orr does, for example). Therefore, he maintains his traditional privileged status even in the modern world. Since fools are traditionally eccentrics and sometimes even lunatics, the fool's nonconformity does not seem to threaten the status quo. He may be ridiculed, pitied or ignored, rather than destroyed. Often the fools seem so harmless and so vulnerable that even the protagonist is deceived by his mentor. The protagonist of The
Enormous Room, for example, is as unable to immediately fathom the value and contribution of Surplice as Yossarian is at first unable to understand why Orr wants him to fly with him.

Third, the fool is relatively independent of our modes of thought, particularly in his relationship to reality and to time. The fool lives in an area between fantasy and reality. Because he is not limited by preconceptions about what is possible or impossible, he can often perform what seems impossible to the rational man. As Enid Welsford explains, the fool's "play with the possibilities revealed by fantasy is less bound to the structure of what is than is the nonfool's play with them. And the fool (such as Baron Munchausen pulling himself up by his hair) may have powers that we lack and that will enable him to triumph over the impossibilities created by his fantasy in its divergence from reality or in its conflict with it." 30 Consequently, Jean pulls bills from his neck; Orr rows to Sweden; and Rinehart can simultaneously be preacher, lover and numbers' runner.

The fool, furthermore, is independent of time. As Willeford explains, originally "Saturnalian folly was... celebrated in a period lying outside the normal course of events," "inserted into the calendar to fill the gap between solar and lunar years"; so the fool existed "out of time." 31 Consequently, the invisible man lives by a
schedule when he is part of the rational world of the Brotherhood, but when he accepts his role as fool, he thinks "with a laugh, why worry about time?" 32 Most often, however, the fool seems to be a living incarnation of the past: "traits belonging to our developmental past, both individual and social or cultural, are often present in the fool now....in him these traits seem an opening into a past to which we have closed ourselves by becoming what we are, and sometimes the opening may strike us as a sign of freedom and even of superiority." 33 Surplice, for example, is a living embodiment of man's developmental past, both personal (he is childlike) and cultural (he is animal-like). C. G. Jung, furthermore, sees the trickster as "simply a reflection of an earlier, rudimentary stage of consciousness." 34 Jean le Negre, accordingly, is not so much childish as pre-human. In modern novels the fool often seems to have stepped out of the eighteenth or nineteenth century into the twentieth, teaching the modern protagonist the optimism and faith of the romantics. In The Enormous Room, for example, a man of feeling and a noble savage act as mentors to the protagonist.

Fourth, the fool is relatively invulnerable; that is why we can laugh when he is hurt. Consequently, Enid Welsford calls the fool "he who gets slapped" and from this definition derives four classes of fools:
So there are those who get slapped, there are those who are none the worse for their slapping \textit{Surplice}, and there are those who adroitly change places with their slappers \textit{Jean}, and occasionally, there are those who inquire, 'what do slaps matter to the man whose body is of india rubber, and whose mind is of quicksilver, and who can even--greatest triumph of all--persuade you for a moment that such indeed is you case.' \textit{Rinehart, Orr, and McMurphy}\footnote{Rinehart, Orr, and McMurphy}\footnote{For the Fool is the great intrusser of our slaveries...35}.

The fool as victim shares his victimization with mankind. If men are victims or oppressors and the world is divided, as in \textit{The Enormous Room}, into captives and their captors, then the fool's ability to survive his "slapping" exemplifies a possible alternative to the total victimization of the individual.

Often the fool escapes defeat only because he cannot understand the terms of his defeat--or refuses to understand them. Jan, for example, in \textit{The Enormous Room}, never knew defeat; since if, after staggering a few moments under the weight which Fritz raised and lowered with ease fourteen times under the stimulus of a female gaze, the little man fell suddenly to earth with his burden, not a trace of discomfiture could be seen upon his small visage--be seemed, on the contrary, well pleased with himself, and the subsequent pose which his small body adopted demanded congratulations. \textit{\footnote{p. 98}}

More often, however, the fool's invulnerability is more dramatically evidenced. The ultimate human misfortune is death. The fool jokes about death, but more importantly, he ritually enacts the victory of life over death and
adversity. Even a modern circus clown, hit over the head with a sledge hammer "rises again in mock resurrection." Similarly, the mentors discussed in this study approximate rebirths: Orr is thought to be dead but is resurrected in Sweden; Jean's child soul appears to die but is reborn; and Rinehart continually dies to one identity and is reborn in another.

As a consequence of these four primary characteristics, the fool can be a viable mentor. Protected by his apparent harmlessness, he teaches us the folly of arbitrarily ordering existence, and he saves us from despair as our metaphysical structures crumble by teaching us to laugh at them and at ourselves. Furthermore, because he does not acknowledge human limitations—suggesting that time can be recaptured, that fantasy can become reality and that even death is not to be feared—he teaches us to hope. Most importantly, the fool reintroduces magic, mysticism, emotion, humor and sexuality as values in a too-rational, too-machinelike culture.

No aspect of the fool's character, however, is as important to his pedagogic function as is his origin. While there is some debate over the exact origin of various types of fools, there is general agreement that the fool is the direct descendent of the seer. As Lord Raglan explains, "Why did kings and other important people keep a fool or jester, a licentious character whose sallies
were often directed at his master? That they did so purely for fun is a cheap rationalization; the official position, the recognized costume, the coxcomb and bladder, emblems of fertility, and the impunity from reprisal or punishment, all mark out the fool as a holy man." Whether the original fool was the old king, antagonist to the new victorious king (as Raglan contends), the hopeful challenger to the old king, a scapegoat or a mock king (as Willeford suggests), he was a ritual figure in a fertility ritual and his task was to help insure the fertility of the community. Lord Raglan further explains the relationship of the fool to the seer, using Falstaff as an example: "And what did Falstaff do when alive? For the most part he got drunk, and then uttered wise saws in a whimsical manner. This suggests that he, or rather his prototype, was a soothsayer or prophet. A soothsayer or prophet is a person who, when in a state of religious ecstasy, usually induced by some intoxicant or narcotic, discloses things which are hidden from the people at large." 37

In the novels to be examined in this study the fool has been banished from the seat of power. However, he can still fulfill his second role. The fool-seer traditionally acted not only as corrective to the old king, but also as the mentor of the hero--future challenger to the king. Sometimes, as Willeford suggests, the fool and the
challenge might be the same person\textsuperscript{38} as McMurphy is both fool and challenger to Big Nurse. Traditionally, however, they have distinct roles. As Lord Raglan explains, "In this world of myth the principle characters are two, a hero and a buffoon, who meet with various adventures together and live on terms of the greatest familiarity. ....It is quite clear that Shakespeare and his predecessors regarded Henry as a great hero, and it follows that they regard association with a man of disreputable character, such as Falstaff was, as being in keeping with the character of a great hero. ....It seems clear that to Shakespeare's audiences the proper way for a budding hero to behave was to roister with a drunken buffoon."\textsuperscript{39}

Each of the novels to be discussed in this study is traditional in Raglan's sense: a fool-seer acts as a mentor to the protagonist, teaching him to be a hero. Yet the pattern of the evolution of the protagonist to hero in these novels contrasts sharply to the pattern of the hero's growth from hero to king in the mythic situation. According to Willeford the hero usually begins as a fool or has "virtues that are at first undistinguishable from folly." For example, in the Grimm story, "The Golden Bird", "the two older of three brothers undertake a quest, fail and are followed by the youngest, a fool, who succeeds in winning the princess." The hero then must learn kingly qualities on his quest, and on the completion of that quest,
he represents a wholeness—the fool and the king, chaos and order, reason and emotion unified in one person. But when he becomes king, "his folly... gains a voice separate from his own", and when his folly becomes totally embodied in the court fool, "the king begins to lose his heroic power.... Once crowned, the hero comes more and more to fulfill the pattern of 'old king', destined to be superceded by the 'new king'." If the old king becomes too exclusive in his desire to maintain order, totally banishing his folly, he "may even degenerate into something like an obstructive and ill-adapted instance of the 'superego' formulated by Freud. This degeneration may be seen in fairy tales in which the king appears as a stuffy, self-righteous tyrant, his presence strangling and suffocating everyone around him."  

The protagonists of many modern novels face a world worse than that governed by the self-righteous tyrant because not only is the king's folly banished but the fool is banished as well, and therefore there is no recognition in the kingdom of our relationship to the irrational or to the numinous. Thus, instead of learning to regulate his folly to achieve a heroic wholeness, the emerging hero must add the virtues of folly to his kingly rationality. In Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King, for example, the protagonist leaves such a kingdom. He is entrapped by the mechanical values of his society and by his fear of
death, but still more by his failure of imagination. Because he cannot imagine a viable alternative to imprisonment by rationality and by his rational perception that life is meaningless, he concludes that "My life and deeds were a prison." Unlike Yossarian, Bromden, the invisible man, or Cummings (as protagonist), he escapes the machine, journeying not only to a garden but also to a society which approximates the mythic kingdom of the past, maintained by fertility magic: the king, for example, is sacrificed at his first sign of declining potency.

On his quest Henderson learns that he must divest himself of mechanical assumptions, for when his bomb destroys the cistern with the frogs, he learns that technology cannot purify the water, and hence cannot bring redemption or fertility to a kingdom. Finally, in a reversal of the mythic pattern, he becomes the Rain King (fertility figure and hence prototype of the fool) whose mentor is the king. The king, however, is not the old tyrant; rather he embodies a heroic wholeness. Knowing that his potency must fail, he grooms Henderson as his successor, primarily teaching him the virtues of the fool to counteract the influence of the mechanical society which has been his home and secondarily teaching him the discipline of a king to counteract his inborn folly. Discussing his inborn folly, Henderson explains that he "always behaved like an ignorant man and a bum" and that he has been driven
mad by insistent and irrational subconscious desires.

From the king, Henderson learns to escape entrapment: first, he gains courage and patience by confronting death in the form of a lion (consider the related courage of McMurphy or Orr and the patience of Orr or of the invisible man's grandfather); second, he learns to act with skill and grace in the face of danger from his confrontation with the lion (like Orr or Rinehart); third, he escapes his madness by learning to be a "Be-er" instead of a "Becomer" and hence achieves a secure identity; and, finally, (like Rinehart) he transcends his situation through the powers of his imagination: As the King tells him, "Imagination is a force of nature...It sustains, it alters, it redeems!...What a Homo sapien imagines, he may slowly convert himself to." With courage, skill, self-knowledge, and imagination, Henderson then returns to the mechanized world, ready to live a positive and fulfilling life as a comic hero in the world of the machine.41

The plight of Yossarian, Bromden, the invisible man, and Cummings (as protagonist) is more desperate than Henderson's because they cannot escape the machine and because any natural folly they possess is so alien to their society that it appears to be grotesqueness. In each novel, therefore, the protagonist is alienated, but he sees no value to his alienation, for he envisions no positive alternative to mechanistic values. Hence, in each novel a
potential hero is enfeebled by despair, since he learns or has learned that he is entrapped by the mechanical values of his culture, but he sees no escape. (In *The Enormous Room*, for example, the protagonist experiences a mental collapse). The protagonist's primary mentor (Christian in *The Enormous Room*, McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Orr in *Catch-22*, and grandfather in *Invisible Man*) seems at first to be merely a comic character, but by the end of the novel he emerges as a seer who has a profound tragic awareness and who is well able to demonstrate the attributes of a viable modern hero.

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* McMurphy changes from fool to seer whereas in *The Enormous Room* the protagonist learns from *Pilgrim's Progress* to reinterpret his fool-mentors as seers. Furthermore, in each novel the primary mentor is aided by several mentors of lesser importance (such as Zulu, Surplice, Dunbar, Pete, or Rineshart) and occasionally is hindered by the examples of false mentors (Minderbinder, Jack, or Count Bragard). By embodying the optimism of the past and by suggesting the possibility of nonrational thought processes as workable alternatives to mechanism, the fool-seers teach the protagonist to hope. Through the example of the fool-seers, the protagonist gains faith in individual value and in mankind's ability to endure. This faith enables the protagonist, first, to withstand pressure to become a child
of the machine (for example, when Cummings informs the
director that love and friendship are more important than
personal advantage), and second, in some cases at least,
effectively to combat the machine (by creating a heavenly
city in New York, for example).

The protagonist-hero's rebellion, like the
fool-seer's, however, is not a panacea: the cultural
machine is not destroyed. The hero simply provides a model
for a personal escape from the machine. Although each novel
contains social criticism, each implies that the social
order will only be destroyed or changed when enough
individuals have been emancipated from mental entrapment
by the system. These novels, therefore, are optimistic at
least concerning human potentiality, declaring that
creative action is possible even within the machine.
However, in these novels understanding is prerequisite to
effective action. Therefore, in Enormous Room, One Flew
Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and Invisible Man each protagonist
interprets his experience through the writing of a novel.
Moreover, all the protagonists (including Yossarian) must
learn to see through the eyes of the seer or of the artist
before they are capable of meaningful action. To the
artist as to the hero, the fool is an appropriate mentor.
Accordingly, Enid Welsford explains that the fool and the
poet are joint descendants of the seer. The kinship
between them in fact has remained close until comparatively
recent times; often the court posts of fool and poet, for example, have been filled by one man as the protagonist of Cumming's novel (or Kesey's or Ellison's) is both fool and artist.

Only in The Enormous Room does the protagonist imitate a literary model. Each protagonist, however, is faced with a mentor whose language is puzzling, and part of each protagonist's education as hero depends upon his growing ability to understand his mentor's enigmatic expression. As Willeford explains, there are two ways of expressing folly, "silence and babbling." Zulu communicates nonverbally while Surplice babbles nonsense. Similarly, Orr's message to Yossarian is obscurely expressed by alternate stubborn silence and elusive riddling, and Wheatstraw's lesson to the invisible man is offered in the form of nonsense verses. In order to understand the fool's imaginative and often symbolic use of language, the protagonist must surplant rationality with imagination, thereby accomplishing "a radical reconstruction of experience". After writing his novel (or in Yossarian's case, after interpreting Orr's message to the Chaplain), however, the artist turns his imagination toward life, using his imagination and his creativity to learn how to live a free and meaningful life in the machine's territory. Therefore, although the active hero is dependent upon the poet, it is active heroism not art or interpretation per se
that is primarily important in these novels.

The Enormous Room, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Catch-22, and Invisible Man are not the only modern novels that are parables of entrapment in which a fool acts as mentor to the protagonist or to the reader. Several American variations on this pattern will be briefly mentioned in the concluding chapter in an attempt to suggest patterns related to that analyzed in this study. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Catch-22 and Invisible Man were chosen for analysis, first, because although each begins with nihilistic assumptions, all share a greater optimism than most parables of entrapment, exemplifying an optimistic tradition in contrast to the pessimism and nihilism generally associated with the twentieth-century novel. Second, they were chosen because together they define a distinct pattern, each containing the elements most central to that pattern, and because they illustrate the major variations on that pattern. Finally, their common inquiry into the plight of modern man is focused on the particular situation of the modern American, each exploring the viability of various aspects of the American dream and each finding an effective alternative to despair in the American tradition. The alternative is then generalized as a solution to universal problems.

 Appropriately, then, the primary mentor of each novel to be discussed is not just a fool, but an American version
of the trickster. In *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* Constance Rourke isolates three nineteenth-century American folk heroes—the Yankee, the backwoodsman, and the Negro—and concludes that each is a trickster.

The three figures loomed large, not because they represented any considerable numbers in the population but because something in the nature of each induced an irresistible response. Each had been a wanderer over the land, the Negro a forced and unwilling wanderer. Each in a fashion of his own had broken bonds, the Yankee in the initial revolt against the parent civilization, the backwoodsman in revolt against all civilization, the Negro in a revolt which was cryptic and submerged but which none the less made a perceptible outline. As figures, they embodied a deep lying mood of disserverence, carrying the popular fancy further and further from any fixed or traditional heritage. . . . Comic triumph appeared in them all, the sense of triumph seemed a necessary mood in the new country. Laughter produced the illusion of leveling obstacles, in a world which was full of unaccustomed obstacles. Laughter created ease, and even more, a sense of unity, among a people who were not yet a nation and who were seldom joined in stable communities. These mythical figures partook of the primitive; and for a people whose life was still uniformed, a searching out of primitive concepts was an inevitable and stirring pursuit, uncovering common purposes and directions.44

These figures reappear in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, Catch-22,* and *Invisible Man:* McMurphy is the backwoodsman, Orr is the Yankee, and the grandfather of the invisible man is the Negro. In these modern novels, however, the tricksters are not confronted with an uniformed society, but with a civilization which is so
oppressively overstructured that men find it almost impossible to be free. All three, for the backwoodsman and the Negro are developments of the yankee, are particularly known for their rebelliousness and for their (yankee) ingenuity. Thus, since Americans are known for their inventiveness, their ability to make and fix new gadgets and machines, it is particularly appropriate that the modern embodiment of yankee ingenuity learns to master the metaphorical machine (often, like Orr, by his mastery of technology or at least by knowledge of the mechanics of the social machine) in order to free himself from subservience to that machine.

In the following pages I wish to examine Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* with special attention given to metaphors of entrapment and to the function of the fool as mentor. Since *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* not only provides the clearest example of the parable of entrapment by the machine, but also contains the most fully developed character portrayal of a trickster-mentor, this study will begin with a consideration of Kesey's novel.
Notes to Introduction


2 William Willsford, *The Fool and His Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audiences* (Chicago, 1969), 257 p. Willsford's work is the source of all theoretical information about the fool in this study unless that information is directly attributed to another source.

3 E. E. Cummings, *The Enormous Room* (New York, 1922), 332 p. Since Cummings' novel will be cited only to exemplify the thesis espoused in this study, this discussion of the novel will certainly be incomplete, but hopefully no violence will be done to the meaning of the novel as a whole. All further references to the novel will be cited in the text.


10 Thus, the ending of *The Enormous Room* is in the atheistic existential tradition.

11 Dougherty, p. 296.


15. Ibid., pp. 65 and xviii.

16. Ibid., p. 16.

17. Ibid., pp. 179 and 183.


19. Ibid., p. 79.

20. Ibid., pp. 26 and 158.


25. Radin, p. 146.


27. Willeford, pp. 101 and 161.

28. Ibid., pp. 64 and 66.
29 Welsford, p. 322.


31 Willeford, p. 7.

32 Ellison, p. 461.

33 Willeford, p. 71.

34 C. G. Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure" in Radin, p. 201.

35 Welsford, p. 323.

36 Willeford, p. 89.


38 Willeford, pp. 155-56.

39 Raglan, p. 213. The passage deleted from the quotation explains that the real Falstaff was a sober, respected man.

40 Willeford, pp. 166, 168 and 171.

41 Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King (N. Y., 1952), pp. 84, 282, 62, 24, 191 and 271 in order of appearance of references in this discussion.

42 Welsford, p. 82.

43 Willeford, p. 29.

44 Constance Rourke, American Humor: A Study of the National Character (Garden City, N. Y., 1951, 53), p. 86.
Chapter I

The Fool as Backwoodsman:

Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

The fool who nonsensically plays in the present with what might be may at the same time remind us of a past that precedes all of us, fools and nonfools alike, and that remains important to us. This is illustrated by the Koyemci clowns among the Zuni. They are said to be silly, yet they are wise, like the high priests and even the gods. Though like simpletons and crazy people they are startled to new thoughts by every flitting thing, they are sages and oracles, interpreting the ancient dance dramas and, in other ways, too, making a connection between present members of the tribe and their primeval ancestors.

William Willsford on the fool

Strength was his obsession—size, scale, power... He shouted in ritual, as though the emotions by which he was moved were bending him to some primitive celebration. Leaping, crowing, flapping his wings, he indulged in dances resembling beast-dances among savages; his heel-crackings and competitive matches were like savage efforts to create strength for the tribe by exhibiting strength. They even
Like many modern novels, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest recounts the adventures of an alienated, seemingly defeated protagonist. Furthermore, the protagonist is a member of a dispossessed minority. Yet unlike most modern American protagonists he is neither Jewish, Black, Southern, nor Beat, but an American Indian. Paradoxically, the Indian—the first victim of white America—emerges as an American culture hero who escapes the bondage of modern society and who suggests the possibility of a free and full life, even in a world controlled by the Combine. What is more, his mentor, whose example makes Bromden's emergence as a hero possible, is a kind of cowboy (the traditional antagonist to the India:), an anachronistic nineteenth-century hero, and a fool.

Bromden, the Indian protagonist, is an inmate of a mental institution and the narrator of the novel. Such a narrator might be expected to inspire little trust. In Bromden's case, however, his reputed insanity does not fundamentally compromise our apprehension of what he says. Gradually we come to see that the lunatic and the fool are more meaningfully sane, and certainly more admirable, than...
the seemingly more rational characters in the novel, for Kesey makes Bromden a very careful and artful narrator, thus anticipating the reader's hesitancy to accept the word of a lunatic and directing the reader to the correct method of interpreting the story. In his narrator's self-introduction, Kesey, first, acknowledges the reader's doubts: "you think the guy telling this," Bromden says, "is ranting and raving my God; you think this is too horrible to have really happened, this is too awful to be the truth," But he then permits Bromden to make himself a surrogate for the author, insisting that his narrative is "the truth even if it didn't happen." p. 6

Thus alerted that Bromden's "truth" is of a special sort, which may not be measured by mere probability, the reader is prepared to see the novel as poetic truth and its events as metaphorical. In fact, the novel recounts a modern equivalent of the mythic situation in which the old king has become a tyrant, banishing or imprisoning the fool. Metaphorically, the Combine--embodifying the principles of order, rationality, and efficiency--controls the kingdom as Big Nurse, the Combine's representative, controls the Ward. In this microcosmic kingdom a challenger emerges--representing irrationality, sexuality, emotion, nature, and humor. In recounting the contest between these two archetypal opponents for the souls of the inmates, Bromden centers his attention on his own salvation. Thus, he writes
a parable which is a dramatization in prose form of the
secular salvation of a representative hero as the result
of the sacrifice of the fool hero and which is an
illustrative story answering the question, "how can modern
man transcend entrapment?"

The Combine

Before discussing Bromden's savior or the process
of his salvation, however, it is important to examine the
world from which he must be saved. For the most part,
Bromden defines this world for us in his description of
the Combine. The Combine is a machine and is therefore
associated with mechanistic values—for example, with
ratiocination, order, efficiency, and conformity—and this
machine socially, metaphysically and psychologically
entrap men. This section, therefore, will (1) define the
attributes of the Combine as machine, (2) investigate the
relationship between the ward and the Combine, and (3)
describe the resulting dehumanization of those entrapped
by the Combine. Finally, through investigating the
Combine's pernicious attacks on individuality, it will
suggest why a savior is needed, why Bromden cannot save
himself from the system he understands so well.

Joseph Waldmeir in "Only An Occasional Rutabaga:
American Fiction Since 1945" helps to define Bromden's
concept of the Combine.
The combine is similar to the 1930's epithet, 'the System.'...But the two terms do not mean the same thing, and the difference is basic to one important distinction between the two social critical positions which they represent. The 1930's critics conceived of the system as degrading the masses in the name of capitalistic free enterprise individualism, and felt that it could only be fought by collective political and pseudo-political action; Kesey sees the Combine as the immolator of the individual in the name of conformity and accommodation, and the novel seems to argue that it can only be fought by a sort of collective individualism, fundamentally unpolitical and haphazardly organized.4

Underlying the difference that Waldmeir articulates is the mechanical metaphor implicit in the term "Combine". Although conformity, accommodation and even forced gregariousness are certainly important values of the Combine, they are not the ultimate values. Basic to the need for uniformity is the desire for efficiency—the first goal of any machine. As Bromden tells us, Big Nurse (the Combine's representative in the ward) "tends to get real put out if something keeps her outfit from running like a smooth, accurate, precision-made machine." [p. 26] Indeed, "what she dreams of...is a world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back, a place where the schedule is unbreakable and all the patients who aren't Outside, obedient under her beam, are wheelchair Chronics with catheter tubes run direct from every pantleg to the sewer under the floor." [p. 27]

To have total efficiency in a machine, all the parts
of the machine must be utterly predictable and dependable. In an economic, political or social system, the parts are human, and men are by nature unpredictable and independent. Therefore, the goal of the machine is not collectivism or uniformity per se, but rather any values which increase a man's predictability and dependability. Obviously, conformity is to be desired. Second, uniformity must be preached as a convenient rationale to explain why a man must give up his individuality: he must do so for the good of the group. Third, reason and objectivity must be emphasized to the exclusion of all nonrational or subjective modes of thought, since men are only predictable when they can be counted on to act rationally and when they are not influenced by their emotions. Finally, since rebellion would be an intolerable interruption of efficiency, men must be docile. To achieve this, the Combine strives to instill in each individual complete belief in the values of the machine, teaching that the cultural machine is natural and unavoidable, patterned after the larger metaphysical machine. If a man is unhappy or rebellious, he is labeled either criminal or mentally ill and taught to use rational analysis—the only thought process accepted by the machine—to understand his own inadequacies.

In order to demonstrate the inadequacy of an ethic based upon efficiency, Bromden introduces us first to the world of the asylum. In this world everyone is controlled
by the Combine: the Combine even controls the inmate's perception of time and space. For example, the nurse as representative of the Combine, fogs the ward so that the inmates cannot see what is around them. Moreover, as Bromden explains, she controls time, making time stop, slow down or speed up at will \( \int \text{p. 74} \). Since the nurse has no literal control over time and space, just metaphoric control, both the fog and the time control are examples of events that "are true even if it didn't happen." For example, the monotonous scheduled life the inmates endure makes time seem to stand still or stop, while any event which stirs up interest makes time seem to go quickly. Similarly, when Bromden is bored, afraid, or in despair, the fog closes in. And, when immersed in the fog, he is in danger of giving up his identity—hence his fear of getting lost in the fog. But when he is hopeful or too interested in something to worry, the fog goes away.

As Bromden conveys truth through his delusions, so too, he conveys the metaphysical reality behind the Combine through dreams. His nightmare of the hospital as a mechanical inferno, for example, synthesizes his experience of the mental destruction of his tribe when a dam was erected on the Columbia River and his perception of the reality of the asylum.

A whole wall slides up, reveals a huge room of endless machines stretching clear out of
sight, swarming with sweating, shirtless men running up and down catwalks, faces blank and dreary in firelight thrown from a hundred blast furnaces.

It—everything I see—looks like it sounded, like the inside of a tremendous dam. Huge brass tubes disappear upward in the dark. Wires ran to transformers out of sight. Grease and cinders catch on everything, staining the couplings and motors and dynamos red and coal black. [pp. 83–84]

Bromden continues,

A workman's eyes snap shut while he's going at full run and he drops in his tracks; two of his buddies running by grab him up and lateral him into a furnace as they pass. The furnace whoops a ball of fire and I hear the popping of a million tubes like walking through a field of seed pods. The machine mixes with the whirr and clang of the rest of the machines.

There's a rhythm to it, like a thundering pulse.

The dorm floor slides on out of the shaft and into the machine room. Right away I see what's straight above us—one of those trestle affairs like you find in meat houses, rollers on tracks to move carcasses from the cooler to the butcher without much lifting. [p. 84]

Then the workmen brutally kill "the old Vegetable Blastic" with a scalpel. Other passages associate the Combine with death: for example, "The machinery...greased silent as death" [p. 83] and "Hum of black machinery, humming hate and death and other hospital secrets." [p. 30] But Bromden's dream makes clear what these passages only suggest. The machine both actually and metaphorically
murders. Since machines are not alive, much less human, it would be impossible for a man to be part of a real machine, and since a metaphoric machine retains the inhuman qualities of the actual machine, man must become inhuman in order to function as a part of that machine.

If man loses his humanity, he becomes a robot. Thus, although Bromden expects to see blood when the workers attack Blastic, he sees instead "a shower of rust and ashes, and now and again a piece of wire or glass." \cite{p. 85}

Indeed, through the entire novel Bromden refers to people as robots, dolls and puppets. Big Nurse characteristically is described as a doll. When we first meet her, Bromden says, "Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll, skin like flesh-colored enamel, blend of white and cream and baby-blue eyes, small nose, pink little nostrils..." \cite{p. 5}

The hands of the Chronics are "like dead birds, mechanical birds, wonder of tiny bones and wires that have run down and fallen." \cite{p. 21}

The technicians "go trotting off...like cartoon men or like puppets", while the Public Relations man looks like "a rubber toy" and has a face like a "balloon with a face painted on it" \cite{pp. 35-36}

In a particularly effective descriptive passage Bromden makes the likeness between the inmates and puppets or cartoons pathetic by implicitly comparing the empty lives of these puppets with the full life possible to
a man.

Seven-thirty back to the day room. The Big Nurse... pushes the button for things to start.... Pete: wag your head like a puppet.
Scanlon: work your knobby hands on the table in front of you, constructing a make-believe bomb to blow up a make-believe world.
Harding: begin talking, waving your dove hands in the air, then trap them under your armpits because grown men aren't supposed to wave pretty hands that way. Sefelt:
begin groaning about your teeth hurting and your hair falling out. Everybody: Breath in... and out...in perfect order; Hearts all beating at the rate the OD cards have ordered. Sound of matched cylinders.

Like a cartoon world, where the figures are flat and outlined in black, jerking through some kind of goofy story that might be funny if it weren't for the cartoon figures being real guys... \([p. \text{31}]\)

In the ward we find all the characters needed for a fool snow, but since the spirit of the fool has been banished from the Combine, these pitiable grotesques can only reflect the mechanical animation of the machine world.

Bromden is not content to portray the mechanization and dehumanization of the hospital. He also explores the sociology, metaphysics and psychology of the Combine, showing that all aspects of life Outside are becoming machine-like. Thus, he explores man's relationship to society by employing the asylum as a microcosm of the whole society and also by explaining the function of the hospital in that larger society. As Doctor Spivey explains to the inmates, the ward is "a little world Inside that is a made-to-scale prototype of the big world Outside that
you will one day be taking your place in again." [p. 47]

The inmates will be able to reenter this world only when they are socially adjusted—which means, when they conform. On the way to the fishing trip Bromden sees the world they are to conform to:

All up the coast I could see the signs of what the Combine had accomplished since I was last through this country, things like, for example—a train stopping at a station and laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored suits and machined hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insects, half-life things coming pht—pht—pht out of the last car, then hooting its electric whistle and moving on down the spoiled land to deposit another batch.

Or things like five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine and strung across the hills outside of town, so fresh from the factory they're still linked together like sausages, a sign saying "NEST IN THE WEST HOMES—NO DOWN. PAYMENT FOR VETS," a playground down the hill from the houses, behind a checker-wire fence and another sign that read "ST. LUKE'S SCHOOL FOR BOYS"—there were five thousand kids in green corduroy pants and white shirts under green pullover sweaters playing crack-the-whip across an acre of crushed gravel. The line popped and twisted and jerked like a snake, and every crack popped a little kid off the end, sent him rolling up against the fence like a tumbleweed. Every crack. And it was always the same little kid, over and over. [p. 228]

Bromden concludes that the children are as identical and as interchangeable as the houses, for, quite probably, they accidentally go home to the wrong identical houses and to the wrong identical parents and no one ever notices the difference.

Not surprisingly, Bromden does not consider social
adaptation to this uniform world to be a positive value.
In fact, in Bromden's opinion, the hospital's "successes"
are worse off than its failures:

Sometimes a guy goes over for an
installation, leaves the ward mean and mad
and snapping at the whole world and comes
back a few weeks later with black-and-blue
eyes like he's been in a fist fight, and
he's the sweetest, nicest, best-behaved
thing you ever saw. He'll maybe even go
home in a month or two, a hat pulled down
over the face of a sleepwalker wandering
around in a simple, happy dream. A
success, they say, but I say he's just
another robot for the Combine and might be
better off as a failure, like Ruckly sitting
there fumbling and drooling over his picture.

Yet, Bromden sees even the failures as machines: "What
the Chronics are—or most of us—are machines with flaws
inside that can't be repaired, flaws born in, or flaws
beat in over so many years of the guy running head-on into
solid things that by the time the hospital found him he was
bleeding rust in some vacant lot." pp. 15-16

The ward, then, "is a factory for the Combine"
pp. 38 whose function is to repair defective machines
and to send them back to the Outside, docile, identical,
and dedicated to efficiently serving the machine pp. 38.

We might well ask why the flawed machines do not see the
perniciousness of a society which makes men into machines
and why, therefore, (before McMurphy) they do not revolt.

Harding answers this question in a discussion with
McMurphy, emphasizing through his choice of metaphors
docility rather than mechanical conformity.

This world...belongs to the strong, my friend. The ritual of our existence is based on the strong getting stronger by devouring the weak. We must face up to this. No more than right that it should be this way. We must learn to accept it as a law of the natural world. The rabbits accept their role in the ritual and recognize the wolf as the strong. [p. 62]

In other words, in society as in the natural world, survival of the fittest is an unalterable law, and the function of the hospital, according to Harding, is to help unhappy rabbits "adjust to our rabbithood." [p. 62]

While Darwin's principle of Natural Selection suggests a correspondence between society and nature, his principle of Adaptability illuminates the function of the ward as factory for the Combine. In a mechanistic world, men are aliens, anachronisms who must become machinelike--thereby adapting to their environment--in order to survive as a species. To adapt to the machine, however, a man must negate his individuality; consequently the species survives adaptation in modified form at the expense of the individual member of the species. Although adaptation necessitates individual death through dehumanization, the refusal or inability to adapt results in either death or entrapment; for example, McMurphy's rebellion leads to his death, while the inability of the other inmates to adapt leads to their incarceration.

Because McMurphy has neither adapted to the machine
nor been destroyed by it, he suggests to Bromden a third alternative to adaptation. In fact, he presents the possibility that Bromden's metaphysical assumptions may be faulty. Since Bromden believes that men learn to be robots through education, he explains McMurphy's seeming freedom from mechanical controls by postulating that he moved around so much as a child that "a school never got much of a hold on him." Perhaps because he lacks this education, McMurphy refuses to adjust to the Combine because he rejects the hypothesis that the machine corresponds to the natural world and therefore is invincible.

Sefelt and Fredrickson, on the other hand, seem to provide evidence that nature not only provides the pattern for the Combine, but also works as an accomplice with it. Normally the inmates are "cured" (or controlled) by shock treatments, but in some cases this is unnecessary because epilepsy works like a natural shock treatment: "Sefelt and Fredrickson... are manufactured to generate their own voltage." Hence, the Combine is metaphysically justified by its naturalness because the pattern of society corresponds to the pattern in nature (a modern adaptation of the argument of the Deists). In Bromden's reminiscences, however, nature is pictured in the romantic tradition as beautiful and benevolent. This view of nature, however, is confined to the past, as
if nature formerly was a friend to man, but now is an agent of his destruction. Only to McMurphy does nature seem to be benevolent in the present.

Since metaphysics is, after all, the study of man's relationship to the rest of the universe and sociology is the study of man's relationship to the larger social group, the metaphysics and the sociology of the Combine are interrelated and interdependent: the metaphysics of the Combine reinforces the power of a social order, allied with death, which serves efficiency, order, rationality, conformity and mechanization—and which ultimately victimizes the individual. So too, the practical psychology of the Combine helps victimize men by turning them into machines for the Combine, concentrating on the adaptation of men to their surroundings, both social and metaphysical. The means used to achieve this end are (1) analysis, (2) social rehabilitation, (3) shock treatments, and (4) the partial lobotomy. Analysis employs the rational facilities in an attempt to understand and then control an individual's drives and emotions. As practiced in the Combine, however, analysis (in group therapy meetings) primarily attacks sexuality and destroys self-respect. As McMurphy succinctly explains, the Big Nurse is a "Ball Cuter" \[\text{p. 58} \]. Specifically, she insinuates that inmates are sexually inadequate or homosexual. She thus uses analysis not to control, but to
destroy sexuality. What she implicitly acknowledges is that sexuality, as a dominant life force, is unalterably opposed to the death-aligned machine culture and, further, is an impediment to reason, order, and efficiency. By attacking a man's masculinity, the Big Nurse can undermine his dignity, making him docile.

Sexuality, which appears most often in the guise of sadism in this novel, is not destroyed, only perverted, 'by the Combine's attack. That Miss Ratched's sexual identity is not completely destroyed is evidenced by her womanly breasts. As Bromden comments, "A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it." [p. 67]

Miss Ratched's denial of her sexual identity in the interest of mechanical efficiency results in frustration and perversion. As the nurse who ministers to McMurphy and Bromden in the Disturbed Ward explains, "Army nurses, trying to run an Army hospital. They are a little sick themselves. I sometimes think all single nurses should be fired after they reach thirty-five." [p. 266] The suggestion of homosexuality in the friendship of the Big Nurse with the supervisor and in the raping of the inmates by the aides underlines the presence of perversion in the ward. The most important sexual perversion in the novel, however, is sadism; the functional result of the
frustration of the Big Nurse, for example, is her sadistic desire to castrate the men in her ward.

Through his depiction of the aides, Bromden suggests that sadism, as a substitute for normal sexuality, is the norm in the Combine—indeed sadistic-masochistic relationships may be the basis for the Combine's social order. As accomplices for her task of castrating and making robots of the inmates, Big Nurse chooses the blackest Negroes she can find; in other words, she finds men whom society has already symbolically castrated. She thus seeks to exploit sadism born of the frustration of men habitually victimized. When the aides predictably respond to their frustration through cruelty to the inmates, a chain of suffering develops similar to that described in "The Eternal City" of Catch-22. In short, by subverting sexuality in the interest of reason and efficiency (Miss Ratched), society is only sublimating sexuality into self-perpetuating violence (the aides).

The second technique of practical psychology—social rehabilitation—is achieved in two ways. First, in group therapy meetings all the Acutes analyse each other. Fundamental to this technique is individual public confession. In addition, each inmate is responsible for writing down anything "revealing" another inmate might say while not in group therapy so that "therapy" becomes a euphemism for shameful confessions and rewarded spying.
The net result of these tactics is the loss of self-esteem by each individual, partly as a result of his own less than dignified confessions (as in the group meeting in which the men confessed so much that thereafter they could not look each other in the eye (pp. 48-49) and partly as a result of his persecution of other inmates in the pecking parties. As McMurphy aptly remarks, the Chinese Communists used the same techniques for lowering moral among prisoners of war during the Korean War.

The second aspect of social rehabilitation entails forced gregariousness. No one is allowed, for example, to sleep late, for it is considered psychologically therapeutic for each inmate to remain in the group at all times. As a result, privacy is eliminated and consequently individuality is further undermined. Moreover, the group from which the inmate cannot escape is the same group that has participated in the frequent pecking parties. For the individual, there is no escape from shame. Finally, this rule has the effect of enforcing a scheduled existence and of denying freedom of choice, for, if one must eternally act in concert with a group, all freedom is sacrificed to the mechanical schedule which is considered to be best for the group.

The last two forms of therapy--shock treatments and lobotomies--are more extreme. As Harding explains, the function of a shock treatment is to make men docile
by making them rational \( \Leftrightarrow \text{p. 178} \), but the result of such treatments is a loss of brain cells. Miss Ratched uses such treatments punitively, since by attacking human consciousness shock treatments attack human independence and identity. The overuse of shock treatments makes Chronics of Acutes, making men into vegetables or metabolizing machines. The ward's fourth method of mental control, the lobotomy, also reduces men into vegetables, destroying individual identity in proportion to the damage done to the patient's brain. The lobotomy destroys human identity because it affects the seat of individual consciousness. After his lobotomy, McMurphy has no identity and no consciousness; only his body survives, and it survives only as a vegetable. A partial lobotomy is less extreme; victims of partial lobotomies can still function as machines, performing simple, repetitive tasks, as we see, for example, in Tabor, the completely adjusted robot who has lost both his humanity and his individuality. In short, shock treatments and the lobotomy represent extreme forms of the prevailing psychology of the Combine, a psychology calculated to destroy individual identity, pride and independence.

Before confinement in the Combine's factory, however, each inmate was not exempt from attacks by the Combine on his sense of personal identity. Indeed, restrictive thought processes drove many of the inmates to the asylum.
For example, Bromden's deaf and dumb act is directly related to the actions of the government agents who visited his tribe's land when he was a child. These agents had arbitrarily ordered their experience into mechanical categories of thought. Because their order is purely arbitrary and leaves out much of reality, for them to respond to anything not included in their order would be to invite chaos. Bromden understands this, saying, "And, I could almost, see the apparatus inside them take the words I just said and try to fit the words in here and there, this place and that, and when they find the words don't have any place ready-made where they'll fit, the machinery disposes of the words like they weren't even spoken." p. 201 The mind, in the mechanical world, has become like a computer and therefore is only capable of ratiocinative thought.

Related to this limiting of mental freedom is the limiting of personality which results from overemphasizing the necessity of a consistent personality. Although a meaningful human identity is denied the human parts of the machine, consistency of personality is required of them. This personality is usually determined jointly by personal appearance and by the expectations of others. Bromden admires McMurphy because he does not allow his character to be shaped by these forces. Although he looks like a backwoodsman, he paints, writes letters and shows
sensitivity; "He hadn't let what he looked like run his
life one way or the other, any more than he'd let the
Combine mill him into fitting where they wanted him to
fit." \(\textup{p. 153}\) But, as Bromden's father warned him,
escaping the molding of society is a complex matter: "Papa
says if you don't watch it people will force you one way or
the other, into doing what they think you should do, or into
just being mule-stubborn and doing the opposite out of
spite." \(\textup{p. 196}\)

Thus, the ordinary person is trapped in almost every
possible way. He is molded by social pressure and by
biological accident and then is imprisoned in the resulting
"personality". His thought processes entrap him because
his reliance on ratiocination to the exclusion of emotion
and imagination leaves much of reality beyond his grasp.
If for some reason the individual escapes these
restrictions, he is labeled an eccentric, a lunatic, or a
criminal. He is then ostracized or confined in a prison
or a mental institution. Ostracism, moreover, often leads
to real neurosis resulting in voluntary confinement; the
rejection of Harding by his wife and by society because he
has homosexual tendencies, for example, leads to his
retreat into the insane asylum. Thus, entrapment is the
dominant metaphor in the novel, and confinement in the
asylum becomes emblematic of the total imprisonment of the
individual within a mechanistic world which threatens to
annihilate his humanity and his individuality. Before McMurry, the individual is apparently left with only three choices: (1) he may become a robot; (2) he may refuse to adjust and therefore be confined involuntary; or (3) he may accept the necessity for his adjustment, seeing himself as a flawed machine, and thereby choose voluntary confinement. Accordingly, while McMurry learns with growing horror that he has been committed (or rather what commitment means) he discovers that most of his fellow inmates are confined voluntarily—a sad testimony to the persuasive power of the Combine. The mental institution in the novel, then, is both the factory in which defective machines are repaired and a microcosm of a culture that, in one way or another sentences all its citizens to a prison of physical and psychological conformity.

The Mentor: The Fool as Backwoodsman

In this world of entrapment a hero is needed who can break bonds. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* Randle P. McMurry is such a man. This section, therefore, will (1) outline those traits McMurry shares with the fool and the backwoodsman which enable him to viably challenge the Combine, (2) examine specific techniques McMurry employs to foil metaphysical, social, and psychological entrapment by the Combine, (3) trace his evolution from fool to seer, and (4) investigate his role as fertility figure and
fool-seer whose sacrifice redeems the protagonist.

Emphasizing his power, Bromden invests McMurphy with something like the mythic proportions of the American folk hero. In introducing him Bromden says,

He sounds like he's way above them the aides, talking down, like he's sailing fifty yards overhead, hollering at those below on the ground. He sounds big. I hear him coming down the hall, and he sounds big in the way he walks, and he sure don't slide; he's got iron in his heels and he rings it on the floor like horseshoes. He shows up in the door and stops and hitches his thumbs in his pockets, boots wide apart, and stands there with the guys looking at him. p. 10

Later, when McMurphy challenges Miss Ratched after his temporary "good behavior", Bromden describes his gestures:

He walked with long steps, too long, and he had his thumbs hooked in his pockets again. The iron in his boot heels cracked lightning out of the tile. He was the logger again, the swaggering gambler, the glib redheaded brawling Irishman, the Cowboy off the T. V. set walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare. p. 189

These and other passages tie McMurphy to the nineteenth-century trickster figure, the backwoodsman. Indeed, he has almost all the traits associated with this mythic figure. First, he is a braggart, introducing himself, for example, to the inmates as the next "bull goose loony". "I'm accustomed to being top man. I been
bull goose catskinner for every gyppo logging operation in
the northwest and bull goose gambler all the way from Korea,
was even bull goose pea weeder on that pea farm at
Pendleton—so I figure if I'm bound to be a loony, then I'
bound to be a stomdown dadgum good one. Tell this Harding
that he either meets me man to man or he's a yaller skunk
and better be outta town by sunset." ∫ p. 19 ⌠
Second, he engages in verbal battles, winning by his homey wit, as
in this exchange with Harding;

"Mr. Bibbit, you might warn the Mr. Harding
that I'm so crazy I admit to voting for
Eisenhower." 
"Bibbit! You tell Mr. McNurphy I'm so crazy
I voted for Eisenhower twice!"
"And you tell Mr. Harding right back"—he
puts both hands on the table and leans down,
his voice getting low—"that I'm so crazy I
plan to vote for Eisenhower next November."
∫ p. 20 ⌠

Third, he has accomplished legendary physical feats:
not only has he eluded the Combine's mental controls by
moving around so much "that Combine never had a chance to
get anything installed" ∫ p. 89 ⌠, but also he has led an
escape from a Chinese prison camp ∫ p. 42 ⌠, has won a
snarpsnooter medal ∫ p. 100 ⌠, and is so attractive to women
that according to McNurphy at least one sixteen year old
girl "got to where she was tripping me and beating me to the
floor." ∫ p. 43 ⌠ Finally, he is too optimistic ever to
admit any doubt about his ability to conquer anything or
anybody. As Constance Rourke writes about the backwoodsman,
"his heel-crackings and competitive matches were like savage efforts to create strength for the tribe by exhibiting strength. They even appeared, in the fertile new country, like those primitive ceremonies to produce growth by which the sower leaps high to make the hemp grow high." In McMurphy's case, he challenges the modern day equivalent of the mythic dragon--Big Nurse. And, by tackling the most formidable opponent possible in the world of entrapment, he gives hope to the modern tribe.

While Bromden makes clear McMurphy's affinities with the backwoodsman, Harding explains McMurphy's connection with still another familiar American folk hero:

I'm all for him, just as I'm for the dear old capitalistic system of free individual enterprise, comrades, for him and his downright bullheaded gall and the American flag, bless it, and the Lincoln Memorial and the whole bit. Remember the Maine, F. T. Barnum and the Fourth of July. I feel compelled to defend my friend's honor as a good old red, white and blue hundred-per-cent American con man. \( \text{p. 254}\)

As con man and as rebel McMurphy is the archetypal American trickster. As backwoodsman and as con man (usually an attribute of the Yankee--who incidentally is the prototype for Uncle Sam) McMurphy seems to be anachronistic--so anachronistic, in fact, that Bromden wonders how someone so free could live in the modern world \( \text{p. 89}\).

McMurphy helps save Bromden by personifying nineteenth-century optimism and faith--demonstrating as
Sam Patch did before him that a man can conquer any obstacle and may do so simply for the pleasure of the challenge\textsuperscript{9}—he may even challenge the Combine. The key to his success in breaking the mental bonds of the Combine is his mental freedom. As Bromden explains, McMurphy is "free enough to be a good con man" \( \text{\textsuperscript{89}} \). This statement is, of course, ironic in the limited sense in which Bromden employs it: Bromden suggests that McMurphy is free because he has "no one to care about" \( \text{\textsuperscript{89}} \). Although this seems largely true at the beginning of the novel, by the end of the novel McMurphy has literally sacrificed his liberty and his life for his friends. However, McMurphy is free in other ways. As the trickster is traditionally innocent of moral restrictions,\textsuperscript{10} McMurphy is free from the mental restrictions of the Combine. He refuses to let his personality be dictated either by his personal appearance or by pressure from society. He is not a slave to ratiocination or rigid categories of thought: he alone both listens to Bromden and understands what he has to say. And, he can understand Bromden because he understands symbolic language.

McMurphy's freedom, and his resulting success as a mentor, can best be understood by recognizing him not just as a nineteenth-century version of the fool but as a generic fool. Originally, a fool was either simpleminded or insane. Later wise men feigned insanity and played the
fool. McMurphy originally is naive, but when he begins to understand the threat of the Combine, he becomes a wise fool who uses all the fool's weapons to conquer the Combine. Although McMurphy lacks the traditional immunity from punishment characteristic of the fool, he is able to help the inmates, at least as he first appears, simply because Miss Ratched underestimates him. She thinks of him as a psychopath, a manipulator, so that his feigned insanity gives him a certain temporary immunity. As McMurphy explains to the inmates, he has an advantage over Big Nurse because "As near as I can tell I'm no loony, or never knew it if I was. Your nurse don't know this; she's not going to be looking out for somebody coming at her with a trigger-quick mind like I obviously got." [p. 257] The Big Nurse does see him as a "disruptor of the ward for the sake of disruption" [p. 257]—a primary characteristic of the fool—but she does not understand that through disrupting the normal order of a society, the fool readsmit values that have been banished from that society, such as humor, optimism, emotion, sexuality, irrationality, and rebellion.

Moreover, McMurphy "makes a farce of the mythical pattern" of the Combine by employing the traditional weapon of the fool: he makes people laugh. As Bromden recalls, "He's [McMurphy is] being the clown working at getting some of the guys to laugh. It bothers him that the best
they can do is grin weakly and snigger sometimes."

\[ p. \ 98 \]\ In order to attack the "mythical order," he underlines the authority of the Big Nurse with his practical jokes--by writing obscenities in the toilets so that the nurse will look ridiculous when she makes cleanliness checks with her hand mirror, for example,\[ p. \ 151 \] or by pretending to be naked under a towel, then whisking it off to embarrass her \[ pp. \ 93-96 \]. Yet, the major function of his laughter is a defense against despair. When McMurphy makes the inmates laugh on the fishing trip, he has brought them very close to mental health:

While McMurphy laughs. Rocking farther and farther backward against the cabin top, spreading his laugh out across the water--laughing at the girl, at the guys, at George, at me sucking my bleeding thumb, at the captain back at the pier and the bicycle rider and the service-station guys and the five thousand houses and the Big Nurse and all of it. Because he knows you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy. He knows there's a painful side; he knows my thumb smarts and his girl friend has a bruised breast and the doctor is losing his glasses, but he won't let the pain blot out the humor no more'n he'll let the humor blot out the pain.

I notice Harding is collapsed beside McMurphy and is laughing too. And Scanlon from the bottom of the boat. At their own selves as well as at the rest of us. And the girl, with her eyes still smarting as she looks from her white breast to her red one, she starts laughing. And Sefelt and the doctor, and all. \[ p. \ 238 \]
Like the fool, who "characteristically serve[s] a principle of wholeness that is often difficult to reconcile with categories of 'good' and 'bad',"^{11} McMurphy unites the good and bad, the humorous and the painful sides of life, and thus does justice to the totality of life.

As fool, moreover, McMurphy can seemingly accomplish the impossible since he is less bound by "reality" than are rational men. In McMurphy's case he is aware of a reality differing from that recognized by the Combine. In his reality, men are men, not rabbits; nature is teeming with fertile life and is not the Combine's accomplice but its antagonist; and faith can move mountains—or control panels. Whereas despair has conquered the more realistic inmates, McMurphy sees all things as possible: if he cannot lift the control panel, he finds someone who can.

Furthermore, McMurphy's relationship to time is similar to that of the fool. As William Illsford explains, "traits belonging to our developmental past, both individual and social or cultural, are often present in the fool now... in him these traits seem an opening into a past to which we have closed ourselves by becoming what we are, and sometimes the opening may strike us as a sign of freedom and even of superiority."^{12} As nineteenth-century comic hero therefore, McMurphy is at first free from the despair of modern man and can act with anachronistic optimism.

Finally, to the inmates McMurphy appears to share the fool's
invulnerability; he can even withstand numerous shock treatments. Even when the Nurse has transformed McMurphy into a vegetable by surgery, the inmates refuse to admit—at least to each other—that the vegetable is McMurphy. Thus, his seeming invulnerability gives others hope that they too can fight the Combine and survive.

McMurphy as the Fool admits into the machinelike society the values that it has banished: humor, hope, individuality, sexuality, love and optimism. And for this, he is martyred. He employs humor primarily as a defense against the Combine and against despair so that he may evade mental control by the Combine, but secondarily he employs humor offensively to combat and to undermine the Combine's power. And, he teaches the men hope, without which men are incapable of rebellion. He fosters individuality in a conformist world by example. By his own fierce individuality he demonstrates that a man can still have individual dignity in a world controlled by the Combine, if a man simply refuses to accept the Combine's values. Consequently, he refuses to participate in the pecking parties, instead dominating the group therapy meetings by the force of his own personality. Fighting shame with humor, he even makes his own reputed insanity sound ludicrous:

"Right here, Doc. The nurse left this part out while she was summarizing my record. Where
it says, 'Mr. McMurphy has evidenced repeated outbreaks of passion that suggest the possible diagnosis of psychopath.' He told me that 'psychopath' means I fight and fu--pardon me ladies--means I am he put it overzealous in my sexual relations. Doctor, is that real serious?"

He asks it with such a little boy look of worry and concern all over his broad, tough face that the doctor can't help bending his head to hide another little snicker in his collar. \[p. 44\]

Furthermore, he fights uniformity by ridiculing the rigid schedule that is, supposedly, for the good of the group. For example, when an aide explains that the toothpaste must remain locked up until six forty-five, McMurphy says, "Yes, now I do understand why the toothpaste must remain locked up. You're saying people'd be brushin' their teeth whenever the spirit moved them.... And, lordy, can you imagine? Teeth bein' brushed at six-thirty, six-twenty--who can tell? Maybe even six o'clock. Yeah, I can see your point." \[p. 90\]

Similarly, he fights the ward's time control by fighting boredom. For example, all the inmates are required to remain in the dining room after breakfast until seven-thirty even though the men have finished eating and have nothing to do; so, McMurphy throws a pat of butter on the wall, taking bets on how long it will take to hit the floor \[pp. 100-101\]. He can even combat the fog which envelopes Bromden by providing him with hope.

Primarily, however, he helps the men regain their
dignity and their sense of individuality by respecting them and by recognizing their individuality. For example, when McMurphy first enters the ward, he introduces himself individually to all the patients, including the Chronics. When he sees Bromden, he wants to know both his real name (Bromden is his mother's name) and his tribe; the other inmates are satisfied to call him Chief Broom (naming him after his occupation at the asylum and thereby equating a role with his identity). Later, McMurphy pays enough attention to Bromden to notice that Bromden jumps when an aide comes by and realizes, therefore, that Bromden cannot be deaf. He then helps cure Bromden by listening to him and by believing what he has to say.

Since many of the men's mental problems stem from real or imagined sexual inadequacy, McMurphy first inflates their sexual image, joking about their sexual prowess and providing girls for the fishing trip and for the party. Second, he transfers the blame for the inmates' feelings of inadequacy from the inmates to the Big Nurse, arguing that she is a castrating woman. Third, he fights the logical, rational analysis with which Big Nurse attacks sexuality with a form of poetic language—the analogy—demonstrating the fallacy of Miss Ratched's contention that analysis is for the patient's own good by arguing that group therapy meetings are analogous to pecking parties. Finally, he fights the inmates' loss of personal dignity with love, for
by demonstrating that he cares for them enough to sacrifice himself, he convinces them that they are worth saving.

McMurphy, of course, is not merely the comic fool. In fact, the traits of the fool discussed so far define McMurphy's identity only as he first appears in the novel and only as he is viewed by the inmates, for when he first appears, he is a natural fool, an innocent, who does not understand his environment and therefore does not understand the seriousness of the threat posed by the Combine to his humanity, to his individuality, or to his life. As the novel progresses, McMurphy begins to understand the tragic potential inherent in his situation. Consequently, his humor becomes more heroic than spontaneous and the wise man (the twentieth-century man) playing the fool supersedes the naive fool (the nineteenth-century hero).

Near the end of the novel, Bromden understands McMurphy's heroism. "It was us that had been making him go on for weeks, keeping him standing long after his feet and legs had given out, weeks of making him wink and grin and laugh and go on with his act long after his humor had been parched dry between two electrodes." \[p. 305\] By the end of the novel McMurphy is more seer than fool, more martyr than trickster, but his heroism and his wisdom are revealed in his continuing to play the clown in the face of adversity.

Related to McMurphy's role as fool-seer is a Hopi
legend called "The Red-Headed Stranger". Although it is possible that Kesey was not familiar with the legend, certain similarities between the legend and Kesey's novel make that possibility unlikely, especially since Kesey's narrator is an Indian. The story recounts the coming of the red-headed stranger to an Indian village, offering to fight anyone; "He was tall and straight, and he always wore clothes of green. His body was almost golden brown, and when the people saw him coming toward them they always stopped and looked at him. He was as beautiful as a pine tree or a lake trout, with his brass-red hair, his golden body, and his green clothes." Similarly, McMurphy is big, tanned and red-headed; furthermore, he wears the hospital's "green convalescents".

The Red-Headed Stranger fights Rabbit Ears, but, although the Red-Headed Stranger is much stronger than Rabbit Ears, Rabbit Ears defeats him because his small antagonist ties the stranger's hands behind him while he's busy laughing. The stranger then tries to squeeze Rabbit Ears with his legs, but since Rabbit Ears has oiled his body before the fight, the stranger cannot hold him. Then the stranger admits defeat, saying,

"When I was beaten, I was to die. Now I shall go. But I said I would have a great gift for you. It is this. When I have died, the man who won from me shall tear me limb from limb. Then he shall plant my head in one place and..."
my body in another, and you shall see what I have left for you."... After his death the head was planted in one place and the body in another. And when the next rain had come, from the place where the head was planted grew a great stalk of corn.... From the place where the body was planted grew a low, creeping vine, with great leaves and bright yellow flowers. And this plant gave the people big yellow squashes.12

Although McMurphy's antagonist is the Big Nurse, not Rabbit Ears, he allows himself to be martyred to save the "rabbits" from their rabbithood. As Harding admits toward the end of the novel: "But at least there's that: they are sick men now. No more rabbits, Mack. Maybe they can be well men someday." p. 294 The importance of the legend to the novel, however, is that the Red-Headed Stranger is specifically associated with fertility; he is sacrificed so that crops of corn and squash may grow. Thus, McMurphy may have affinities with a ritual personage in a fertility drama.

The novel's association of McMurphy with Christ supports this association, suggesting that McMurphy may indeed serve as a martyr to renew the modern world. Specifically, he could renew fertility by restoring organic values (the values of the fool)15 in the mechanical world of the Combine. As Bromden declares, "McMurphy was a giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine that was networking the land with copper and crystal." p. 255 Even the Big Nurse recognizes (with antagonism) the
inmates' belief that McMurphy does "things without thinking of himself at all, as if he were a martyr or a saint."

And, Bromden describes the fishing trip in biblical language, saying, "As McMurphy led the twelve of us toward the ocean." Indeed, to emphasize that McMurphy and the inmates paralleled Christ and his disciples, Bromden places this statement by itself as an independent, summary paragraph. Furthermore, at the moment of McMurphy's death, Scanlon asks, "Is it finished?"

The most interesting Christ symbolism in the novel, however, reflects McMurphy's own growing awareness that he is a martyr and a scapegoat for the other inmates. He begins as a trickster, offering confidently to best Big Nurse because "I'm a gambler and I'm not in the habit of losing." However, after learning that the lifeguard, picked up for being drunk and disorderly, has been in the hospital eight years and eight months, that he is committed, and that the nurse could keep him in the hospital indefinitely and even subject him to shock treatments, he temporarily decides to play safe. Explaining to Harding, he says, "I couldn't figure it at first, why you guys were coming to me like I was some kind of savior. I just happened to find out about the way the nurses have the big say as to who gets discharged and who doesn't. And I got wise awful damned fast. I said, "Why, those slippery
bastards have conned me, showed me into holding their bag. If that don't beat all, conned ol' R. P. McMurphy."

Although McMurphy still sees himself as the great con man in this passage, after Cheswick's suicide McMurphy begins to have nightmares of faces—the same faces that turn to him during group therapy meetings "full of a naked, scared hope." Finally, McMurphy accepts his role as savior, helping Bromden to regain his strength, teaching all the inmates to laugh, and, by example, demonstrating the necessity for courage even when faced with impossible odds.

Furthermore, he accepts his role as martyr and scapegoat, willingly facing mental death in order to save his friends. And, as Christ (according to traditional Christian theology) defeated death through his crucifixion and resurrection, McMurphy evades threatened mental death and thereby defeats the Combine by enduring his symbolic crucifixion, while maintaining, even asserting, his identity as fool by satirizing the Combine as it crucifies him. Early in the novel Harding compares shock treatments to crucifixion: "You are strapped to a table, shaped, ironically, like a cross, with a crown of electric sparks in place of thorns." Appropriately, then, when McMurphy has his first shock treatment as punishment for defending George, he sees himself as a Christ-figure:
They put the graphite salve on his temples. "What is it?" he says. "Conductant," the technician says. Anoint my head with conductant. Do I get a crown of thorns?"

They smear it on. He's singing to them, makes their hands shake.

"'Get Wildroot Cream Oil, Cholly...!'"

Put on those things like headphones, crown of silver thorns over the graphite at his temples. They try to hush his singing with a piece of rubber hose for him to bite on.

"'Hain with soothing lan-o-lin.'"

Not only is he a Christ-figure, but he is a comic Christ, clowning through his crucifixion, and thereby, as fool, he celebrates his invulnerability and affirms the victory of life over the threat of death.

Other qualities, of course, help to establish McMurphy as the central figure in a fertility rite. His own reputed sexuality and his association with the natural make him an appropriate symbol for fertility. Returning from the fishing trip he proclaims himself a dedicated lover, who after his first sexual encounter hung the nine year old girl's dress in a tree. Concluding his narrative, McMurphy declares, "So my colors were flown, and from that day to this it seemed I might as well live up to my name--dedicated lover." \[p. 245\] Ironically, he is impotent before the coldness of the Big Nurse and therefore cannot conquer her through his sexuality. However, he can remind
the inmates of the natural world by his presence in the asylum. He even smells more natural than the people characteristic of the Combine: Bromden observes, "I realize for the first time since I been in the hospital that this big dorm full of beds, sleeps forty grown men, has always been sticky with a thousand other smells—smells of germicide, zinc ointment, and foot powder,...but never before now, before he came in, the man smell of dust and dirt from the open fields, and sweat, and work." \( \text{[p. 98]} \)

When McMurphy first takes Bromden's hand, Bromden feels McMurphy's contagious natural power: "the fingers were thick and strong closing over mine, and my hand commenced to feel peculiar and went to swelling up out there on my stick of an arm, like he was transmitting his own blood into it. It rang with blood and power." \( \text{[p. 24]} \)

Furthermore, McMurphy is associated with natural symbols. For example, he wears black shorts "with big white whales with red eyes," given to him by a co-ed literary major who said he was a symbol. \( \text{[p. 61]} \)

Here, he is associated with Moby Dick, that manifestation of unconquerable nature at its most complex. Furthermore, he is repeatedly associated with birds and fish. According to Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, birds (most often the dove), fish and the fisher are "life symbols of immemorial antiquity."\(^{16}\) It is entirely appropriate that McMurphy, as fertility hero, should lead his men on a
fishing trip, that they should be accompanied on this trip by a prostitute and further that on the boat, after catching a fish, they should learn how to combat the Combine by learning to laugh.

The bird most often associated with McMurphy is the goose. He introduces himself, for example, as the "bull goose loony", and Harding, soon thereafter, says he is "an illiterate clod, perhaps, certainly a backwoods braggart with no more sensitivity than a goose." [p. 56] The goose is associated with the fool-seer in the expression "silly goose" which "is of pious derivation; the word silly originally meant blessed, gentle, happy, innocent ..."[17] According to the Dictionary of Mythology, Symbol and Folklore, "In practically all languages, the name for goose also means sun...Universally associated with the sun. Chaos Bird which laid the Golden Egg of the Sun; creator of the universe; Great Cackler...As a blessed fowl, associated with the dove and peacock."[18] Similarly, a Piute Indian legend explains that Chief Duck (ducks are symbolically related to geese in this novel) created the earth we know for one woman, a remnant of an older society, and for her descendents. In one version, Chief Duck sends Mud-Hen to the bottom of a lake to bring up mud. With this mud, he makes an island on which the new men will live.[19] In another version (Maidu) he creates the people themselves from this mud.[20] Similarly, the trickster legend
recounts the trickster's dive to the bottom of the ocean before ascending to heaven. 21

Kesey is perhaps reminding us of these creation legends when Bromden recalls a nursery rhyme he knew as a child—the nursery rhyme from which the title of this novel is taken;

Ting. Tingle, tingle, tremble toes, she's a good fisherman, catches hens, puts 'em inna pens...wire blier, limber lock, three geese inna flock...one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo's nest...O-U-T spells out...goose swoops down and plucks you out.

My old grandma chanted this, a game we played by the hours, sitting by the fish racks scaring flies. A game called Tingle Tingle Tangle Toes. Counting each finger on two outspread hands, one finger to a syllable as she chants.

Tingle, ting-le, tang-le toes (seven fingers) she's a good fisherman, catches hens (sixteen fingers, tapping a finger on each beat with her black crab hand, each of my fingernails looking up at her like a little face asking to be the you that the goose swoops down and plucks out).

I like the game and I like Grandma. I don't like Mrs. Tingle Tangle Toes, catching hens. I don't like her. I do like that goose flying over the cuckoo's nest. I like him, and I like Grandma, dust in her wrinkles. 22

Bromden remembers this nursery rhyme during a shock treatment. After this shock treatment he knows he has beaten the Combine—at least he can take shock treatments without retreating into the fog after the treatment. The nursery rhyme sums up his perception of the events of the
novel. Mrs. Tingle Tangle Toes (the Big Nurse) "catches hens" (the chickens of the 'pecking party') and "puts 'em inna pens". McMurphy, the goose, swoops down from the sky to save those chickens (of the pecking parties) and make them men. Like the mythic goose, he is a creator; and, like Chief Duck, he creates a new life from a remnant of an old civilization. But while the inmates are able to leave the old world of Miss Ratched's ward, they cannot leave the Combine. They must find a way to live a new life with new values within the Combine's territory. Metaphorically, they must, like the Indian tribe, build "scaffolding all over that big million-dollar hydroelectric dam...\[and spear\] salmon in the spillway." (p. 311) Literally, they learn both to resist the Combine and to live a fulfilling life by emulating the fool.

Furthermore, the party in the hospital which results in McMurphy's destruction suggests a fertility ceremony. With the help of vodka, cough medicine, red wine and pot, the participants in the party proceed to an ecstasy of hope in which Bromden believes, "Maybe the Combine...\[is not\] all-powerful" (p. 292); Bibbit is sexually initiated, and sexuality is generally celebrated. There is even a suggestion that epilepsy is not evidence of nature's conspiracy with the Combine. In a comic passage, Sefelt has an epileptic fit while making love to Sandy. Rather than being repulsed, she keeps repeating over and over,
"I never experienced anything to come even close to it....
Never in my life experienced anything to come even halfway near it." \( \text{pp. 290-291} \) Even epilepsy has a part in the orgiastic celebration of life.

Finally, Harding repeats a pessimistic, although comic, mass, prophesying the sacrifice to come:

Down the hall we heard glass crash and Harding came back with a double handful of pills; he sprinkled them over Sefelt and the woman like he was crumbling clods into a grave. He raised his eyes toward the ceiling.

"Most merciful God, accept these two poor sinners into your arms. And keep the doors ajar for the coming of the rest of us, because you are witnessing the end, the absolute, irrevocable, fantastic end. I've finally realized what is happening. It is our last fling. We are doomed henceforth. Must screw our courage to the sticking point and face up to our impending fate. We shall be all of us shot at dawn. One hundred cc's apiece. Miss Ratched shall line us all against the wall, where we'll face the terrible maw of a muzzled-loading shotgun which she had loaded with Miltowns! Thorazines! Libriums! Stelazines! And with a wave of her sword, bloody! Tranquilize all of us completely out of existence."

He sagged against the wall and slid to the floor, pills hopping out of his hands in all directions like red and green and orange bugs. "Amen." he said and closed his eyes. \( \text{pp. 291} \)

But the whole group is not "tranquilized out of existence". Bibbit, of course, commits suicide because the nurse threatens to tell his mother of his activities. The others, however, escape punishment because, as in most fertility ceremonies, a scapegoat is ritually sacrificed...
for all the participants. The sacrifice of the scapegoat ride the society of evil, cleansing its members. The result of the party and of McMurphy's sacrifice is the mental freedom of almost all of the participants. By the time the Big Nurse returns with post-operative McMurphy, only three of the twelve men who went on the fishing trip are still in the ward—and those three are no longer under Miss Ratched's control \[ p. 307 \].

The Emergence of the Hero

Although McMurphy, as backwoodsman, fool, and seer, has all the qualities necessary to be a viable mentor of rebellion, he could not teach someone unreceptive or someone devoid of heroic qualities. Bromden, while in total despair at the beginning of the novel, has the virtue of knowledge (he understands the Combine)—a primary prerequisite of heroism. Therefore, the purpose of this section is, first, to investigate Bromden's past, examining both those experiences which caused his despair and those which prepared him to be receptive to his mentor; second, to trace his emergence as a hero, sketching what he learns not only from McMurphy but also from nature and from his father, Pete and Matterson, third, to describe his final emergence both as hero and as mentor to the reader; and, fourth, to examine the positive ethic which he learns from McMurphy's example and which he interprets
for the reader.

Crucial to the understanding of Broomden's past is an examination of his apprehension of nature as it is revealed through recurrent image patterns. Broomden's association of McMurphy with the goose of the nursery rhyme, for example, is not the only way in which geese or ducks are important to his salvation from despair. When he first fully describes the workings of the Combine, he likens it to a cotton mill he visited on a high-school football trip: "The mill put me in a kind of dream, all the humming and clicking and rattling of people and machinery, jerking around in a pattern...reminded me somehow of the men in the tribe who'd left the village in the last days to do work on the gravel crusher for the dam. The frenzied pattern, the faces hypnotized by routine." \[\text{p. 36}\] In a discussion with a girl employee, a duck blind becomes a symbol of sexuality and of escape from the machines in the mill:

I told her about the fluff. She rolled her eyes and ducked her mouth to laugh in her fist when I told her how it was like looking at her face out on a misty morning duck-hunting. And she said, "Now what in the everlovin' world would you want with me out alone in a duck blind?" I told her she could take care of my gun, and the girls all over the mill went to giggling in their fists. I laughed a little myself, seeing how clever I'd been. We were still talking and laughing when she grabbed both my wrists and dug in. The features of her face snapped
into brilliant focus; I saw she was terrified of something.

"Do," she said to me in a whisper, "do take me, big boy. Outa this here mill, outa this town, outa this life. Take me to some ol' duck blind someplace. Someplace else. Huh, big boy, huh?" \[ p. 37 \]

Thus, ducks and geese suggest values in direct contrast to the Combine, not only fertility, but also freedom, masculinity, and even humor. When the inmates all laugh for the first time, Bromden likens the laughter to being "blown up off the water and skating the wind with those black birds." \[ p. 238 \] Furthermore, Bromden remembers with nostalgia how his father made fools of the government representatives who had been "talking like tourists from the East who figure you've got to talk to Indians so they'll understand" \[ p. 91 \]. When they begin asking when the chief will sell the treaty, he only replies, "Canada honkers up there...What are you--? In July? There's no--uh--geese this time of year. Uh, no geese....Geese up there, white man. You know it. Geese this year. And last year. And the year before and the year before." \[ pp. 91-92 \] Bromden concludes, "It sure did get their goat; they turned without saying a word and walked off toward the highway, red-necked, us laughing behind them. I forget sometimes what laughter can do." \[ p. 92 \] The chief, of course, was not just being funny, he was making a statement about the Indians' way of life. Still a big man at this
time, he believes the Indians' masculinity, freedom and naturalness can continue forever, like the geese that symbolically represent these values.

Before the dam was built and his father began to "shrink", Bromden's memories of nature are pleasant. These memories provide a picture of nature in conflict with that presented by the Combine. After the fishing trip Bromden reflects that he "was feeling better than I'd remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land was still singing kid's poetry to me." (p. 243)

Even at the beginning of the novel, Bromden uses his memories of nature as a talisman to protect himself from the Combine; afraid that the aides will "slip one of their machines in on" him, he tries "to keep from getting scared...[tries] to get my thoughts off someplace else--[tries] to think back and remember things about the village and the big Columbia River, think about ah one time Papa and me were hunting birds in a stand of cedar trees near The Dalles..." (p. 6)

After Bromden has stepped back into life by voting in the group therapy meeting and by sitting with the others in front of the blank T. V. screen in defiance of the nurse, he looks out the window one night. For the first time that he can remember, he consciously feels the linoleum under his feet, and he sees and smells fall coming.
I looked out the window and saw for the first time how the hospital was out in the country. The moon was low in the sky over the pastureland; the face of it was scarred and scuffled where it has just torn up out of the snarl of scrub oak and madrone trees on the horizon. The stars up close to the moon were pale; they got brighter and braver the farther they got out of the circle of light ruled by the giant moon. It called to mind how I noticed the exact same thing when I was off on a hunt with Papa and the uncles and I lay rolled in blankets Grandma had woven, lying off a piece from where the men bunched around the fire as they passed a quart jar of cactus liquor in a silent circle....

Something moved on the grounds down beneath my window--cast a long spider of shadow out across the grass as it ran out of sight behind a hedge.... I saw it was a dog, a young, gangly mongrel slipped off from home to find out about things went on after dark.... The moon glistened around him on the wet grass.... He twisted and thrashed around like a fish, back bowed and belly up, and when he got to his feet and shook himself a spray came off him in the moon like silver scales....

Then, from a long way off, I heard a high, laughing gabble, faint and coming closer. Canada honkers going south for the winter. I remembered all the hunting and belly-crawling I'd ever done trying to kill a honker, and that I never got one.... Then they crossed the moon--a black, weaving necklace, drawn into a V by that lead goose. For an instant that lead goose was right in the center of that circle, bigger than the others, a black cross opening and closing, then he pulled his V out of sight into the sky once more. (pp. 155-156)

The flight of the Canadian honkers is such an important symbol for Kesey that he uses it again in Sometimes a Great Notion. Here, however, the juxtaposition of the dog-fish
and the geese suggests fertility or, more aptly, the possibility of a fulfilling life—a possibility that Bromden is just beginning to accept.

Bromden identifies with the dog in this passage. The dog's reaction to the geese reminds him of his own, and when he finally escapes the hospital, he runs along the same path the dog follows. Here, again, this passage suggests an Indian custom. The White Dog Ceremony was an Iroquois ritual celebration of the New Year, "aimed at renewing life in all things." In this ceremony two white dogs are sacrificed to the sun and the moon that the world might be reborn. Appropriately, then, Bromden's world is reborn for him as he sees a dog who reflects the white light of the moon and who runs toward the highway directly into the path of an on-coming car. As Bromden's rebirth begins with the sacrifice of this dog, he is reborn, and the inmates of the ward are saved, only at the price of McMurphy's sacrifice. Furthermore, the second dog to be sacrificed—hinted at by the identification of Bromden with the dog running to certain death—is Bromden, and therefore this scene prefigures Bromden's emergence as the hero who will take McMurphy's place (and, it is implied like the dog and like McMurphy he will ultimately be sacrificed).

Before continuing to discuss Bromden's emergence as a hero, it is appropriate to look at the personal causes of
his despair (the causes other than the social reality discussed in the section on the Combine). His feeling that others neither saw nor heard him contributed to his despair as, undoubtedly, did his experiences in the war [p. 131].

Moreover, the two hundred shock treatments he was given [p. 67] certainly aggravated his condition. However, his total despair probably resulted in a great measure from what happened to his tribe and particularly to his father. In short, his father agreed under duress to sell the tribe's rights to the government so that a dam could be built on the Columbia River. This, of course, ruined the Indian's fishing and ultimately the tribe's morale. As the tribe disbanded, the chief began to drink; as Bromden describes the subsequent events, his father began to shrink while his white mother began to grow.

Bromden's immediate attachment to McMurphy is partly a result of the similarity between McMurphy and his father. While McMurphy's strong actions remind him of his father before he began to shrink, Bromden's reaction to McMurphy's combatting the Big Nurse is ambivalent. On one hand, he wishes McMurphy to succeed in conquering the Big Nurse, thereby proving that the Combine can be defeated. On the other hand, he wants McMurphy to learn to be "cagey" (like his father learned to be when he agreed to sign the papers) because he does not want McMurphy to be completely destroyed by the Combine. As he explains to McMurphy,
"The Combine. It worked on him
Bromden's father for years. He was big enough to fight it for awhile. It wanted us
to live in inspected houses. It wanted to
take the falls. It was even in the tribe,
and they worked on him. In the town they
beat him up in the alleys and cut his hair
short once. Oh, the Combine's big--big.
He fought it a long time till my mother
made him too little to fight any more and
he gave up."

"What did they want him to give to the
government?"

"Everything. The tribe, the village, the
falls..."

"Now I remember; you're talking about the
falls where the Indians used to spear salmon
--long time ago. Yeah. But the way I
remember it the tribe got paid some huge
amount."

"That's what they said to him. He said,
What can you pay for the way a man lives?
He said, What can you pay for what a man is?
They didn't understand. Not even the tribe.
They stood out in front of our door all
holding those checks and they wanted him to
tell them what to do now. They kept asking
him to invest for them, or tell them where
to go, or to buy a farm. But he was too
little anymore. And he was too drunk, too.
The Combine had whipped him. It beats
everybody. It'll beat you too. They can't
have somebody as big as Papa running around
unless he's one of them. You can see that."

Other examples convince Bromden of the futility of
his or McMurphy's trying to fight the Combine. Tabor,
who Miss Ratched recalls as "an Intolerable Ward
Manipulator... just like McMurphy" (p. 25), is sent back
into society "a little black and blue around the eyes," a
perfectly well-adjusted robot (pp. 38-39). Cheswick,
while not a strong man like McMurry or Papa, at least protested against the rule of Big Nurse. However, he always backed down when he was without support. When he believed McMurry to be getting "cagey", he drowns himself, but his death, unlike McMurry's, is in no way redemptive.26

Each of these examples helps to convince Bromden of the futility of fighting, as does McMurry's temporary cageyness. But two inmates of the hospital besides McMurry, while not strong figures, act as positive mentors to Bromden. Colonel Matterson plays only a small part in the novel, but he plays his role at a crucial time. In a group therapy meeting Bromden feels that he is going into the fog for the last time. Then he notices Colonel Matterson and Pete. Matterson, an old Chronic, is, as usual, talking what seems to be nonsense: "Now...The flag is...Ah-mer-ica. America is...the plum. The peach. The wah-ter-mel-on. America is...the gumdrop. The pump-kin seed. America is...tell-ab-vision....Now...The cross is...Mex-i-co...Mexico is...the wal-nut. The hazelnut. The ay-corn. Mexico is...the rain-bow. The rain-bow is...wooden. Mexico is...woo-den." $\[ \text{p. 129} \]$ All at once Bromden perceives that Matterson is "making sense...a sense of $\[ \text{his} \]...own" and that he is not crazy. $\[ \text{p. 129} \]$ He merely speaks in metaphoric language, not in the analytic rational language of the Combine. Understanding
Mattrson, then, immediately helps Bromden keep from losing himself in the fog, and ultimately helps him to prepare for his role as narrator of his own story and as parable-maker who helps emancipate men from bondage to the Combine.

Mattrson has escaped the bonds of rational thought and expression that entrap the people of the machine, but Pete, like McMurphy, has escaped the control of the Combine altogether, for his head was damaged during birth. Pete is a type of the fool—the simpleton. As Bromden explains, "being simple like that put him out of the clutch of the Combine. They weren't able to mold him into a slot."

His job Outside had been to "sit in a little clapboard house way out in the sticks on a lones nutch and wave a red lantern at the trains if the switch was one way, and a green one if it was the other, and a yellow one if there was a train someplace up ahead. And he did it, with main force and a gutpower they couldn't mash out of his head, out by himself on that switch. And he never had any controls installed."

In the hospital, he usually just says, "I'm tired," or nothing; but one day after the group meeting in which all the Acutes "were all shouting to outdo one another, going further and further, no way of stopping, telling things that wouldn't ever let them look one another in the eye again" Pete came "to life for maybe a
minute to try to tell \( \text{the inmates} \) ... something, something none of us cared to listen to or tried to understand, and the effort had drained him dry.\(^{\text{p. 52}}\) After that Pete is a vegetable. However, with the wisdom of a child or of a fool, Pete has told the inmates,

"You see—i't's a lotta baloney...i'ts a lotta baloney....."

He began slumping over again, and his iron ball shrunk back to a hand. He had thrown an aide against the wall. He held it cupped out in front of him like he was offering something to the patients.

"I can't help it. I was born a miscarriage. I had so many insults I died. I was born dead. I can't help it. I'm tired. I've give out trying. You got chances. I had so many insults I was born dead. You got it easy. I was born dead an' life was hard. I'm tired. I'm tired out talking and standing up. I been dead fifty-five years. \(^{\text{p. 52}}\)

From Pete, Bromden learns courage, and faced with Pete's real suffering he learns not to exaggerate his own misfortune. Furthermore, he learns what he already suspected, that the public confession of shameful events is "baloney". The confessions aggravate the problems of the men, rather than solving them. Moreover, Pete's struggling so long, attempting to accomplish what for him was impossible, prefigures McMurphy's fighting the Combine, even after he knows he cannot win. For as Bromden reminds the reader, to defeat the Big Nurse it is not enough to win one round, you must win them all: "She'll go on winning, just like the Combine, because she has all the
power of the Combine behind her. She don't lose on her losses, but she wins on ours. To beat her you don't have to whip her two out of three or three out of five, but every time you meet. As soon as you let down your guard, as soon as you lose once, she's won for good, and eventually we all got to lose. Nobody can help that." (p. 109)

McMurphy is, of course, Bromden's primary mentor. He begins his educational task by bringing Bromden out of the fog. When McMurphy first appears, Bromden is interested enough in what he will do to come alive. As Bromden says, "One of these days I'll quit straining and let myself go completely, lose myself in the fog the way some of the other Chronics have, but for the time being I'm interested in this new man." (p. 39) Bromden stays out of the fog because not only does McMurphy retain his interest, but also he begins to win minor victories over the Big Nurse, demonstrating that perhaps she can be fought; "They haven't really fogged the place....since McMurphy came in. I bet he'd yell like a bull if they fogged it." (p. 75)

As he begins to fear that Miss Ratched will send McMurphy to Disturbed, however, the fog moves in again. At a group meeting in which McMurphy is asking for a revote on watching the world series, Bromden feels he is finally going to be lost in the fog: "I'm further off than I've ever been. This is what it's like to be dead. I guess this is what it's like to be a Vegetable; you lose yourself
in the fog. You don't move. They feed your body till it finally stops eating; then they burn it. It's not so bad. There's no pain. I don't feel much of anything other than a touch of chill I figure will pass in time."  

When McMurphy brings his issue to a vote, all twenty Acutes vote with him; yet the Big Nurse says twenty is not a majority, since there are forty men in the ward. McMurphy then turns to the Chronics. None respond. Finally, Bromden raises his hand:

McMurphy did something to it that first day... Just by the way the nurse is staring at me with her mouth empty of words I can see I'm in for trouble, but I can't stop it. McMurphy's got hidden wires hooked to it, lifting it slow just to get me out of the fog and into the open where I'm fair game. He's doing it, wires...

No. That's not the truth. I lifted it myself.  

Bromden's vote like those of the other inmates is not "just for watching TV, but against the Big Nurse, against her trying to send McMurphy to Disturbed, against the way she's talked and acted and beat them down for years." With his vote Bromden rejoins the world, and thereafter "there is no more fog anyplace." He sits with the others in front of the blank television set, talks with McMurphy, signs up for the fishing trip and learns to laugh again. Bromden is able to do these things because McMurphy has given him hope and a philosophy by
which to live.

Prerequisite to learning any positive philosophy is the repudiation of false metaphysics. McMurphy frees Bromden from the belief that nature provides the pattern for the Combine by proving to him that nature is as beautiful and as benevolent in the present as it seemed to be in the past. On the fishing trip Bromden learns to regard nature once again as a friend.

We'd just shared the last beer and slung the empty can out the window at a stop sign and were just leaning back to get the feel of the day, swimming in that kind of tasty drowsiness that comes over you after a day of going hard at something you enjoy doing—half sunburned and half drunk and keeping awake only because you wanted to savor the taste as long as you could. I noticed vaguely that I was getting so's I could see some good in the life around me. McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I'd remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land was still singing kid's poetry to me.

If nature is not machinelike, it cannot provide the pattern for the Combine, and if the Combine is not natural, but is only a human construct, then men can change it. On the fishing trip, therefore, Bromden not only learns that the Combine can be fought but he also experiences a life full enough to fight for—a life which provides an alternative to the existence of a robot.

This new knowledge would be useless, however, if McMurphy had not first taught Bromden courage. Without
courage, Bromden would never have voted against the Big Nurse and therefore would never have learned that life could be good. McMurphy teaches courage in attempting to lift the control panel—an act which clearly embodies his philosophy of continued resistance against oppression. McMurphy introduced the question of watching the world series in a prior group therapy meeting, but only Cheswick voted with him \[ \text{p. 114} \], the others were too frightened. Then McMurphy bets the Acutes that he can pick up the control panel, significantly offering to demonstrate his power over the machine that controls the ward. Bromden describes the event:

I don't know what he's driving at; broad and big as he is, it'd take three of him to move that panel, and he knows it. He can just look at it and see he probably couldn't even tip it, let alone lift it. It'd take a giant to lift it off the ground. But when the Acutes all get their IOUs signed, he steps up to the panel and lifts Billy Bibbit down off it and spits in his big callused palms and slaps them together, rolls his shoulders...

Playing the backwoodsman and the fool—as Harding recognizes, saying "quit acting like a fool"—McMurphy begins to talk:

"Okay, stand outa the way. Sometimes when I go to exertin' myself I use up all the air nearby and grown men faint from suffocation. Stand back. There's liable to be crackin' cement and flying steel. Get the women and kids someplace safe. Stand back..."

But when he really tries to lift the panel, he is more the
Christ than the trickster; he even has wounded hands:

And suddenly nobody's hooting at him any more. His arms commence to swell, and the veins squeeze up to the surface. He clinches his eyes, and his lips draw away from his teeth. His head leans back, and tendons stand out like coiled ropes running from his heaving neck down both arms to his hands. His whole body shakes with the strain as he tries to lift something he knows he can't lift, something everybody knows he can't lift.

But, for just a second, when we hear the cement grind at our feet, we think, by golly, he might do it.

Then his breath explodes out of him, and he falls back limp against the wall. There's blood on the levers where he tore his hands. He pants for a minute against the wall with his eyes shut. There's no sound but his scraping breath; nobody's saying a thing.

He tries to distribute the IOUs, but he cannot; so he throws them on the floor. As he leaves the room he stops to say, "But I tried, though... Godammit, I sure as hell did that much, now, didn't I?"  

After this, McMurphy begins to train Bromden to lift the control panel, restoring his strength not by physical exercises but by restoring his confidence. In doing so, McMurphy is grooming a successor who could potentially exceed his success as a hero. Finally, Bromden does lift the control panel \( \text{[p. 257]} \), but only later does he realize the ramifications of what McMurphy tried to teach by attempting the impossible (trying to lift a panel he knew he could not lift). After the party, however, Bromden suddenly understands and can articulate McMurphy's
philosophy and his approach to life in the Combine;

I looked at McMurphy out of the corner of my eye, trying not to be obvious about it. He was in his chair in the corner, resting a second before he came out for the next round--in a long line of next rounds. The thing he was fighting, you couldn't whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn't come out any more and somebody else had to take your place. [pp. 302-303]

Bromden's philosophy here, like the philosophy taught by McMurphy in attempting to lift the control panel, is very much like that of Camus in "The Myth of Sisyphus". Heroism lies in persevering in a hopeless task. However, the philosophies are not identical. Sisyphus is heroic because he realizes the tragic absurdity of his task, and yet he chooses with joy to roll the stone once more up the mountain. McMurphy and Bromden, while just as conscious of the immediate futility of their endeavor, choose not to acquiesce to their fate, but to fight it with all their strength. The difference between these two philosophies, of course, is partly explained by the fate each is emphasizing. Camus emphasizes man's metaphysical condition while Kesey is primarily concerned with man's social and political state. While man's relationship to the universe probably cannot be changed, his relationship to society certainly can. Thus, it is more heroic to fight society than to choose to acquiesce.

While McMurphy as fool is able to bring Bromden out of the fog by providing him with hope, McMurphy as seer
teaches him to be a hero. Bromden becomes a hero only after he realizes that McMurphy is sacrificing himself unselfishly for the men in the ward. Originally, Bromden understands the sufferings and feelings of others (for example, Matterson and Pete), but feels he cannot help them \( \text{p. 131} \). McMurphy's success in relieving the suffering of the inmates and Bromden's affection for McMurphy cause Bromden to change his mind. When McMurphy fights the aide to protect George, Bromden helps him. Thus, he has made the decision to help fight against the Combine and to "keep on whipping it, till...[he] couldn't come out anymore."

As soon as he has accepted the responsibilities of the hero, he begins to discover what McMurphy has experienced. For example, a patient in Disturbed comes up to him obviously asking for help,

\[ \text{Bromden couldn't sleep much the rest of the night and I kept seeing those yellow teeth and that guy's hungry face, asking to Look me! Look me! Or, finally, as I did get to sleep, just asking. That face, just a yellow, starved need, came looming out of the dark in front of me, wanting things...asking things. I wondered how McMurphy slept, plagued by a hundred faces like that, or two hundred, or a thousand.} \] 

\( \text{p. 266} \)

Here Bromden has accepted the responsibilities of the hero for the rest of society, and if he, like McMurphy, can be strong in fighting the Combine, others will be given confidence to fight also—they will be given their lives
back.

As hero, Bromden goes through a final shock treatment and learns that he can fight even such a tangible evidence of the machine. When the post-operative McMurphy is brought back to the ward, Bromden smothers him in his sleep, conscious that since McMurphy can no longer fight, he must take his place;

I watched and tried to figure out what he would have done. I was only sure of one thing: he wouldn't have left something like that sit there in the day room with his name tacked on it for twenty or thirty years so the Big Nurse could use it as an example of what can happen if you buck the system. I was sure of that. [p. 308]

After smothering McMurphy, Bromden escapes. And, his escape is the culmination of the drama of the entire novel. Scanlon reminds him that McMurphy taught him how to escape—by throwing the control panel through the window. Significantly, this time Bromden knows why he's lifting the control panel; literally, he lifts it because it is the only available object heavy enough to break the screen on the window, and symbolically, he rips it out because it is the most tangible evidence of the Combine's control of the hospital.

I took a deep breath and bent over and took the levers. I heaved again and heard the wires and connections tearing out of the floor. I lurched it up to my knees and was able to get an arm around it and my other hand under it. The chrome was cold against my neck and the side of my head. I put my
back toward the screen, then spun and let
the momentum carry the panel through the
screen and window with a ripping crash.
The glass splashed out in the moon, like a
bright cold water baptizing the sleeping
earth...I put my hand on the sill and
vaulted...into the moonlight. \[ p. \ 310 \]

Bromden's escape is pictured as a baptism of the earth; thus,
the fertility drama is ended. The old hero is sacrificed,
but he is reborn through the emergence of the new hero.
Once more, there may be fertility in the land. Consequently,
Bromden goes to investigate stories that the Indians are
fishing off the dam. If so, the values so long banished
by the encroaching mechanism may have returned in more
places than Nurse Ratched's ward.

While Bromden's escape is the culmination of a parable
recounted in the novel, we know that he makes one further
step as hero. He writes the novel. One descendent of the
seer has followed another--the poet follows the fool as
the modern culture hero; as McMurphy does justice to the
whole of life through laughter \[ p. \ 238 \], Bromden does
justice to it through art. But Bromden is only able to
write because of the example of the fool. The fool has
readmitted the irrational into a world which has banished
the irrational in favor of the arbitrary rational order of
a mechanical world. Because the reemergence of the
irrational makes chaos of the old order, the new hero must
provide a new order. This order, however, cannot be
created by using the overly-rational, scientific language
of the Combine. The new hero uses symbolic and mythic language to provide a parable which both explains our world and exemplifies the proper way to live in it. Thus, as hero and as mentor to his readers, Bromden tells his story as a parable for our time.
Notes to Chapter I


3. Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York, 1962), p. 8. All further references to Kesey's novel in this chapter will be noted in brackets in the text.


6. Rourke, p. 46 (braggart) and pp. 48-49 and 62-63 (verbal battles).

7. Rourke, pp. 39-40 (physical feats) and p. 40 (quotation).


14 Ibid., pp. 132-133.

15 See Introduction. As explained there, organic values and the values of the fool are roughly equated.


18 Ibid.


21 Radin, p. 146.

22 Kesey characteristically equates masculinity with sexuality.


24 Ellen Russel Emerson, Indian Myths (Minneapolis, 1965), pp. 405-406.

It is important to the novel that the White Dog Sacrifice is sometimes made to the moon, for the moon has an important relationship to Bromden and McMurphy. Bromden looks at the moon, pondering its relationship to the stars when the world is reborn for him (p. 154). He considers that Big Nurse would not be so cocky if she knew what he and the moon have going (p. 274). The eyes of the post-operative McMurphy "starred into the full light of the moon" (p. 309). And, when Bromden escapes, "glass splashed out in the moon, like a bright cold water baptizing the sleeping earth" (p. 310). Traditionally, the moon has a special relationship with the insane and with poetic inspiration. This seems to be the primary relationship of the moon to the hero and his mentor in the novel. However, the moon is also the place of the Indian equivalent to the Christian heaven. Therefore, Bromden and McMurphy's goodness (as well as their approaching death) is underlined by their relationship to the moon. (Jobes, p. 119)

26 This part of Kesey's novel suggests the organization of The Waste Land. A nonredemptive death by water precedes and prefigures the later redemption.

Chapter II

The Fool as Yankee: Joseph Heller's Catch-22

the word "mask" comes from an Arabic word, maskharat, for clown. "Sooted cheeks in Ancient Rome, red noses for devils in the Middle Ages, masks in the Commedia dell'arte, bismuth and rouge in the English Harlequinade, flour in old French farces, and burnt cork in the nigger-minstrel shows"--clowns and fools usually wear some kind of mask, though a natural deformity often takes its place.

William Willeford on the fool

The Yankee was never passive, not the crackerbox philosopher seated in some dim interior, uttering wisdom before a ring of quiet figures; he was noticeably out in the world; it was a prime part of his character to be "a doin'!" But though he often pulled strings ... he was seldom deeply involved in situations; even his native background was meagerly drawn... Though he talked unceasingly his monologues still never brimmed over into personal revelation. He was drawn with ample color and circumstance, yet he was not wholly a person. His mask, so simply and blankly worn, had closed down without a
crack or a seam to show a
glimpse of the human creature
underneath.
Constance Rourke on the
Yankee.

Each of the other novels treated in this study is
narrated in the first person by one or more participants in
the novel's action. Although Joseph Heller's Catch-22 has
a third person narrator, it is generally conceded that the
novel is ordered around "The psychological development of
revolt in Yossarian". Why, then, did Heller reject the
popular first person narrative technique in favor of a
complicated third person narrative form? And, further,
if the novel is structured around Yossarian's revolt, why
does Heller include information and anecdotes that, as far
as one can tell from the novel, are unknown to Yossarian--
for example, the anecdote describing the attitudes of Major
Major's father on socialism and price supports. Furthermore,
a dual purpose is revealed in Heller's characterization.
How much we know about any given character varies; we know
even the thoughts of Cathcart, the chaplain and Major Major,
but know little or nothing more than Yossarian knows about
Milo, Dunbar and Orr.

In order to answer these questions it is necessary
to investigate Heller's approach to style, structure, and
point of view in Catch-22. First, like Nathanael West's
Miss Lonelyhearts, Catch-22 is indebted to the comic strip.
The plot is episodic, humorous and improbable, and many of the episodes are in the form of a joke. The characters are two dimensional grotesques who are characterized primarily by one or two outstanding traits (for example, Hungry Joe is characterized by his nightmares and by his divided response to naked women) and who have lost their complex humanity by accepting metaphysical, social, and psychological entrapment in a machinelike world.

Second, to underline the importance and difficulty of understanding metaphysical, social, and psychological truth and to make the reader a participant in the novel, Heller organizes the novel as a puzzle—similar in technique (according to Heller) to \textit{Absalom, Absalom}. Throughout, Heller gives hints, referring to incidents that he does not fully narrate until well into the novel, coming back many times with more information so that the reader can make sense of what is happening in a particular incident. Only at the end of the novel does the reader have all the facts. Consequently, since the reader must actually organize the information in order to understand each part of the novel, he participates in a learning experience analogous to that of Yossarian, and perhaps he will rebel with Yossarian as a consequence of that experience.

Third, whereas in the other novels, the poet supersedes the fool as modern hero, in \textit{Catch-22} the most fully developed hero is a man of action, not a poet; yet
the hero must understand both his world and his mentors before he can act effectively. Finally, although Milo, Dunbar and Orr are mentors to Yossarian, Milo is a negative mentor, Dunbar is "disappeared", and Orr is incompletely developed as a character, leaving Yossarian as the most fully developed and articulate hero in the novel. Thus, he becomes the primary mentor to his friends in the novel and to the reader, although the reader also learns from the histories of such minor mentors as the chaplain and Major Major.

Prerequisite to understanding Catch-22 as a parable which answers the question "how can a man escape entrapment?" is an understanding of the function of the widely criticized ending of the novel. Often the novel is criticized for its comic ending, many critics contending that the end is cowardly, that it sidesteps the thorny problems presented by the novel and by World War II. As Joseph Waldmeir contends, the ending seems to say,

You see! This has all been a joke--good clean fun with overtones of the macabre to titillate. But underneath there has really been something deep and important going on! Unfortunately, however, there hasn't been.

Waldmeir concludes, therefore, that Catch-22 is a failure because an "artist must have a position, a point of view, some awareness of what things should or could be in order to be aware of the absurdity of things as they are. Without
such an awareness, he really has nothing to portray—and the portrayal of nothing as absurd equals the portrayal of nothing as nothing. 7

In my analysis of Catch-22 I hope to show, first, that Heller provides both a standard of behavior opposed to the one he satirizes, and second, that the conclusion to the novel is appropriate. The critics who most dislike the ending seem intent upon interpreting Catch-22 simply as an anti-war novel; consequently they disapprove of Yossarian's leaving only after the German's are defeated because they feel Heller is avoiding the difficult question of the morality of war. Heller's novel, however, is not just an antiwar novel. Indeed, it is not an antiwar novel at all in a pure sense, for the novel tacitly accepts the necessity of fighting W. W. II. Rather, during World War II the army functions as a microcosm of the modern world through which Heller exposes the metaphysical, social, and psychological entrapment which circumscribes the life of modern man. 8 Furthermore, Heller's answer in the novel is not social reorganization or the formation of a society to end wars, but individual rebellion not only against wars and army bureaucracy but also against our society's conceptions of sanity and intelligence. Finally, since Yossarian is liberated by adopting the philosophy and the tactics of the fool (Orr), it is appropriate that the ending of such a parable of escape from entrapment is
comic.

**The World of Catch-22**

Before examining Yossarian's fool-mentors in section two, this section will analyze the world of *Catch-22*, examining those mechanical forces that entrap the protagonist and considering any alternatives to these forces which may lead to his freedom. First, I will examine the style of the novel in order to demonstrate that the world of the novel is comic in essence. Second, I hope to show that the universe portrayed is irrational and chaotic, that if there is a god, he is a "bungling trickster" and that the ultimate metaphysical reality in this universe is death. After defining the metaphysical basis of Yossarian's world, I hope to show how fear and despair in response to meaninglessness and death lead men to accept entrapment in a social machine and finally to accept psychological entrapment by becoming dehumanized cogs in that machine. Finally, by examining the relationship between linguistic reality and sense data, I shall describe how language obscures reality and helps entrap men but also how the recognition of the divergence between logical self-contained linguistic systems and an irrational, essentially comic universe can prepare the protagonist to use language effectively and to live more effectively when he learns that neither the universe, men,
nor society are logical.

First, the world of the novel is comic in the way that the world portrayed in Kesey’s novel is comic. Yet whereas Bromden tells us that the ward in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is "like a cartoon world, where the figures are flat and outlined in black, jerking through some kind of goofy story that might be funny if it weren’t for the cartoon figures being real guys...", 9 Heller thrusts the reader into a similar world without providing a fully developed narrator to explain events to him. Yet although the characters of *Catch-22* seem comic, they face the most pressing metaphysical, social and psychological problems of our age, confronting death in a meaningless universe with utter terror and social conformity with helpless despair. And although the tone of the novel is comic, deadly serious events intervene (for example, the death of Snowden).

Furthermore, inspite of the humor occurring on almost every page, the characters of *Catch-22*, like the inmates of Nurse Ratched’s ward, lack humor; only Orr laughs. For example, Clevinger, appalled by the superstition of the other officers, says: "It’s a complete reversion to primitive superstition. They’re confusing cause and effect. It makes as much sense as knocking on wood or crossing your fingers. They really believe that we wouldn’t have to fly that mission tomorrow if someone would
only tiptoe up to the map in the middle of the night and move the bomb line over Bologna." Heller continues, ironically, "In the middle of the night Yossarian knocked on wood, crossed his fingers and tiptoed out of his tent to move the bomb line up over Bologna." To complete the joke, Heller shows that the officers on the base accept the reality portrayed on the map as the real situation in Bologna; so, Yossarian's superstitious action successfully delays the mission. This anecdote, of course, like many others in the novel is a good joke, but no one laughs except the reader, the characters in the novel are too frightened or too self-centered (Cathcart or Milo) to laugh.

Arguing that the common quality of "absurd" novels is not "the author's metaphysical conviction of the absurd" but rather a common style, Eugene McNamara states:

The narrative devices most frequently used in these contemporary absurd novels are, first of all, in character development, a diminishing of individuality, a deliberate thinness. Characters become minimal, two dimensional. The most obvious indication of this is the use of unusual and grotesque names.

Secondly, in the development of plot, action is frequently reduced to stasis, causality is underdeveloped or eliminated, there is an openness, an obviousness, a transparency of incident. There is no attempt at narrative reticence. Artifice is blatant, the bare outlines of the movement are easily discernable. The result is a sense of emptiness, of vacancy, a sense that
the world thus created is a facade of pasteboard masks. In both plot and character, then, formula is emphasized. Parody and burlesque of traditional styles abounds, and the action is intermittent—interrupted by a kind of detached, gratuitous, random cruelty.

Finally, in language, there are lexical distortions, meaningless puns, an insistent repetition of empty words, clichés, exaggeration and deliberately misplaced particulars and juxtaposed incongruous details.  

McNamara's analysis of the style of the "absurd" novel is particularly relevant and applicable to Catch-22. First, the characters are two dimensional. As Randall H. Waldron explains, "Catch-22 is peopled by men which are truly like machines, capable only of automatic patterned actions and reactions, conditioned by the self-serving profit-motivated ethic of the world in which they live."  

However, the men are not just machinelike, they are also like the figures in a cartoon. Quite often, for example, their characters are almost defined by their names: Nately (from natal) is a naive idealist who believes in America, romance, and love; Appleby (mom and apple pie) is the all-American boy; Aarfy is amoral and doglike; Minderbinder binds men's minds with capitalistic dogma; and Scheisskopf is the ultimate "shithead." Characteristically, the villains of the novel are completely two dimensional and completely predictable. Cathcart, for example, is mechanically controlled by his desire to become a general, constructing lengthy lists of "feathers in cap"
and "black eyes", while Scheisskopf lives for parades.
Other more positive characters on the other hand--such as the chaplain, Major Major and Orr--are reminiscent of such a fool as Charlie Chaplin, who although superficially portrayed as a two dimensional character reveals inner depths that, while only implied, tie him to something basically human--something perhaps even definitely human.

Second, "in the development of plot, action is frequently reduced to stasis" and "causality is underdeveloped or eliminated." Although the novel contains some action scenes, an atmosphere of stasis is encouraged by Heller's method of narration. Most of the events in the novel have already occurred at the beginning of the novel, and the flashbacks are not narrated in chronological order; rather the reader keeps learning more and more about the same incidents. According to James M. Hellard, the method of the novel "to use Heller's own labeling, is *déjà vu*--a term meaning 'already seen' that suggests something of the delusory experience, hallucinatory quality, and disjunctive expression of the reality in *Catch-22*."¹³ "For the reader, as for the chaplain and, eventually, Yossarian, there is a lag...between the seeing and the understanding..."¹⁴ the reader learns more and more facts about each incident, but does not really understand the incident until the last narration of that incident. Consequently, the progress of the novel is primarily in depth of understanding rather than
the plot progression of the traditional novel.

Significantly, this stasis is broken only after Nately's death. Yossarian then begins to act, going AWOL to Rome, and learning to understand his world, his former experiences, and then after one false move resulting from despair (giving in to Cathcart and Korn), he acts positively as a modern hero. The stasis, reflected in the narration throughout most of the novel, then, reflects Yossarian's mental paralysis in the face of despair. Yet to see the narration of the novel as a rendition of Yossarian's mental state does not completely explain Heller's complicated narrative.

Jan Solomon examines the structure of the novel, contending rightly that the "form is carefully constructed to support the pervasive theme of absurdity, in fact to create its own dimension of absurdity." Although Solomon begins with the general assumption that Yossarian's chronology is dominated "by the pattern of Yossarian's growing psychological revolt", he then demonstrates how the key events which punctuate Yossarian's story emphasize the metaphysical absurdity of the modern world; "Yossarian's time is punctuated, if not ordered, by the inexorable increases in the number of missions and by the repetitious returns to the relative safety and sanity of the hospital where, 'they couldn't dominate Death...but they certainly made her behave'." Each of these incidents
emphasize the pervasiveness of death and the utter helplessness of men faced with death.

Solomon also recognizes the importance of Milo's story, explaining that the chronological discrepancies between Yossarian's story and Milo's are intrinsic to the theme of the novel. In Solomon's words, "Independently, each chronology is valid and logical; together, the two time-schemes are impossible. By manipulating the points at which the different systems cross, Heller creates a structural absurdity enforcing the absurdity of character and event in the novel." 17 Each episode in which the chronologies of Yossarian and Milo conflict underlines this absurdity:

As Yossarian develops increasing rebelliousness through events of past and present, so Minderbinder increases his financial empire step by chronological step. The dissonance sounds when a step in Milo's success occurs simultaneously with the relating of an event in the 'past' time of Yossarian's story. The dissonances, moreover, tend to fall at moments when one of Milo's greatest successes coincides with one of the more grotesque moments in the decay of Yossarian's world. The logic of connection between cynical success and moral decay supersedes the logic of chronology. 18

Although Solomon's analysis of the structure of the novel is excellent, he does not discuss the significance of the structure of the joke and the burlesque comedy routine in the novel. Milo's history is chronologically narrated and causally developed. However, comic exaggeration is presented at every step in his story; he begins
his career by learning that Yossarian can have all the fruit he wishes and ends as "the corn god, the rain god and the rice god in backward regions... Vice-Shah of Oran... Caliph of Baghádád, the Imam of Damascus, and the Sheik of Araby." That Milo's history is an elaborate parody of the Horatio Alger myth and of American capitalism is obvious, but it is often ignored that Heller's parody is not only biting satire but also extremely effective humor. The joke, however, becomes grotesque when Milo bombs his own base, contracts with both sides to blow up a bridge (making a profit from the death of his comrades) and starves his countrymen if they refuse to give him their pay.

Similarly, Yossarian's story is narrated in the form of a burlesque monologue with occasional burlesque dialogue interludes. Anecdotes are characteristically in the form of jokes, developed around incongruity and absurd logic. For example, the first chapter of Catch-22 is organized around six humorous incidents: (1) Yossarian's fortunate "liver ailment"; (2) Yossarian's censoring of letters, signing "Washington Irving", "Irving Washington", or censoring all words except articles; (3) the Texan from Texas who "turned out to be good-natured, generous and likable. In three days no one could stand him"; (4) the soldier in white, murdered by Nurse
Cramer because she takes his temperature; (5) Yossarian's falling in love with Chaplain Tappman; and (6) the "gorgeous" colonel with "a cavernous mouth, cavernous cheeks, cavernous, sad, mildewed eyes... There was a urologist for his urine... there was a pathologist for his pathos, a cytologist for his cysts, and a bald and pedantic cetologist from the zoology department at Harvard who had been shanghaied ruthlessly into the Medical Corps by a faulty anode in an I.B.M. machine and spent his sessions with the dying colonel trying to discuss Moby Dick with him." \( \text{p. 15} \) In addition to these anecdotes, the chapter offers burlesque-like stichomythic dialogue between Dunbar and Yossarian (see, for example, the conversation in which Dunbar and Yossarian accuse the Texan of murdering the soldier in white \( \text{p. 11} \)).

In the first chapter anecdotes are narrated together for no other apparent reason than that they all occurred in the hospital. More typically, transition between anecdotes is similar in pattern to this narrative bridge between Heller's introduction of Colonel Cargill, Doc Daneeka and Havermeyer. Cargill says,

\begin{quote}
I'd be the last colonel in the world to order you to go to that U.S.O. show and have a good time, but I want everyone of you who isn't sick enough to be in the hospital to go to that U.S.O. show right now and have a good time, and that's an order.
\end{quote}
Yossarian did feel almost sick enough to go back into the hospital, and he felt even sicker three combat missions later when Doc Daneeka still shook his melancholy head and refused to ground him.

"You think you've got troubles?" Doc Daneeka rebuked him grievingly. "What about me?" He's losing money...

"Why don't you just smile and make the best of it?" he advised Yossarian glumly. "Be like Havermeyer."

Yossarian shuddered at the suggestion. Havermeyer was a lead bombardier who never took evasive action...

Thus, Milo's success story, Yossarian's story, the juxtaposition and incongruity between their stories, individual anecdotes about men and events and the transition between anecdotes are all basically comic in structure and in content. Not surprisingly, then, the language of the novel is comic, also. The linguistic traits McNamara discovers—lexical distortions ("Supraman"), meaningless puns, an insistent exaggeration (Milo's history) and deliberately misplaced particulars (the method of narration of the entire novel), and juxtaposed incongruous details (the colonel who is "gorgeous" and "cavernous")—are the building blocks of comedy. Since the language of the novel is examined in detail later in this chapter, just one example should suffice here to demonstrate Heller's typical use of language. Most of the jokes in the novel play upon incongruous juxtapositions of connotative words. For example, "There were many principles in which Cleveing
believed passionately. He was crazy." ([p. 17])
"Appleby was a fair-haired boy from Iowa who believed in God, Motherhood and the American Way of Life...everybody who knew him liked him...'I hate that son of a bitch, Yossarian growled.'" ([p. 19]) In each case, the reader is surprised when his expectations, based upon the connotations of words (such as the positive connotations usually associated with "principles" or belief in the American Way of Life) are abruptly opposed by a statement which is based upon completely antithetical premises. The result is a sudden apprehension of absurdity, causing laughter.

Now, since the stylistic attributes McNamara discovers to be present in the absurd novel are characteristic of Catch-22 and also of the world of the comic strip or burlesque theatre, two questions present themselves. For what purpose does Heller dramatize such a world? And, how does this world differ from the world of the comic strip or burlesque? Unexplained or insufficiently explained cruelty are common both to the comic strip and to Catch-22, but the difference in our response to that cruelty is instructive. When a comic strip character falls off a cliff or is run down by a car, he characteristically emerges unscathed. Consequently, we laugh. In Yossarian's world, however, although we find comic book characters in
comic situations, human vulnerability and mortality are very real--so real, in fact, that twice in the novel characters find themselves covered with pieces of another character's body. Further, even though Heller portrays the entire universe as a mammoth joke, the joke is a grotesque and cruel one, perpetrated upon mankind. Consequently, Yossarian, employing a perverse argument from design, speaks of God as an amoral, bungling trickster, whose victim is mankind.

"And don't tell me God works in mysterious ways," Yossarian continued, hurtling on over her objection. "There's nothing so mysterious about it. He's not working at all. He's playing. Or else He's forgotten all about us. That's the kind of God you people talk about--a country bumpkin, a clumsy, bungling, brainless, conceited, uncouth hayseed. Good God, how much reverence can you have for a Supreme Being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as phlegm and tooth decay in His divine system of creation? What in the world was running through that warped, evil, scatological mind of His when he robbed old people of the power to control their bowel movements? Why in the world did He ever create pain?" [P. 184]

In such a world two responses are possible: despair or laughter. Until the end of the novel no one considers that the proper reaction to the absurd universe might be laughter except Orr. Instead, despair breeds either unfeeling commitment to self-interest or brute terror, typified respectively by the equally grotesque descriptions (1) of the "Eternal City" in which victim and victimizer
cooperate in a grotesque ritual of suffering and (2) of the men, influenced by Hungry Joe's screaming, who "began" to have shrieking nightmares of their own, and the piercing obscenities they flung into the air every night from their separate places in the squadron rang against each other in the darkness romantically like the mating calls of songbirds with filthy minds."  \[p. 55\]

In this world in which Yossarian realizes "it all made sense. Why not scream out every night. It made more sense than Appleby, who was a stickler for regulations ...made more sense than Kraft, too, who was dead...." \[p. 56\], laughter is impossible because all the other values associated with the fool are not available to the men. Hope, faith and religion are all made impossible by the brute fact of death. And, the pervasiveness of unexplained chaos and of cruel irrationality has made any comforting irrationality (like mysticism, religion or optimism) impossible, for men have frantically sought false rationality in an attempt to order diversity at all costs. Furthermore, individuality has been sacrificed to the war effort and to economic profit. The only value associated with the fool that remains at all viable is sexuality, but sexuality devoid of love, compassion or even friendship. As Waldron explains, sex in the world of *Catch-22* is the only escape from a death culture, the only positive life force until the end of the novel, but the men's desire
for women "is purely fleshly, sensual, biological." 20

Every aspect of the men's lives—the metaphysical, the social and political, the psychological and the linguistic—work together to imprison them in a mechanical and false order. The men long for order and purpose; instead they find there is no order and no purpose. They long to be immortal, but daily face death; they wish to be free and find they are entrapped. The more they try to live as if the world fit their preconceptions about it, the more imprisoned they become.

Characteristically, man's social and psychological entrapment by bureaucracy, by statism, by collectivism and by despair is associated in the novel with mechanical metaphors. Scheisskopf's inhumanity and active complicity with the social machine which entraps men, for example, is demonstrated by his fantasies of his men "marching like mechanical puppets, marching in perfect lines with stiff, motionless arms." Typically, he considers "Nailing the twelve men in each rank to a long two-by-four beam of seasoned oak to keep them in line. [But] the plan was not feasible, for making a ninety-degree turn would have been impossible without nickel-alloy swivels inserted in the small of every man's back." 21

He also considers sinking "pegs of nickel-alloy into each man's thighbones and linking them to the wrist by strands of copper wire with exactly three inches of play" 22 to keep
hands from swinging more than three inches. He does not proceed with these plans only because of the shortage of copper wire, the difficulty of obtaining nickel-alloy and time. Appropriately, this inhumane man becomes the commanding officer of the military machine by the end of the novel.

Even though Scheisskopf cannot transform his men into robots in these artificial ways, two representative pictures in the novel show man as mechanically entrapped by the universe and consequently by society: (1) Yossarian in his airplane and (2) the soldier in white. Yossarian—who is reminded by the nurse at the hospital that he belongs to the U.S. government "just like a gear or a bedpan" (p. 300)—sees his plane as his mechanical prison, and centers his frustration upon the small crawlway obstructing his course to safety:

The crawlway was Yossarian's lifeline to outside from a plane about to fail, but Yossarian swore at it with seething antagonism, reviled it as an obstacle put there by providence as part of a plot that would destroy him. There was room for an additional escape hatch right there in the nose of a B-25, but there was no escape hatch. Instead there was the crawlway, and since the mess on the mission over Avignon, he had learned to detest every mammoth inch of it, for it slung him seconds and seconds away from his parachute....Yossarian longed to sit on the floor in a huddled ball right on top of the escape hatch....instead of hung out there in front like some goddam cantilevered goldfish in some goddam cantilevered goldfish
bowl while the goddam black tiers of flack were bursting and booming and billowing all around and above and below him in a climbing, cracking, staggered, banging, phantasmagorical, cosmological wickedness that jarred and tossed and shivered, clattered and pierced, and threatened to annihilate them all in one splinter of a second in one vast flash of fire. \( \text{p. 50} \)

This "cosmological wickedness", of course, is anything that threatens his life.

When we are introduced to Yossarian, he is explaining his paranoia to Clevinger,

"They're trying to kill me," Yossarian told him calmly.

"No one's trying to kill you," Clevinger cried.

"Then why are they shooting at me? Yossarian asked.

"They're shooting at everyone," Clevinger answered. They are trying to kill everyone.

"And what difference does that make?"

... . . . . . . . . . .

Clevinger really thought he was right, but Yossarian had proof, because strangers he didn't know shot at him with cannons every time he flew up into the air to drop bombs on them, and it wasn't funny at all. \( \text{p. 17} \)

At the hospital Major Sanderson diagnoses Yossarian, saying he has "a morbid aversion to dying." \( \text{p. 312} \) Indeed, Yossarian is obsessed with death:

There was too many dangers for Yossarian to keep track of. There was Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo, for example and they were all out to kill him. There was Lieutenant Scheisskopf
with his fanaticism for parades and there was the bloated colonel with his big fat mustache and his fanaticism for retribution, and they wanted to kill him, too. There was Appleby, Havermeyer, Black and Korn. There was Nurse Cramer and Nurse Duckett, who he was almost certain wanted him dead, and there was the Texan and the C.I.D. man, about whom he had no doubt. There were bartenders, bricklayers and bus conductors all over the world who wanted him dead, landlords and tenants, traitors and patriots, lynchers, leeches and lackeys, and they were all out to bump him off. That was the secret Snowden had spilled to him on the mission to Avignon. \[p. 177\]

Moreover, brute fear resulting from his awareness of death leads him to accept social and psychological entrapment in a machine; for example, he is so afraid of all the diseases he might get that he wishes he could live in a medical machine: "Yossarian had so many ailments to be afraid of that he was sometimes tempted to turn himself into the hospital for good and spend the rest of his life stretched out there inside an oxygen tent with a battery of specialists and nurses seated at one side of his bed twenty-four hours a day waiting for something to go wrong."

\[p. 178\]

Yet Yossarian's obsessive fear of death is the normal condition of the men at the camp. Both Hungry Joe and Doc Daneeka collect names of fatal diseases because they are so afraid of death \[p. 177\]. The chaplain is paralyzed by the fear that his wife and children might contract a fatal disease or die in an accident. \[p. 278\]
And, Dunbar is so obsessed with the idea of death that he spends his life cultivating boredom so that his life will at least seem longer.

Although the men of Catch-22 are entrapped by their fear of death, they are particularly frightened by the violent death which is the norm during war. Ironically, the men are determined to keep from being killed at Bologna or "die in the attempt." Their intention is irrational and humorous on the surface, but actually death in the war is more frightening than death at home or in the hospital. Explaining this phenomena, Yossarian makes a qualitative difference between death in the hospital and death in the airplane.

There was a much lower death rate inside the hospital than outside the hospital, and a much healthier death rate. Few people died unnecessarily. People knew a lot more about dying inside the hospital and made a much neater, more orderly job of it. They couldn't dominate Death inside the hospital, but they certainly made her behave. They had taught her manners. They couldn't keep Death out, but while she was in, she had to act like a lady. People gave up the ghost with delicacy and taste inside the hospital. There was none of that crude, ugly ostentation about dying that was so common outside the hospital. They did not blow up in mid-air like Kraft or the dead man in Yossarian's tent, or freeze to death in the blazing summertime the way Snowden had frozen to death after spilling his secret to Yossarian in the back of the plane.

Indeed, the men do not fear death itself so much as they fear the forced confrontation with the meaning of human
mortality forced upon them by the physical grotesqueness
of events such as the death of Snowden or Sampson.
Throughout the novel the reader is given partial glimpses
of the death of Snowden until his story accrues tremendous
meaning and impact, but the reader does not learn Snowden's
secret until Yossarian is psychologically ready to assimilate
the message conveyed by Snowden's death.

Heller artfully withholds the full narration of
Snowden's death until he has told the reader enough to
insure that his curiosity will motivate a close, attentive
reading of the passage. The death of Snowden succinctly
communicates the metaphysical reality underlying the novel.
The reader's understanding of this reality, therefore, is
so important to his comprehension of the rest of the novel
that for once Heller has Yossarian interpret an event:

Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret.
Drop him out a window and he'll fall. Set
fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll
rot like other kinds of garbage. The spirit
gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden's
secret. Ripeness was all. \( \sqrt{p. 450} \)

Even Snowden's allusive name is calculated to emphasize
Heller's point. Wordsworth climbed Mt. Snowden and there
found a comforting vision of a spirit "Of something far
more deeply interfused/a motion and a spirit, that impels/
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts/and rolls
through all living things." But Yossarian can find no
transcendental comfort to explain suffering and to make
life meaningful. He learns that man is "garbage" and that man is only one with nature, because both man and nature are just matter. Snowden is hardly described as a man at all in the novel. We only see him as he is dying, when his warmth (his only human attribute), is slipping away; as he freezes to death, he becomes a totally inhuman "thing."

Even nature seems hostile without a religious or metaphysical framework behind it more soothing than "man is matter." Retreating to the forest after Bologna, Yossarian looks at nature:

Along the ground suddenly, on both sides of the path, he saw dozens of new mushrooms the rain had spawned poking their nodular fingers up through the clammy earth like lifeless stalks of flesh, sprouting in such necrotic profusion everywhere he looked that they seemed to be proliferating right before his eyes. There were thousands of them... He hurried away from them with a shiver of eerie alarm and did not slacken his pace until the soil crumbled to dry sand beneath his feet and they had been left behind. He glanced back apprehensively, half expecting to find the limp white things crawling after him in sightless pursuit or snaking up through the treetops in a writhing and ungovernable mutative mass. (p. 148)

When Yossarian goes to the sea shore, he wonders "about all the people who had died under water... and he studied every floating object fearfully for some gruesome sign of Clevinger and Orr." (347) Ultimately, his worst fears are realized when parts of Sampson float to the shore.

(p. 347)

"The spirit gone" man is faced with the void.
Vance Ramsey suggests that men react to meaninglessness by renouncing their humanity, becoming cogs in the machine: "Part of the difference between Catch-22 and the usual war novel lies in this insistent world-view of a nothingness which threatens to invade even the selves of these men...the void is not only a constant presence; it also threatens to invade the self and it has its ally in a system which would make of these men anonymous and expendable cogs in a war machine so devoted to the purposes of men like Colonel Cathcart and General Peckem as to make the objective of winning the war almost an afterthought."21

Consequently, the metaphysical reality which entraps men leads them to accept an equally imprisoning social system. For example, Yossarian retreats to the hospital to save himself from the terrors of war, death and meaninglessness only to find that this more normal, more protected world offers insidious dangers that, while less obvious than violent death, are equally damaging to human personality. In order to protect themselves from the reality of the void, the men become uniform and interchangeable cogs in the machine, renouncing both thought and individuality. Indeed, they become so interchangeable that they become other men simply by exchanging beds with them: Dunbar explained, "Why don't you aim a little lower and try becoming Warrant Officer Homer Lumley for a while? Then you can have a father in the state legislature and a sister who's engaged
to a champion skier...'. Yossarian climbed up into his \\
Lumley's bed and became Warrant Officer Lumley...
\\nLater Dunbar led the way back to Yossarian's ward, 
where he thumbed A. Fortiori out of bed to become Dunbar 
again for a while." p. 300 That this confusion of 
human identity is potentially lethal is demonstrated when 
A. Fortiori is sent home instead of Yossarian because the 
psychiatrist who judged Yossarian insane confused his 
identity with the name written on his bed. p. 312

Having retreated from physical danger and from 
forced confrontation with the void, Yossarian is faced with 
the annihilation of identity in the anonymity of the 
hospital. There, the soldier in white warns Yossarian 
(through Dunbar) of a new danger. To Yossarian, he looks 
like a 'thing': "The soldier in white was like an unrolled 
bandage with a hole in it or like a broken block of stone 
in a harbor with a crooked zinc pipe jutting out. And, he 
functions as a useless machine:

Changing the jars for the soldier in white was 
no trouble at all, since the same clear fluid 
was dripped back inside him over and over again 
with no apparent loss. When the jar feeding 
the inside of his elbow was just about empty, 
the jar on the floor was just about full, the 
two were simply uncoupled from their respective 
hoses and reversed quickly so that the liquid 
could be dripped right back into him..."Why 
can't they hook the two jars up to each other 
and eliminate the middleman?" the artillery 
captain with whom Yossarian had stopped playing 
chess inquired. p. 174
The soldier in white performs two symbolic functions. First, as man at his most minimally human, he serves as a reminder that even in anonymity, man cannot escape Snowden's secret. While Snowden reveals that "man is matter," the soldier in white demonstrates that man is a machine which turns fuel into energy: when he stops doing so, his temperature drops and he is useless. Like Snowden, he is eventually just cold matter. But, second, and more important, the soldier in white embodies man as a product of a collective society. He is the man who, while not yet physically dead, no longer has a viable identity or life and who is a replaceable, interchangeable cog in the social machine.

Heller demonstrates dramatically as well as symbolically what happens to a man when the fear of death and of meaninglessness paralyzes his personality: men become machines, reacting predictably to any given stimuli. Hence, Heller's characters react predictably time and time again. Hungry Joe, for example, reacts to fear through his nightmares, his inverted response to the danger of flying, and his obsessive desire to pictorially preserve moments of sexuality. Similarly, Dobbs responds to fear by plotting murder while trying to convince the authorities that he is unfit to fly.

Even the villains of the novel are explained by their reactions to the metaphysical void. When Yossarian
wonders why men take self-seeking as their ultimate value,
Korn explains,

"And there you have the crux of the situation. Colonel Cathcart wants to be a general and I want to be a colonel, and that's why we have to send you home."

"Why does he want to be a general?"

"Why? For the same reason that I want to be a colonel. What else have we got to do? Everyone teaches us to aspire to higher things. A general is higher than a colonel, and a colonel is higher than a lieutenant colonel. p. 435. Underlining mine."

In other words, social and political ambition serve to mask the void by providing artificial, but time consuming, purpose. For Doc Daneeka and Milo making money (as well as self-pity) becomes their holy cause in the same way that military ambition becomes the primary purpose of Cathcart, Korn, Black, Dreidle and Peckum and in the way that parades create purpose for Scheisskopf.

While Joseph Waldmeir's contention that there are no villains in Catch-22 is an exaggeration, Heller does show us why the villains become villains: they are made inhuman by their attempts to forget the void. In other ways all the characters in Catch-22 prove their inhumanity. They have become part of the huge army bureaucracy in which men are simply interchangeable cogs, property of the U.S. government. In this world Cathcart's form letter becomes totally appropriate: "Dear Mr., Miss, or Mr. and Mrs.: Words cannot express the deepest personal grief I experienced
when your husband, son, father or brother was killed, wounded or reported missing in action." p. 289 Men are so interchangeable that Yossarian is asked to impersonate a dying soldier for the dead soldier's family (who had traveled from the states to watch him die) because the doctors do not want to disappoint them. The substitution is successful because one dying soldier is as good as another even to that soldier's family. Even when Yossarian corrects the family for calling him Guiseppe, saying his name is Yossarian, Guiseppe's brother quite seriously reprimands his parents for calling their son by the wrong name. pp. 188-189

While these men have become robots to escape uncertainty, the rigid, mechanical existence they lead contrasts with the irrationality of everything that happens to them. The universe itself is fundamentally irrational, since chance is the fundamental principle of life. Yet, the men in Catch-22 demand a logical order:

"That's what I mean," the warrant officer with malaria continued. "Why him? There just doesn't seem to be any logic to this system of rewards and punishment. Look what happened to me. If I had gotten syphilis or a dose of clap for my five minutes of passion on the beach instead of this damned mosquito bite, I could see some justice. But malaria? Malaria? Who can explain malaria as a consequence of fornication?" The warrant officer shook his head in numb astonishment.

"What about me?" Yossarian said. "I stepped out of my tent in Narrakech one night to get a
bar of candy and caught your dose of clap when that Wac I never even saw before hissed me into the bushes. All I really wanted was a bar of candy, but who could turn it down?"

"That sounds like my dose of clap, all right," the warrant officer agreed. "But I've still got somebody else's malaria. Just for once I'd like to see all these things sort of straightened out, with each person getting exactly what he deserves. It might give me some confidence in this universe." \[p. 175\]

Primarily the men find it irrational that some men have to die in the war and not others and that anyone has to die so that Cathcart can be a general.

With no logical explanation to make suffering and death meaningful and acceptable, each man looks for some answer. Nately believes in love and America; Major Major first tries friendship, then retreats from human relationships by creating his own adaptation of Catch-22; Doc Daneeka has self-pity; Cathcart, Dreedle and Peckman have ambition; Black has sadism; and Dunbar savors boredom.

The result of this retreat into single-minded purposefulness, however, is rigid inhumanity. Milo follows the principles of capitalism to the letter, doing anything to make a profit. Consequently, he bombs his own men, and starves them if they refuse to give him their pay. Similarly, Cathcart sacrifices all of Yossarian's friends to his religious pursuit of a promotion. Those who shelter themselves from fear by refusing to accept death or suffering as realities become callous: they cheerfully risk the
lives and the sanity of others because they refuse to acknowledge the reality of death and suffering. For example, Doc Daneeka places more importance on his loss of income than on Yossarian's life, and Milo is more impressed with personal economic disaster than with Snowden's death.

The easiest escape from dangerous and disturbing thought is a simple-minded respect for law and accepted morality. In Rome the M.P.'s exemplify the overly law-abiding person who obeys law with no regard for humanity. They arrest Yossarian who is AWOL, but ignore the murdered girl on the street. By acting with pure rationality, like computers programmed only to enforce army regulations, they have become mechanical men:

They apologized to Aarfy for intruding and led Yossarian away between them, gripping him under each arm with fingers as hard as steel manacles; at dawn they gave him a pail for a latrine and drove him to the airport where two more giant M.P.'s with clubs and white helmets were waiting at a transport plane whose engines were already warming up when they arrived, the cylindrical green cowlings oozing quivering beads of condensation. None of the M.P.'s said anything to each other either....Yossarian had never seen such granite faces. [p. 429]

In the society which results when men fear thought so much that they merely accept what others tell them, the law becomes merely a facade covering the basest instincts of men. Society becomes only an institution to perpetuate these instincts and to help the victims adapt to the order of Darwinian nature. Consequently, the victims share...
responsibility with their tormentors for their debasement and suffering because they do not reject their tormentors or the system that perpetuates suffering. This conspiracy of suffering is demonstrated most effectively in the "Eternal City" episodes; men beat dogs or children and Arfy murders, and no one intercedes to help the victim or to punish the tormentor. Even when Yossarian wishes to help a woman, he cannot, for she will do nothing to acknowledge her need for help. pp. 425-26 Furthermore, Yossarian realizes that the agencies of government are but further tormentors, who prey upon the weak and help the strong; the words "help police" "shouted in the street were not... intended as a call for the police but as a heroic warning from the grave by a doomed friend to everybody who was not a policeman with a club and a gun and a mob of other policemen with clubs and guns to back him up. 'Help! Police!' the man had cried, and he could have been shouting of danger." p. 425

This picture of mankind preying upon one another with the blessings of every institution of society is consistently maintained in the novel. Cathcart makes victims of his men with the blessings of the twenty-seventh headquarters. Milo victimizes everyone with blessings from almost all individuals and institutions; in some countries he is even worshipped as a religious figure. Furthermore, personal sadistic-masochistic relationships occur between
Cathcart and Korn, Dreedle and Moodus, Peckem and Cargill, Whitcomb and Chaplain Tappman, and Chief White Halfloat and Flume.

That men should accept such a world depends upon their inability to question it and upon that fundamental despair which makes change seem impossible. Men need both insight and hope in order to revolt, but the desire to escape the horror of accepting responsibility in a meaningless and seemingly cruel universe has paralyzed men, making them psychological cripples. Imprisoned by mortality, the men rush to a mechanistic society (in which the IBM machine is the ultimate authority) for psychological protection. In order to shelter men from fear, therefore, society enfeebles language, for it is through language that we understand and share our understanding of reality. When we devitalize language, we lose the ability to examine questions clearly. Furthermore, since men need values to live by, society establishes the state as a value to replace religion. As a result, citizens of that state lose their individual personalities so that they may work efficiently toward the good of the state. Belief in government, however, is not adequate to the needs of individuals. Consequently, men pattern their lives after the only mythic framework available in a society dominated by scientific theory; since science teaches that the principle of the natural world is survival of the fittest, self-interest
becomes the chief value of society.

Ordinarily, men remain completely sheltered from terror, never questioning the assumptions of society. As Yossarian realizes, "The only thing going on was a war, and no one seemed to notice but Yossarian and Dunbar. And when he tried to remind people, they drew away from him and thought he was crazy." \[\text{p. 17}\] A blanket of idealistic language so successfully shelters the men that they are as unable to comprehend death or fear as they are to value human dignity or worth. Hence, language is made into an object of deception rather than of expression, examination, or communication, and the dominant occupation of men and of society becomes "protective rationalization" \[\text{p. 372}\]

In short, whereas in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* Kesey posits a machinelike organization (the Combine) which entraps modern civilization, in *Catch-22* language and a mechanical use of logic entrap men. As Yossarian learns in the "Eternal City", "Catch-22 says they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing." \[\text{p. 416}\] He further realizes that "Catch-22 did not exist,...but it made no difference. What did matter was that everyone thought it existed, and that was much worse, for there was no object or text to ridicule or refute, to accuse, criticize, attack, amend, hate, revile, spit at, rip to shreds, trample upon or burn up." \[\text{p. 418}\]

Even though *Catch-22* does not exist as a law, it
exists as a linguistic construct, one accepted by the
citizens of the world it governs. Characteristically, the
provisions of Catch-22 are absurd. As John Hunt explains,
"Catch-22 is the catch by which an otherwise coherent and
rational world is rendered absurd; it is an elliptical
inner logic defeating all perception....the principle of
Catch-22 means that ultimately all sense is frustrated
...."^23

Although the logical provisions of Catch-22 seem to
provide provisions for freedom of action and of escape from
entrapment, they actually provide the rationale by which
men are totally entrapped. For example, in the most
notable example of Catch-22, the men are forced to keep
flying missions by its provisions.

There was only one catch and that was
Catch-22, which specified that a concern for
one's own safety in the face of dangers that
were real and immediate was the process of a
rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be
grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as
soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy
and would have to fly more missions. Orr
would be crazy to fly more missions and sane
if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to
fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and
didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he
was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very
deeply by the absolute simplicity of this
clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful
whistle. (pp. 46-47)

Learning of Catch-22 as a threat to his life and to his
humanity, Yossarian recognizes the mechanical quality of
the logic: "Yossarian saw it clearly in all its spinning
reasonableness. There was an elliptical precision about its perfect pairs of parts that was graceful and shocking."

Other provisions of Catch-22 are equally absurd, contradictory, and mechanical, and each is a rationalization for brute power, which entraps and victimizes those without power. For example, although the Twenty-seventh Air Force says the men only have to fly forty missions, "regulations say you have to obey every order. That's the catch. Even if the colonel were disobeying a Twenty-seventh Air Force order by making you fly more missions, you'd still have to fly them, or you'd be guilty of disobeying an order of his." In the educational sessions "the only people permitted to ask questions were those who never did." Captain Black even employs the principle of Catch-22 to his advantage in enforcing his great Loyalty Oath Crusade: "And this whole program is voluntary, Milo--don't forget that. The men don't have to sign Pitchard and Wren's loyalty oath if they don't want to. But we need you to starve them to death if they don't. It's just like Catch-22."

Other examples of false logic--mechanical logic which has no relationship to sense data, but merely to a linguistic system--pervade the novel. For example, at the chaplain's trial, the chaplain is found guilty of signing "Washington Irving" to censored letters because his signature does not match
that of Yossarian's scrawled "I long for you tragically, A. T. Tappman." As the Major charges, "a person who'll lie about his own handwriting will lie about anything."

Furthermore, by a clever twist of language the chaplain is found guilty of "the commission of crimes and infractions we don't even know about yet...If they're his crimes and infractions, he must have committed them"

And when the chaplain questions Colonel Korn about the twelve men who were killed on a mission, many of whom had completed seventy missions, Korn replies, "Would it be any less terrible if they had all been new men."

Rightly, the chaplain is confounded by this "immoral logic."

Most often the misuse of language is aimed at victimizing someone (as in Catch-22) for personal advantage. However, this tactic only works when the victim believes in the power and authenticity of language. Clevinger, for example, is found guilty after arguing a verbal point (the difference between saying "You cannot find me guilty" and "You cannot find me guilty of the offense with which I am charged and still be faithful to the cause of...justice."

Clevinger argues a case which would be valid in a less absurd world, but in a world in which language is used to cloak meanings rather than to express them, to thwart communication rather than to aid it and to obscure any relationship between ideas and the real sensory world,
Clevinger's arguments are mere nonsense. In this world those who are either ignorant of language or who recognize the absurdity of applying logical language to an irrational world are more effective in combatting their tormentors than those who believe in rational language. For example, Nately's whore fares better in a verbal contest than Clevinger does because she does not acknowledge the power of the word ("uncle"). And Dunbar effectively combats her tormentors by employing absurd, completely illogical language ("Your toes are dirty"). Furthermore, in a world in which the meanings of words are either unimportant or obscured with the intent to deceive, Yossarian's censoring of all words but "A, an and the" because "that erected more dynamic intralinear tensions... and in just about every case left a message far more universal" is a logical extension of the tendency to divorce words from any relationship to the real world.

Most of the characters in the novel, however, acknowledge the power and authenticity of language as a closed nonreferential system. Therefore, language becomes so important that Wintergreen can effectively control generals and their men because he runs the mimeograph machine. Colonel Cathcart, for example, cannot achieve his objectives because Wintergreen "always distorted, destroyed, rejected or misdirected any correspondence by, for or about Colonel Cathcart that might do him credit."
When experience conflicts with linguistic reality, men disregard experience. For example, the men avoid Doc Daneeka after he is officially dead, and Mudd's gear cannot be removed from Yossarian's tent because Mudd never officially arrived at headquarters. Characteristically, language is equated with reality: Captain Black believes, for example, "The more loyalty oaths a person signed, the more loyal he was." \[ p. 117 \] And, ultimately, language is attributed with a magical power to create reality before the fact: hence, during the Siege of Bologna, Captain Black places a sign on the medical tent, reading "CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, DEATH IN THE FAMILY." \[ p. 112 \], demonstrating the officers' belief that they can "order sick call out of existence" \[ p. 113 \] with a sign; similarly, Major Major's psychological problems can be traced back to the traumatic "Harsh and stunning realization that was forced upon him at so tender an age, the realization that he was not, as he had always been led to believe, Caleb Major, but instead was some total stranger named Major Major about whom he knew absolutely nothing and about whom nobody else had ever heard before." \[ p. 87 \] Moreover, his playmates reject him because they share his instinctive belief that linguistic reality is more reliable than experience \[ p. 87 \]

In a world in which language is equated with reality, words such as patriotism, duty, honor, courage, and
loyalty are employed to dupe the men into risking their lives for, for example, a tighter bomb pattern. Hence, Major Danby—a college professor who believes in the world of words—explains to Yossarian that "it would be for the good of the country to have you found guilty and put in prison, even though you are innocent," and that he works along with Cathcart and Korn "because it's my duty." \[\text{p. 454}\] But Yossarian, understanding that all generalizations must correspond to particulars, replied "Between me and every ideal I always find Scheisskopfs, Peckems, Korns and Cathcarts. And that sort of changes the ideal....When I look up, I see people cashing in on every decent impulse and every human tragedy." \[\text{p. 455}\]

Because Yossarian's perception of reality is based upon sense data not upon the verbal pronouncements of the machine, his concept of reality differs from that of those wholly entrapped in the world governed by Catch-22. Indeed, his views seem insane in the context of that world. Not surprisingly, therefore, in Catch-22 the sanity of Yossarian is questioned time and time again, while he in turn concludes that everyone else in the squadron is insane (except Dunbar). In order to prove that Yossarian is insane (paranoid), Clevinger lists his symptoms: "an unreasonable belief that everybody around him was crazy, a homicidal impulse to machine-gun strangers, retrospective falsification, an unfounded suspicion that people hated
him and were conspiring to kill him." (p. 21) Yossarian agrees with the list, mentally noting that "everywhere he looked was a nut, and it was all a sensible young gentleman like himself could do to maintain his perspective amid so much madness." (p. 21) The hospital psychiatrist declares Yossarian insane, but Yossarian concludes that his whole society is crazy, since "all over the world" "men went mad and were rewarded with medals." (p. 16)

Finally, the question of sanity reduces to the discrepancy between the metaphysics and the resulting ethic of the mechanistic, death-aligned world governed by Catch-22 and the metaphysics and resulting ethic of the fool who, as fertility figure, promotes life. Nately's discussions with the old man in the brothel cogently reflect this disparity:

"I don't believe anything you tell me," Nately replied, with a bashful mitigating smile. "The only thing I do believe is that America is going to win the war."

"You put so much stock in winning wars," the grubby iniquitous old man scoffed. "The real trick lies in losing wars.... we will certainly come out on top again if we succeed in being defeated."

Nately gaped at him in undisguised befuddlement. "Now I really don't understand what you're saying. You talk like a madman."

"But I live like a sane one. I was a fascist when Mussolini was on top, and I am an anti-fascist now that he has been deposed."
I was fanatically pro-German when the Germans were here to protect us against the Americans, and now that the Americans are here to protect us against the Germans I am fanatically pro-American. I can assure you, my outraged young friend... that you and your country will have a no more loyal partisan in Italy than me—but only as long as you remain in Italy."

"But," Nately cried out in disbelief, "You're a turncoat! A time-server! A shameless unscrupulous opportunist!"

"I am a hundred and seven years old," the old man reminded him suavely.

"Don't you have any principles?"

"Of course not."

"No morality?"

"Oh, I am a very moral man," the villainous old man assured him with satiric seriousness, stroking the bare hip of a buxom black-haired girl... [p. 252]

The old man eloquently summarizes the philosophy popularized in the slogan "Make love not war," and in the context of Catch-22, what he says makes good sense. The basic morality of a country or of an individual should be based upon the life force in order for the man and the species to survive and to enjoy their survival. Although the old man's version of a morality based upon the positive life force is a limited one, consisting merely of sexuality and bare survival, he is more "sane" than those who willingly die for Colonel Cathcart or for a tighter bomb pattern.

Neither the old man nor Yossarian make many converts to their position; yet Dr. Stubbs and Dunbar summarize the
judgment of the novel:

"He's √\textit{Yossarian's} √ not so crazy,"
Dunbar said. "He swears he's not going to
fly to Bologna."

"That's just what I mean," Dr. Stubbs
answered. "That crazy bastard may be the
only sane one left." (p. 114)

Ultimately, \textit{Catch-22} not only maintains that to be crazy
even to refuse to die for a principle (especially a
"principle" that is merely a rationale for another's gain)
is moral, but also suggests that to be insane is to be in
tune with a universe that is fundamentally irrational and
chaotic, while to be a fool is to be at home in a universe
governed by a "bungling trickster." Hence, when Yossarian
superstitiously believes he can change reality by moving
the bomb line over Bologna, he is acting irrationally, but
his action is at least temporally effective. In fact,
the most positive weapons he uses against Cathcart are all
considered to be irrational: he moans, goes naked to
receive a medal, walks backwards carrying his gun to
enforce his refusal to fly more missions, and ignores
self-interest to be fair to his friends.

Since insanity, irrationality, and foolishness seem
wiser and more effective than sanity and rationality in
the world of \textit{Catch-22}, perhaps laughter is more effective
than high seriousness. And, perhaps, therefore, Heller
wrote a funny book about those who cannot see the humor
in a universe which is a practical joke (at best) in order
to teach his audience to laugh at themselves and at that universe—not without the realization that death and suffering are real and not without the realization that "man is matter", but also with the awareness that Yossarian shares with us at the close of the novel: if man transcends despair, life can be "fun". 463  Perhaps man only despairs because he interprets his situation wrongly; if so, he might do better to forget the view of the worldly-wise man and learn to see the world with the eyes of the fool.

The Mentors: The Fool as Yankee Peddler, Rebel and Tinker

Before Yossarian can learn the wisdom of the fool he must understand the perniciousness of the system of which he is a part. He learns this partly from Cathcart and Korn's callousness and ambition, but he also learns from Milo. Then he must learn how to fight that system and to preserve himself from either active or passive corruption by that system. The purpose of this section, therefore, is to examine those characters who help Yossarian evolve from protagonist to hero. Most central to his education are his three primary mentors: Milo, Dunbar and Orr. Therefore, the following discussion will analyze their qualifications as mentors and their specific contributions to Yossarian's education. Then, some small attention will be given to Nately's whore, who acts as a conscience to
Yossarian, preventing him from becoming part of a pernicious system and, finally, two characters, who are mentors not to Yossarian, but to the reader, will briefly be considered.

In order to understand Heller's mentors, it is necessary to realize that each of the three most important mentors to Yossarian illustrate important characteristics of the Yankee. Milo illustrates the most important qualities of the Yankee as peddler, Dunbar, the Yankee as rebel and Orr, the Yankee as tinker. According to Constance Rourke, the Yankee (prototype for Uncle Sam) is America's most endemic folk hero. Defining the attributes of Jonathan, one of the first versions of the Yankee, Rourke comments: "The Yankee Jonathan...gave savor to the notion that only a rough sincerity was of consequence in America. Introduced for the purpose of comic relief, he might easily have become a puppet but...Jonathan drew the breath of life. Astute and simple, gross and rambling, rural to the core, he talked 'nat'r'l--talked his way through the scenes, and became a presiding genius. His appearance was dynamic...[He might appear in many guises] But he was always the symbolic American."$

Introducing Milo, Heller emphasizes his (Jonathan-like) sincerity and his representative American character (with all due irony). Furthermore, Milo has a physical resemblance to Jonathan (picture a young Uncle Sam); even
Milo's red hair may be explained by the line about the Yankee from "Yankee Doodle" which suggests the appearance of the Yankee's hair, "Corn cobs twist your hair."

Yossarian turned slowly to gaze at Milo with probing distrust. He had a simple, sincere face that was incapable of subtlety or guile, an honest, frank face with disunited large eyes, rusty hair, black eyebrows and an unfortunate reddish-brown mustache. Milo had a long, thin nose with sniffing, damp nostrils heading sharply off to the right, always pointing away from where the rest of him was looking. It was the face of a man of hardened integrity who could no more consciously violate the moral principles on which his virtue rested than he could transform himself into a despicable toad. One of these moral principles was that it was never a sin to charge as much as the traffic would bear.

Discussing the Yankee as peddler, Constance Rourke writes:

A close view of his figure brought consternation to men and women lounging at the tavern or near the sheds that clustered around the planter's gate. "I'll be shot if it ain't a Yankee!" cried one. The yard was suddenly vacant. Doors banged and windows were shut. The peddler moved relentlessly nearer, reached a doorway, and laid his pack on the half hatch. The inhabitants had barred their doors and double-locked their money-tills in vain...In the end he invaded every house. Every one bought...he was said to have sold a load of warming-pans in the West Indies, and when he arrived in a Canadian village with a load of fashionable white paper hats and found no market because of cholera, he ground them up in a mortar and made them into pills. He always traveled alone; he declined to talk politics; he never drank or bet on cocks. When the barter was over he lapsed into an image as wooden as his ware.... The farther he receded from view the more
completely he changed into a sly thin ogre, something greater than human size. He was a myth, a fantasy."

Milo's power as a salesman, his amoral belief that it is fair to sell anyone anything no matter how useless or even harmful the item might be, his mythic stature, and the inability of Americans to resist his appeal, all suggest that Milo is a modern reincarnation of the Yankee Peddler. Although Rourke's description of the Yankee certainly is ominous enough in a humorous way, the Yankee's selling ground paper hats as pills for cholera is mild compared to Milo's bombing his own base, threatening to starve his own men, or replacing the morphine on Yossarian's plane with a note, reading "What's good for M & M Enterprises is good for the country, Milo Minderbinder." p. 446]

Milo, of course, is not just a reincarnation of the Yankee Peddler, but Heller's interpretation of what the ideal of the Yankee Peddler has become in today's world; through Milo, Heller provides a bitter critique of capitalism. For example, under Milo's command, "Courage, Might, Justice, Truth, Liberty, Love, Honor and Patriotism" (once painted on the sides of American airplanes) are replaced by "M & M ENTERPRISES, FINE FRUITS AND PRODUCE." p. 259] Simply stated, Heller suggests that capitalism, the profit motive and the desire for physical comfort and pleasure have superseded all former American values.

Because Americans worship materialism, comfort and
pleasure, they excuse callousness, cruelty, and even murder in the service of greed by invoking the sacred principles of capitalistic free enterprise:

This time Milo had gone too far. Bombing his own men and planes was more than even the most phlegmatic observer could stomach, and it looked like the end for him. High-ranking government officials poured in to investigate. Newspapers inveighed against Milo with glaring headlines, and Congressmen denounced the atrocity in stentorian wrath and clamored for punishment...Decent people everywhere were affronted, and Milo was all washed up until he opened his books to the public and disclosed the tremendous profit he had made. He could reimburse the government for all the people and property he had destroyed and still have enough money left over to continue buying Egyptian cotton...And the sweetest part of the whole deal was that there really was no need to reimburse the government at all.

"In a democracy, the government is the people," Milo explained. "We're people, aren't we? So we might just as well keep the money and eliminate the middleman." \[ p. 266 \]

Milo is a master of the invocation of sacred capitalistic principles to rationalize cruelty, masking greed with rhetoric (in the American tradition) so successfully that he becomes a culture hero in the world governed by Catch-22. When Milo, "with a devotion to purpose above and beyond the call of duty...raised the price of food in his mess halls so high that all officers and enlisted men had to turn over all their pay to him in order to eat," he valiantly defends "the historic right of free men to pay as much as they had to for the things they needed in order
to survive. Milo had been caught red-handed in the act of plundering his countrymen, and, as a result, his stock had never been higher."

Although Yossarian does not believe in Milo's sacred principles, he is not quite without guilt in the history of Milo either, for although he refuses to go into business with Milo, he allows him to use his letter authorizing an unlimited supply of free fruit from the mess hall. Thus, Yossarian's naiveté, his inability to imagine the perniciousness of the use to which Milo could put that letter, helps Milo begin his empire. Even later, Yossarian, who has learned the art (at least in mimicry) of "protective rationalization", helps Milo learn how to use the government for profit. In the tree during Snowden's funeral when Milo complains to Yossarian because he cannot get rid of his cotton, Yossarian sarcastically suggests, "Why don't you sell your cotton to the government?"

Milo vetoed the idea brusquely. "It's a matter of principle," he explained firmly. "The government has no business in business, and I would be the last person in the world to ever try to involve the government in a business of mine. But the business of government is business," he remembered alertly, and continued with elation. "Calvin Coolidge said that, and Calvin Coolidge was a President, so it must be true. And the government does have the responsibility of buying all the Egyptian cotton I've got that no one else wants so that I can make a profit, doesn't it?..."But how will I get the government to do it?"
"Bribe it," Yossarian said. "You make the bribe big enough and they'll find you. Just make sure you do everything right out in the open. Let everyone know exactly what you want and how much you're willing to pay for it...."

"If you run into trouble, just tell everybody that the security of the country requires a strong domestic Egyptian-cotton speculating industry."

"It does," Milo informed his solemnly. "A strong Egyptian-cotton speculating industry means a much stronger America...."

"You see?" said Yossarian. "You're much better at it than I am. You almost make it sound true."

This exposé of American capitalism is only one of many in the novel (consider Major Major's father, for example), perhaps because in the world of Catch-22 capitalistic free enterprise is simply one more version of the rationales employed to cloak self-interest in the guise of virtue. Although supporters of capitalism have traditionally defended their economic principles by references to Darwin, suggesting that in human society, as in nature, only the fittest do (and should) survive, self-interest is a perversion of the natural instinct of self-preservation. When men accept self-interest as their primary value, they become as perverted as Colonel Cathcart who would not consider "wasting his time and energy making love to a beautiful woman unless there was something in it for him."
substitution of materialism and ambition for normal sexual interests recurs throughout the novel. Aarfy, for example, refuses women or rapes and murders, but he is "an authority on the subject of true love because he had already fallen in love with Nately's father and with the prospect of working for him after the war." (p. 296). Throughout the novel Milo never reveals any interest in a woman. However, as an important member of a depersonalized mechanistic society, he appropriately falls in love with a ticker tape (p. 244), buying an entire cotton crop as a result. The consequence of even this perverse love is the threat of economic disaster, but Milo financially recovers by bombing his own men. Thus, while it is appropriate that in a death-aligned culture man loves inanimate objects, it is just as appropriate that this love helps cause actual death, transforming living beings into inanimate material.

Yossarian learns from Milo's example that the system of which he is a part is cruel, callous and inhumane and, further, that by underestimating the evil of this system, he has actually aided its dissemination. But Milo cannot provide a positive morality. So, Yossarian must look to other mentors to learn how to live. Although Heller exposes the moral bankruptcy of the Yankee Peddler as archetypal American Capitalist through his portrayal of Milo, he does not reject all aspects of the Yankee as folk hero. The
Yankee as capitalist has perverted his heritage—or perhaps he reveals that his heritage was deeply flawed to begin with. But through the narrative of *Catch-22* Heller examines the American experience, carefully defining what aspects of that heritage are still viable. Two other primary attributes of the Yankee must be considered in order to discover if there can be any salvation through this folk hero: the Rebel and the Tinker.

Yossarian's first positive mentor is Dunbar, who Waldron describes as an "allegorical figure of rebellion" "like an absurd angel come to lead Yossarian in his revolt against *Catch-22.*" Dunbar is one of the only characters in the novel who is never described. We know very little about him at all, but we know he is important because he is the first character in the novel to revolt in any way. Although Dunbar lacks the most distinctive traits which identify the Yankee, he illustrates the facelessness, the humor, and the rebellion which, according to Constance Rourke, are primary characteristics of the Yankee:

The Revolution, with its cutting of ties, its movement, its impulses toward freedom, seemed to set one portion of the scant population free from its narrow matrix.... the Yankee—bounded up with his irreverent tune, ready to move over the continent or to the ends of the earth, springing clean away from the traditional faith, at least so far as any outward sign appeared in his growing portrait. He could even take the Revolution as a joke; most of his songs about it streamed
nonsense. He had left the deeper emotions behind or had buried them.

Proof of his anterior experiences remained in his use of the mask... No doubt the mask would prove useful in a country where the Puritan was still a power and the risks of pioneering by no means over. The Yankee retained it. 27

Although we cannot penetrate Dunbar's mask, we do know that he is the one character in the novel, besides Yossarian, who is concerned enough about bombing a civilian village to argue with Korn about the mission \( p. 336 \) and, when argument fails, to quietly and unobtrusively rebel by disobeying orders:

Yossarian no longer gave a damn where his bombs fell, although he did not go as far as Dunbar, who dropped his bombs hundreds of yards past the village and would face a court-martial if it could ever be shown he had done it deliberately. Without a word even to Yossarian, Dunbar had washed his hands of the mission. \( p. 339 \)

Soon after this incident Yossarian begins to follow Dunbar's lead, refusing to follow inhumane or senseless orders and ultimately refusing to fly.

His apprenticeship to Dunbar begins earlier, however. In the first chapter, for example, Yossarian picks up Dunbar's lead in order to torment the Texan, repeating what Dunbar says in different words or elaborating on Dunbar's comments. 28

"You murdered him," said Dunbar.
"You killed him," said Yossarian....
"You killed him because he was a nigger,"
Dunbar said.

"The sergeant smuggled him in," Dunbar said,
"The communist sergeant," said Yossarian,
"And you knew it." [*p. 11*]

Dunbar here as elsewhere teaches Yossarian that absurd and
humorous speech can be an effective means of rebellion; it
disorient the enemy and helps restore personal sanity
by relieving one's anger and frustration.

Similarly, when Nately's friends attempt to save
his girlfriend from her tormentors, Dunbar disorients the
officials with irrational remarks, again teaching the value
of absurd speech, although in this passage no one actively
follows his lead.

A nude, ridiculous man with a blushing
appendectomy scar appeared in the doorway
suddenly and bellowed, "What's going on here?"

"Your toes are dirty," Dunbar said.

The man covered his groin with both hands
and shrank from view...*then* a man who
was very distinguished-looking from the neck
up padded into view imperiously on bare
feet.

"Here, you, stop that," he barked. "Just
what do you men think you're doing?"

"Your toes are dirty," Dunbar said to him.

The man covered his groin as the first had
done and disappeared. Nately charged after
him. [*pp. 362-63*]

Furthermore, in the same manner, Dunbar shows
Yossarian how to appear insane as he earlier taught Yossarian
to feign illness to escape combat. Again his use of
irrational language is purposeful and effective. And, here again we can see Yossarian actively following Dunbar's lead.

"Yes, he really is crazy, Doc," Dunbar assured him. "Every night he dreams he's holding a live fish in his hands."

The doctor stopped in his tracks with a look of elegant amazement and distaste, and the ward grew still. "He does what?" He demanded.

"He dreams he's holding a live fish in his hand."

"What kind of fish?" the doctor inquired sternly of Yossarian.

"I don't know," Yossarian answered. "I can't tell one kind of fish from another."

"In which hand do you hold them?"

"It varies," answered Yossarian.

"It varies with the fish," Dunbar added helpfully. \[pp. 302-03\]

As a consequence of this discussion, a psychiatrist is sent to interview Yossarian; he declares him insane, and orders his return to the states. Therefore, Dunbar's tactics almost worked—and, they would have, if he and Yossarian had not become invisible men by adopting variable, interchangeable identities.

Dunbar's most important function as mentor to Yossarian, however, is to define the metaphysical, social, and psychological reality in the world governed by Catch-22. He continually mutters, "There is no God," acutely aware of meaninglessness in a world without a benevolent design.
Hence, mortality is his most important reality.

Dunbar loved shooting skeet because he hated every minute of it and the time passed so slowly. He had figured out that a single hour on the skeet-shooting range with people like Havermeyer and Appleby could be worth as much as eleven-times-seventeen years.

"I think you're crazy," was the way Clevinger has responded to Dunbar's discovery....

"Do you know how long a year takes when it's going away?" Dunbar repeated to Clevinger. "This long." He snapped his fingers. "A second ago you were stepping into college with your lungs full of fresh air. Today you're an old man."

"Old?" asked Clevinger with surprise. "What are you talking about?"

"You're inches away from death every time you go on a mission. How much older can you be at your age? A half minute before that you were stepping into high school.... They go rocketing by so fast. How the hell else are you ever going to slow time down?" Dunbar was almost angry when he finished.

"Well, maybe it is true," Clevinger conceded. "Maybe a long life does have to be filled with many unpleasant conditions if it's to seem long. But in that event, who wants one?"

"I do," Dunbar told him.

"Why?" Clevinger asked.

"What else is there?" 

Dunbar is more knowledgeable about his metaphysical situation than most of the other men and even has some insight into ways of coping with it. For a time he fights despair with absurd clowning, jokes, rebellion, and cultivated boredom. However, he lacks the most important
value required for a man to effectively survive: he lacks hope and faith. Since the only person who would hope or believe life to be good in the world of Catch-22 is the fool, or an anachronistic Yankee, and since Dunbar is rational and modern, he cannot function as a savior in the novel.

When Dunbar perceives the secret of the soldier in white, he despairs. Randall Waldrum concludes, "Finally, Dunbar's function as the arch-opponent of the machine and the leader in condemning its evils is made clear by his discovery that there is really no one inside the soldier in white's diligently cared for shell of plaster and tubing. For exposing this horrible secret of the meaningless of life in the Catch-22 world, Dunbar is 'disappeared.'" Exposing the emptiness of life in the world of Catch-22 is Dunbar's primary function in the novel. However, that it is necessary for those in power to "disappear" him because of his knowledge is secondary to his own need to disappear.

Even before Dunbar discovers that no one is inside the soldier in white— that human personality is now nonexistent—his despair is growing. As the narrator comments, "Dunbar seldom laughed any more and seemed to be wasting away. He snarled belligerently at superior officers, even at Major Danby, and was crude and surly and profane even in front of the chaplain." Having sacrificed the enjoyment of life to his fear of metaphysical nothingness and having taught himself and others to be
interchangeable and anonymous men, he needs to believe in his course of action. But when he realizes that by becoming an invisible man and by giving up any enjoyment of life he has become like the soldier in white, his life is over; consequently, he despairs. Thus, while Yossarian learns from Dunbar how to understand his metaphysical, social and psychological position, how to escape physical death by adapting to the machine world, and how to use the mask and disruptive humor to rebel in limited ways, he cannot learn from Dunbar how to transcend his situation. Finally, Dunbar offers him only despair. Without hope, Dunbar could not even continue his rebellion. Even Dunbar's strongest rebellion was ineffective. While he refused to drop his bombs on civilians, he did so quietly and unobtrusively, not even disrupting the system that demanded that those bombs be dropped. Furthermore, his disruptive clowning is not effective, finally, because although he employs the tactics of the fool, he does not share the beliefs that inform the fool's actions. Since his clowning grows from cynicism, he can no longer play the clown when his cynicism turns into terror.

Since rebellion without hope is as impossible as rebellion without knowledge, Yossarian needs a mentor who combines hope and knowledge with the will to rebel. Such a man is the Yankee Tinker—the personification of Yankee Ingenuity. But, ironically, Yossarian does not recognize
his mentor when he sees him. He sees Orr as just a "homely freak" who "hasn't got brains enough to be unhappy."

When Yossarian finally discovers that he has been fooled by Orr's mask, he realizes that the mask is an indispensable weapon of the Yankee Tinker, declaring his own need for the mask: "Da'bby bring me buck teeth, too, and a valve to fix and a look of stupid innocence that nobody would ever suspect of any cleverness."  

Orr's competence as a tinker is undeniable:

Orr was an eccentric midget, a freakish, likeable dwarf with a smutty mind and a thousand valuable skills that would keep him in a low income group all his life. In opposition to the Yankee Peddler, he never uses his talents to exploit anyone else. He could use a soldering iron and hammer two boards together so that the wood did not split and the nails did not bend. He could drill holes. He had built a good deal more in the tent while Yossarian was away in the hospital. He had filed or chiseled a perfect channel in the cement so that the slender gasoline line was flush with the floor as it ran to the stove from the tank he had built outside on an elevated platform. He had constructed andirons for the fireplace out of excess bomb parts and had filled them with stout silver logs, and he had framed with stained wood the photographs of girls with big breasts he had torn out of cheesecake magazines and hung over the mantelpiece. Orr could open a can of paint. He could mix paint, thin paint, remove paint. He could chop wood and measure things with a ruler. He knew how to build fires. He could dig holes, and he had a real gift for bringing water for them both in cans and canteens from the tanks near the mess hall. He could engross himself in an inconsequential task for hours without growing restless or bored, as oblivious to fatigue as the stump of a tree, and almost at taciturn. He had an uncanny knowledge of wildlife and was
not afraid of dogs or cats or beetles or moths,
or of foods like scrod or trips.\[p. 322]\]

Although Yossarian reacts with impatient desperation as Orr patiently works on a small problem for hours, Orr's patience, ingenuity and mastery of the machinery of his world are the qualities that make him capable of rowing to Sweden.

Furthermore, that Orr's American heritage is important to our understanding of his character is revealed to us by Heller through his narration of Orr's history.

When I was a kid," Orr replied, "I used to walk around all day with crab apples in my cheeks. One in each cheek."

"I wanted apple cheeks," Orr repeated. "Even when I was a kid I wanted apple cheeks someday, and I decided to work at it until I got them, and by God, I did work at it until I got them, and that's how I did it, with crab apples in my cheeks all day long." He giggled again. "One in each cheek."

"Why did you want apple cheeks?"

"I didn't want apple cheeks." Orr said. "I wanted big cheeks, I didn't care about the color so much, but I wanted them big. I worked at it just like one of those crazy guys you read about who go around squeezing rubber balls all day long just to strengthen their hands. In fact, I was one of those crazy guys. I used to walk around all day with rubber balls in my hands, too." \[p. 214]\]

Here Orr reveals that he is as American as apple pie, Ben Franklin or self-improvement courses, believing that "with courage and shrewdness" a man can accomplish anything. With the same confidence that he used to develop apple
cheeks, he sets out to escape from the world of Catch-22. Hence, he masters the technology of the mechanical society without adopting its self-serving morality, and he provides an alternative morality based not upon self-serving greed but upon self-preservation, including the preservation of one's life, personality, and compassion. Therefore, his rowing away to a new life on the U.S. life raft is similar to the Indian fishing off the dam in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Both build a new life harking back to an older one in the midst of the machinery of the modern world.

Theoretically, Orr could have saved himself without serving as a mentor to Yossarian or to the other men, but he is able to lead by his example because he has established himself as a folk hero who accomplishes legendary feats: typically, he is distinguished by both sexual conquests and successful conquests of nature. He gains some fame from the extraordinary event in the brothel, and he increases his notoriety by refusing to explain why the girl kept hitting him over the head with her shoe. Not until the end of the novel does Yossarian realize that, in the great American tradition, Orr paid her to do it. He hoped a head wound would help him to escape combat—or at least to escape conscious knowledge of the horror of the world around him.

His most legendary feat, however, is his flawless
crash landing in the ocean. He sees that the men are safe on the raft and then he proceeds to make them comfortable.

"I swear, you should have seen him sitting up there on the rim of the raft like the captain of a ship while the rest of us just watched him and waited for him to tell us what to do.... Orr began opening up compartments in the raft, and the fun really began. First he found a box of chocolate bars...some soup...Can't you see him serving us tea as we sat there soaking wet....then Orr proceeds to fish for cod because cod can safely be eaten raw/...The next thing he found was this little blue car about the size of a Dixie-cup spoon, and, sure enough, he began rowing with it, trying to move all nine hundred pounds of us with that little stick...And that's how he spent the time until the launch picked us up about thirty minutes later, sitting there with that baited fishing line out behind him, with the compass in his lap and the map spread out on his knees, and paddling away as hard as he could with that dinky blue car as though he was speeding to Majorca, Jesus!"/ pp. 317-18/

Through his depiction of Orr, therefore, Heller dramatizes the American qualities that are still viable--optimism, ingenuity and rebellion, concluding that the solutions to the individual problems of America can be found in the American tradition. Orr even reflects traditional American independence and individuality, planning and executing his escape alone, thereby proving a man can still be an individual in a collective society--if he divorces himself mentally and, when necessary, physically from that society.

The Yankee Tinker, however, is but one type of the fool, and traits associated with the generic fool are as
crucial to Orr's success as the specialized traits of the
Tinker. To be sure that we recognize Orr as a fool, Heller
has Yossarian speak of him as a "Moron", an "Imbecile", and
a "homely freak". \( \text{pp. } 317, 319 \text{ and } 234 \) Like many
traditional fools, Orr is unusually small and physically
grotesque;\(^{30}\) he is a "grinning Pygmy" \( \text{p. } 18 \) who "had a
raw bulgy face, with hazel eyes squeezing from their
sockets like matching brown halves of marbles and thick,
wavy particolored hair sloping up to a peak on the top of
his head like a pomaded pup tent." \( \text{p. } 234 \)

Throughout most of the novel Yossarian recognizes
that Orr is a fool, but he does not realize the potential
effectiveness of the fool. He thinks that Orr is harmless
and (before Orr's commanding the rescue) at least
psychologically vulnerable:

Yossarian felt sorry for Orr. Orr was so small
and ugly... Who would protect a warmhearted,
simple-minded gnome like Orr from the rowdies
and cliques and from expert athletes like
Appleby who had flies in their eyes and would
walk right over him with swaggering conceit
and self-assurance every chance they got?.....
Orr was a happy and unsuspecting simpleton
with a mass of wavy polychromatic hair...Orr
was an eccentric midget, a freakish and likable
dwarf. \( \text{p. } 321 \)

But Yossarian is wrong about Orr's vulnerability. Even the
example he chooses to convince us that Orr needs his care
is calculated to make us realize that Orr can take care of
himself. The one time Orr is bested in athletics (in a
game of ping-pong) by Appleby, he defends himself with
splendid irrationality: "Orr leaped on the top of the table after hurling his paddle and came sailing off the other end in a running broad jump with both feet planted squarely on Appleby's face." [p. 57] In fact, Orr defeats Appleby more successfully than Appleby ever defeats anyone, but again he employs the characteristic irrationality of the fool, accusing Appleby of being blind to things as they really are because "he's got flies in his eyes." [p. 47] Unfortunately for Appleby, the accusation sticks, for his friends all begin to discuss (and to accept as real) the "flies in his eyes."

Orr's other fool-ish characteristics are closely related: his humor, his faith and his optimism. While the other characters in the novel are so paralyzed by greed or by fear that they never laugh, Orr is characterized by his constant giggle. [p. 317] He is constantly joking, giggling, for example, as he realizes how annoyed Yossarian is at his refusal to tell him a story he refers to but will not explain. He can laugh, of course, because he never seems to doubt his ability to survive and endure, and more important, to escape entrapment in the world of the machine. And, we should not be surprised at his easy faith since he is in essence a nineteenth-century man and a fool.

Furthermore, in a world in which language and logic are used to entrap and to deceive, Orr remains strangely quiet, and he remains completely undeceived because he does
not acknowledge rational language. What he does say, he says enigmatically like a Greek oracle. And his language and his arguments are never logical or rational; although he seems evasive, he actually speaks metaphorically. He explains his faith in Yankee Ingenuity, for example, with the parable of his effort to develop "apple cheeks". Similarly, rather than explaining to Yossarian that he should fly with him because he is plotting an escape, he says:

"Oh, I don't mind flying missions. I guess they're lots of fun. You ought to try flying a few with me when you're not flying lead. Just for laughs, tee-hee." Orr gazed up at Yossarian through the corners of his eyes with a look of pointed mirth. "If you had any brains, do you know what you'd do? You'd go right to Pitchard and Wren and tell them you want to fly with me."

"And get shot down with you every time you go up? What's the fun in that."

"That's just why you ought to do it," Orr insisted. "I guess I'm just about the best pilot around now when it comes to ditching or making crash landings. It would be good practice for you." [p. 321]

In this discussion in which the word "fun" keeps recurring, the fool appropriately advocates an action because it is pleasurable. Although Orr sounds flippant here, the concept of escaping because it will be fun recurs more seriously later in Catch-22. When Yossarian decides to follow Orr's example and escape to Sweden, Danby warns that "it won't be fun". But having accepted the ethic of
the fool, Yossarian replies, "Yes it will." [p. 463]

In short, Yossarian not only has gained faith, optimism and a sense of humor from Orr, but also has learned that in an irrational world the proper response to despair is an irrational and unpretentious faith in man's ability. Moreover, he has learned that escape from the death-aligned culture involves more than mere physical survival. In order to live in tune with the life force, he must live life fully, not just exist (as Dumbar does). And, in order to satisfactorily enjoy life he must accept the irrationalities of life and affirm the irrationality of the universe.

Only one more attribute is necessary to the success of Yossarian, and that, too, he gains from the example of Orr. With the exception of Nately's naive infatuation, no one in Catch-22 seems to care very sincerely about anyone else—at least not enough to perform a disinterested task to help them. Even the chaplain never succeeds in helping anyone because he is too concerned with protecting his ever-threatened dignity. Although Orr cannot convince Yossarian to fly with him, he cares enough about him to work very hard before his escape to insure Yossarian a warm tent for winter. [p. 320] Learning from Orr, Yossarian resolves not to go to Sweden alone, and furthermore, decides to take the one person that he can help disinterestedly—the kid sister of Nately's whore.

Orr provides an alternative for Yossarian ("or") and
the method of attaining that alternative ("oar"), but Orr cannot teach Yossarian anything while Yossarian still thinks of him as a nineteenth-century folk hero, for his optimism and faith seem old-fashioned—the products of a mind out of tune with its times. Furthermore, he cannot teach while he is considered merely the fool and not the fool-seer. Therefore, he must die to his old self and become new. Unlike McMurphy, however, he need not change his image of himself or of the world. He seems to realize fully the danger and possible horror of his situation, simply opting to defeat terror with laughter and constructive action. The personality that needs effacing is not Orr's at all, therefore, but the mask that Yossarian and the other men assume to be real. Since Yossarian believes Orr to be dead, it is as if Orr has been resurrected when Yossarian learns he is alive and in Sweden. Then Yossarian's old concept of Orr dies and a new concept takes its place. Learning hope from Orr's example, Yossarian becomes a hero and a mentor to the other officers and to the reader. Thus, the novel traces again the mythic pattern of the death of the old king or hero resulting in his rebirth in another form: Yossarian becomes the new hero, a more complicated and knowledgeable hero than Orr because his optimism is won with more difficulty.

Before discussing Yossarian's emergence as a hero, it seems appropriate to recognize the role of Nately's
where. Although she is less a mentor than a conscience to Yossarian, her appearance (stabbing Yossarian) stops him from agreeing to "like" Cathcart and Korn. And when she does not appear for some time, he misses her. Her naïveté (the simple fool) is evidenced from Heller's first description of her. What Nately takes to be "heroic poise" is really boredom and fatigue: she is too innocent to realize that to be ignored by a room full to men to whom she is offering her body is an insult, just as she is too naive to realize what the officers mean when they insist she say "uncle". Furthermore, she is completely irrational, falling in love because she gets a good night's sleep or trying to kill Yossarian because he tells her the news about Nately's death. Furthermore, unlike the hardened inhabitants of the mechanical world governed by Catch-22, she really cares for Nately, grieving sincerely at the news of his death, weeping "with no other emotion than grief, profound, debilitating, humble grief." (p. 404)

Yossarian appreciates that she cares enough about Nately's death to hate Yossarian and to try to kill him. Perhaps that is why he picks her sister as the person he will befriend and "save". But also, he realizes that although she is irrational, her irrationality is preferable to the logic of those who rationalize the death of friends and thereby escape grief and fear. Certainly, her irrationality is more moral. Yossarian concludes:
Yossarian thought he knew why Nately's whore held him responsible for Nately's death and wanted to kill him. Why the hell shouldn't she? It was a man's world, and she and everyone younger had every right to blame him and everyone older for every unnatural tragedy that befell them; just as she, even in her grief, was to blame for every man-made misery that landed on her kid sister and on all other children behind her. Someone had to do something, sometime. Every victim was a culprit, every culprit a victim, and somebody had to stand up sometime to try to break the lousy chain of inherited habit that was imperiling them all. [p. 414]

Even though the reaction of Nately's whore is purely irrational—the reaction of a fool—she takes a step that helps break the chain of suffering, a chain which continues because men are either too apathetic or too debilitated by despair to repudiate injustice. Her refusal to remain a helpless victim helps Yossarian to repudiate the chain and to understand that it is necessary that he break a link too. And, while she is not a seer, she acts rightly with the fool-ish instinctual perception usually attributed to a child or an idiot. 31

Two other mentors deserve mention, but they are mentors to the reader rather than to Yossarian. Major Major demonstrates the path of total escape to anonymity; by mastering the principle of Catch-22, he becomes totally inaccessible and insulated. The only virtue of this escape is that any cruelty Major Major inflicts is unintentional. The career of the chaplain follows a development much like that of Yossarian. And, although his life is not as completely developed as Yossarian's,
his story provides an alternative example of how to save oneself from the world of Catch-22. We see him, first, as a naive idealist, second, as a pragmatist who has mastered "protective rationalization" to protect himself from the world of Catch-22 \( \text{[p. 372]} \) and, third, as a man in despair, believing that "there was so much unhappiness in the world...and there was nothing he could do about anybody's, least of all his own." \( \text{[p. 213]} \) Finally, Orr's miraculous resurrection renews his faith, if not in God, then in man.

"Sweden!" cried the chaplain, shaking his head up and down with a gleeful rapture and prancing about uncontrollably from spot to spot, in a grinning, delicious frenzy. "It's a miracle, I tell you...I believe in God again. I really do....Washed ashore in Sweden after so many weeks at sea! It's a miracle."

And, when Yossarian corrects him saying "Washed ashore, Hell!...He rowed there!", the chaplain exclaims with undiminished zeal, "Well, I don't care!...It's still a miracle, a miracle of human intelligence and human endurance. Look how much he accomplished!" \( \text{[p. 458]} \)

Then sounding so much like a fool that Danby accuses him of being crazy, the chaplain rejects escape to Sweden in favor of direct confrontation with his immediate superiors and tormentors, articulating an alternative method of combatting the mechanical culture:

"I'll stay here and persevere. Yes. I'll persevere. I'll nag and badger Colonel Cathcart
and Colonel Korn every time I see them. I'm not afraid. I'll even pick on General Dreedle... Then I'll pick on General Peckem, and even on General Scheisskopf. And do you know what else I'm going to do? I'm going to punch Captain Black in the nose the very next time I see him. Yes, I'm going to punch him in the nose." (pp. 461-62)

The Emergence of the Hero

Yossarian's story, however, not the chaplain's, adequately dramatizes the growth from two dimensional grotesque to complete hero. In chapter two of the novel, Yossarian forecasts his forthcoming ascendency as a hero. And even though he is Assyrian (like most modern protagonists, he is a member of a minority group—even if he just imagines his special persecution), he associates himself with American folk heroes as well as other important folk heroes of Western culture.

They hated him because he was Assyrian. But they couldn't touch him, he told Clevinger, because he had a sound mind in a pure body and was as strong as an ox. They couldn't touch him because he was Tarzan, Mandrake, Flash Gordon. He was Bill Shakespeare. He was Cain, Ulysses, the Flying Dutchman; he was Lot in Sodom, Deirdre of the Sorrows, Sweeney in the nightingales among trees. He was miracle ingredient Z-247. He was--

"Crazy!" Clevinger interrupted. (p. 20)

Defining his future role more clearly, Yossarian says, "I'm a bona fide Supraman." And, when Clevinger corrects him, suggesting that he means superman, he repeats,
"Superman". \( \text{[p. 20]} \) Superman of the American comic book is not a man at all but a being from another planet who is inherently more powerful than any human. So, Yossarian insists that he does not mean super (from the Latin "above") man, but supra (transcending) man.\(^{22}\) He is to transcend the current human condition first by understanding it and second by adopting the irrational faith of the fool. Thus, in the context of his culture, he is insane.\(^{33}\)

In discussing the structure of Catch-22, Jan Solomon ably traces the pattern of Yossarian's growth from alienated protagonist to rebel hero. Therefore, this section will briefly outline Solomon's summary of the crucial events in Yossarian's life and then will briefly discuss questions regarding Yossarian's history not explained earlier in this chapter and not analyzed by Solomon.

As Solomon explains,

Yossarian's constant retreats to the hospital enforce the reversal of values in the world of Pianosa, where the hospital represents the high-water mark of the safe and the reasonable. These escapes mark as well the stages in Yossarian's insubordination; each self-imposed hospitalization is a response to the raising of the required number of missions. Insubordination, the refusal to play the game, begins in the 'past' time of the novel. After the death of Snowden, Yossarian goes naked rather than wear a uniform stained by Snowden's personality. Naked, he attends Snowden's funeral, and naked, he receives a medal. But the acts of insubordination toward the end of the
novel become increasingly dangerous to authority. Yossarian refuses to fly further missions, a decision he enforces by walking backwards and carrying a gun. His penultimate gesture of revolt takes him AWOL to Rome, and at last he deserts.34

Chapters one through sixteen introduce us to the major characters and to significant episodes which have already occurred: "Avignon and Ferrara have been bombed. All the 'Great' and 'Glorious' events have occurred: The Glorious Atabrine Insurrection, The Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade, and The Great Siege of Bologna. Furthermore, Snowden, Kraft and Clevinger, as well as other less significant characters have already died." In this first section, therefore, Heller introduces the reader to the psychological, metaphysical and social forces which act upon Yossarian and which result in his paralyzing fear of death. Appropriately, therefore, Section One ends with Yossarian fleeing to the hospital.35

Section Two begins with chapter 17 entitled "The Soldier in White", and focuses on "the horror of symbolic depersonalization" juxtaposed against the humanity of the brothel. Significantly, this section ends with the arrival of orders which send A. Portiori home instead of Yossarian. Here, Yossarian learns that uniformity of personality is just as threatening to him as physical death.

Section Three of the novel interprets the events of
the first two sections, emphasizing by exaggeration and occasionally by overt interpretation, that "man is matter" in an irrational and meaningless universe, that the social order is based upon a masochistic-sadistic conspiracy of victims and oppressors and that individuals have become dehumanized, interchangeable cogs in the war machine. And, finally, the increasing disparity between bazaar events and probability underline chaos, irrationality, and absurdity.

In the final section of the novel, which, except for the narration of the death of Snowden, concentrates on events in the present, the tempo of horrors increases. The chief officers become even more self-seeking and incompetent. Lt. Scheisskopf arrives from California, soon becomes a General, and takes over Special Services from General Dreedle at the moment when Special Services takes over the control of combat. More of Yossarian's fellows die, and their deaths are more bizarre. McWatt buzzes the raft and cuts Kid Sampson in half; guilt drives McWatt to fly his plane into a mountain. Doc Daneeks, supposedly on that plane, dies on paper, a death that proves just as effective as a more mortal end. Chief Hulfoot dies of pneumonia, as predicted, and Hungry Joe smothers under Hule's cat. New young soldiers arrive and commit the weirdest of murders by removing the effects of the dead man, Mudd, from Yossarian's tent. Even Orr, shot down again, is missing. As the missions skyrocket to 80, the chaplain is arrested and questioned about Washington Irving in a scene that repeats the earlier mad trial of Clevinger. Dunbar "is disappeared," and finally Nately dies, his whore becoming a ubiquitous assassin threatening Yossarian.
In Section Three Yossarian is portrayed as a man who can understand his world and can act in it, his ability to rebel effectively increasing proportionately as his understanding of his world and of alternatives to that world grow.

Finally, Yossarian's rebellion takes a more aggressive form; wearing a gun and walking backwards, he refuses to fly. He goes AWOL to Rome, where, after passing like an impotent Dante through the Eternal City which has become a modern Inferno, he finds that Aarfy has murdered a whore. The M.P.'s arrive and arrest not Aarfy, the murderer, but Yossarian, the AWOL soldier. When the Colonels offer Yossarian and themselves an out, an opportunity for him to return home and to advertise the goodness and intelligence of his officers, Yossarian wavers, accepts, and then, attacked by Nately's whore, is hospitalized. The novel ends as it began, in the hospital. Here Yossarian learns of Orr's escape to Sweden and the reader learns the details of Snowden's death. Yossarian turns down the deal, as he had turned down Major Major Major Major's earlier offer and deserts.36

Until the end of the novel—when Yossarian becomes an active hero—events are not narrated in chronological order. As Solomon explains,

The psychological development of revolt in Yossarian significantly does not depend on the actual chronology of the events....The most absurd and intense insubordination of nakedness, predates any of Yossarian's Pianosa hospitalizations; yet although it is alluded to early in the book, it is not fully recounted until chapter 24, more than half way through the novel, when it fits into the pattern of Yossarian's growing psychological unrest.37

Events are narrated in an order which, primarily, enables the reader to experience Yossarian's growing psychological
revolt and, secondarily, corresponds to Yossarian's psychological growth. Past events are fully narrated as Yossarian is able to assimilate them, and, as Yossarian learns to understand these experiences, he gains the knowledge necessary to transcend despair.

At the beginning of the novel Yossarian has experienced many events (such as Snowden's death) that he has not completely understood or accepted, but that have influenced him profoundly. From the beginning of the novel, for example, he is acutely conscious of death, but before he can transcend despair, he must face death as a personal and inevitable fact of existence. In fact, his paranoia and fear make him one of the best navigators in the company.

There was no established procedure for evasive action. All you needed was fear, and Yossarian had plenty of that, more fear than Orr or Hungry Joe, more fear even than Dunbar, who had resigned himself submissively to the idea that he must die someday. Yossarian had not resigned himself to that idea. \[ p. 51 \]

But as his friends are killed one by one, he comes to understand that he will die and accordingly the reader learns more and more about Snowden's death because Yossarian is mentally assimilating more of Snowden's secret. Yet only after he is stabbed by Natey's whore and after his hallucination in the hospital is he able to fully accept Snowden's secret. "A strange man with a mean face" wakes
him in the hospital, declaring, "We've got your pal, buddy. We've got your pal." Wondering what the man meant, Yossarian muses,

"I think it must be someone like Nately or Dunbar. You know, someone who was killed in the war, like Clevinger, Orr, Dobbs, Kid Sampson or McWatt." Yossarian emitted a startled gasp and then shook his head. "I just realized it," he exclaimed. "They've got all my pals, haven't they? The only ones left are me and Hungry Joe." He tingled with dread as he saw the chaplain's face go pale. "Chaplain, what is it?"

"Hungry Joe was killed." The full narration of the death of Snowden immediately follows this realization, for Yossarian has accepted the reality of his own death and, hence, begins to realize that he must act to redeem the time that remains for him.

But Yossarian recognizes that merely staying alive is not enough. He must also retain his identity and humanity, escaping psychological entrapment in the world of Catch-22. Yossarian has learned to understand this world. Not only has he learned about metaphysical reality from Dunbar and from Snowden's death, but he also recognizes social and psychological reality. Warned by Dunbar's perception about the soldier in white, he has discovered that escape through anonymity involves a sacrifice of humanity and individuality. Furthermore, he realizes that Dunbar's limited revolt is not enough: bombs still get dropped on villages. By not totally repudiating the system
that orders those bombs dropped, one passively aids that system, just as Yossarian unintentionally aided Milo.

In the "Eternal City," moreover, Yossarian learns that the social order of Catch-22 is based upon a masochistic-sadistic conspiracy in every level of that society, from the very personal relationship of a Whitcomb and a Chaplain Tappman to the impersonal relationship between Cathcart and the men he causes to be killed. From Nately's whore, Yossarian learns that to end this perpetuation of suffering, one must refuse to be part of this chain of suffering.

After Snowden's death earlier in the novel Yossarian temporarily tries retreating from the system, without actively repudiating it. Like Major Major or Dunbar he wishes to escape moral responsibility for the cruelty inflicted by that system. Comparing Yossarian's actions to Holden Caulfield's, Sanford Pinsker writes,

In many respects Yossarian's position is even more naive than Holden's. When Snowden dies, Yossarian refuses to wear clothing and insists on receiving a medal in only his slippers. Yossarian's retreat to primal innocence is more complete than Holden's. Yossarian refuses to wear even a hunting cap. The important point, however, is that Yossarian somehow feels that going naked constitutes an effective protest against the system.

Yossarian does "retreat to primal innocence," but if he thinks this is an effective protest, he does not hold that opinion long. The scene in which he shares a tree with
Milo during Snowden's funeral may show why. Yossarian is sitting naked in the tree when Milo appears. Yossarian invites him to join him in the tree, saying "It's the tree of life...and of knowledge of good and evil, too."

\[ p. 269 \]

Although Yossarian has retreated temporarily to primal innocence, he does recognize that his tree is also the tree "of knowledge of good and evil." He is not a pre-fallen creature, but one with responsibilities and one who knows right from wrong. And, his responsibilities are clarified in his discussion with Milo, for Milo clearly reveals his selfish callousness:

Yossarian answered him slowly in a level voice. "They're burying that kid who got killed in my plane over Avignon the other day. Snowden."

"What happened to him?" Milo asked in a voice deadened with awe.

"He got killed."

"That's terrible," Milo grieved, and his large brown eyes filled with tears. "And it will get even worse if the mess halls don't agree to buy my cotton. Yossarian, what's the matter with them? Don't they realize it's their syndicate? Don't they realize they've all got a share?"

"I wish you'd stop picking on me about that dead man in your tent," he pleaded peevishly. "I told you I didn't have anything to do with killing him. Is it my fault that I saw this great opportunity to corner the market on Egyptian cotton and got us into all this trouble?" \[ p. 270 \]

Yossarian and Milo obviously have different priorities.
Milo, in fact, is only concerned about Yossarian's nakedness because he is afraid Yossarian will start a trend, thereby reducing the demand for cotton. Yossarian cannot remain an innocent, because to remain innocent is to aid Milo and Cathcart by default.

Yossarian's retreat to primal innocence is not his final answer, but a dramatic and symbolic rebirth. When he reclothes himself, he is a rebel. Before Snowden's death, he even went back over a target twice to be sure he would hit it. After receiving his medal for bravery naked (because of Snowden's death), he no longer cares "whether he hit ∫s the target or not." ∫p. 31∫ He retreats to the hospital, moans in meetings, moves the bomb line on the map to avoid a mission, bribes the cook to put soap in the potatoes, and generally disrupts the base. He even uses absurd questions to "disrupt the education sessions Clevinger" conducted. When Clevinger asks if there are any questions, Yossarian, yells, "Who is Spain?", "Why is Hitler?" or "When is right?" ∫p. 35∫

Each of Yossarian's escapes to the hospital are similar to his retreat to primal innocence. He is escaping from horror by irresponsibility. However, this escape becomes impossible to him when he learns from Dunbar the truth about the soldier in white, learning of a personal danger resulting from an attempt to escape death on society's own terms. As the surgeon tells him (to convince
him he should pose as Guiseppe), "We're all in the business of illusion together. I'm always willing to lend a helping hand to a fellow conspirator along the road to survival if he's willing to do the same for me."  

But when the illusion being perpetuated is one of personality and as a result identity is threatened, the business of illusion becomes threatening to Yossarian.

Although Yossarian retreats to the innocence and anonymity of a fetus in the hospital, his metamorphosis is more like that of the Yankee, who, according to Daniel Hoffman, weathers many "rebirths" without substantially changing, for the metamorphoses are not true rebirths and are not redemptive. After many stays in the hospital, Yossarian still has nothing in which he can believe. In fact, he loses all illusions. But like a traditional mythic hero, he journeys to the underworld (the "Eternal City," reminiscent of Dante's Inferno) where he learns even more about the evils of society. And, although he learns from Nately's whore that he should break the chain of suffering, his despair renders him incapable of success. The result of this journey into the underworld is another retreat. This time, however, Yossarian recognizes that he cannot retreat to innocence, for he knows too much; so he retreats to a known evil. He will become part of the system that he despises in order to save his life, thereby becoming a part of the system not as a victim, but as a fellow
perpetrator of suffering and injustice with Cathcart and Korn. Korn explains to him,

"You see, Yossarian, we're going to put you on easy street. We're going to promote you to major and even give you another medal. Captain Flume is already working on glowing press releases.... We're going to glorify you and send you home a hero.... You'll live like a millionaire. Everyone will lionize you.... A whole new world of luxury awaits you once you become our pal...."

"Don't worry about the men. They'll be easy enough to discipline and control when you're gone. It's only while you're still here that they may prove troublesome. You know, one good apple can spoil the rest," Colonel Korn concluded with conscious irony. "You know--this would really be wonderful--you might even serve as an inspiration to them to fly more missions."

Yossarian is saved from this temptation by the intervention of Nately's whore. But he still has no positive plan of rebellion because he recognizes no hope. However, even Korn's statements to Yossarian hint at the solution that Yossarian will eventually discover: "You'd have to be a fool to throw it all away just for a moral principle, and you're not a fool." [p. 437, underlining mine] But Yossarian is a fool, since he does reject Korn's offer because of moral principles. Appropriately, the rest of his education consists of his learning how to act the fool effectively.

Vance Ramsey finds Yossarian's refusal to "like" Cathcart and Korn unconvincing: "The Flaw is that the end is not artistically convincing. In his all-absorbing
involvement in the threat to his own existence, Yossarian has been so little aware of the threat to others that the sudden change to an awareness of them and dedication to trying to help them does not have the same force." 39

Actually, Yossarian's commitment to self-preservation is not as selfish as Ramsey suggests. Twice before his final refusal to save himself at the expense of the men, he had refused deals in which he was only to fly milk runs \( \text{pp. 106 and 110} \); once he refuses specifically because other men might have to die in his place. Furthermore, Yossarian's insistence that he has the right to self-preservation develops into an ethic which acknowledges the right of every man to live. He even refuses either to kill Cathcart or to tell Dobbs (who just wants his approval) to kill him, because, "He's got a right to live, too."

\( \text{p. 232} \) Even before he learns that Orr is alive, he recognizes his own responsibility to others as an extension of his ethic of preservation. Consequently, after Nately's death he goes to save his girl's sister.

Essentially, then, Yossarian accepts the morality espoused by Heller's novel before he hears that Orr is alive and in Sweden. He believes in self-preservation of body, mind, and identity and in the similar preservation of others. Orr, however, does teach him other values. First, he teaches Yossarian trust and honesty, and, second, he teaches Yossarian hope and provides him with a pattern for
successful living. Yossarian has learned to believe Orr when he tells him something because "Orr, unlike Yossarian's mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, in-law, teacher, spiritual leader, legislator, neighbor and newspaper, had never lied to him about anything crucial before." \(\text{p. 47}\) But when Orr demands that Yossarian tell him why he will not fly with him, he is asking first for honesty and then for trust. Orr even makes Yossarian's honesty a prerequisite to telling him why the girl was hitting him over the head with the shoe and, thus, why he crashes so often, because until Yossarian transcends his obsessive fear of death through honesty and trust he cannot escape entrapment. When he learns that Orr is in Sweden, however, Yossarian knows that he would be there too if he had only been able to trust. He gains hope because Orr succeeded in his escape, and he learns how to succeed—understanding that Orr's tinkering is an essential tool of the successful Yankee. In short, he learns that he needs hope, humor, patience and Yankee Ingenuity in order to work a "miracle of human intelligence and human endurance." \(\text{p. 458}\)

Thus, while Yossarian adopts the total morality and method of operation of the Fool, he asks also for the Fool's trappings: "Bring me apples, Danby, and chestnuts, too. Run, Danby, run. Bring me crab apples and horse chestnuts before it's too late, and get some for yourself
...bring me buck teeth too, and a valve to fix and a look of stupid innocence that nobody would ever suspect of any cleverness. I'll need them all." [p. 459] Furthermore, Yossarian learns not only to be immune to rational argument but also to understand the fool's use of language: "Oh, why wouldn't I listen? He invited me along, and I wouldn't go with him! Now I understand what he was trying to tell me. I even understand why that girl was hitting him on the head with her shoe." [p. 459]

Yossarian's resolve to find the sister of Nately's whore and save her illustrates his final growth from protagonist to fool-hero. By accepting responsibility for the salvation of another and by learning hope and the knowledge necessary to success (no longer relying on Milo's help), he has become a real hero, capable of saving others. Throughout the novel the men have looked to him as a special person. Milo trusts him and talks to him; he is one of the few men on the base to succeed in seeing Major Major; he becomes such an antagonist to Cathcart that Cathcart pales when his name is spoken; and, Dobbs wants his approval (and only his) before killing Cathcart. But after he refuses to fly anymore, the men look to him explicitly as a hero and a mentor, although he refuses to accept the role:

All the next evening, people kept popping up at him out of the darkness to ask him how he was doing, appealing to him for confidential
information with weary, troubled faces on the basis of some morbid and clandestine kinship he had not guessed existed. People in the squadron he barely knew popped into sight out of nowhere as he passed and asked him how he was doing. Even men from other squadrons came one by one to conceal themselves in the darkness and pop out. Everywhere he stepped after sundown someone was lying in wait to pop out and ask him how he was doing. [p. 441]

But with his new knowledge born of hope, he finally accepts the role of hero at the end of the novel.

Yossarian's refusal to save anyone else until near the end of the novel illustrates the emotional poverty of the population of Catch-22. In a totally rational society, love is impossible, and emotions are suspect. For most of the novel, Yossarian fights his unselfish instincts because they might interfere with self-preservation (like Nately's naive love which causes him to volunteer to keep flying missions). When people do not call forth Yossarian's compassion, he is grateful: "Yossarian was in love with the maid in the lime-colored panties because she seemed to be the only woman left he could make love to without falling in love with. Even the bald-headed girl in Sicily still evoked in him strong sensations of pity, tenderness and regret." [p. 137]

He loves women most often because they evoke human emotions in him, particularly human compassion. For example, he does not fall in love with Luciana because she is attractive or charming or because she comes to his bed in the morning as she promised, but when he learns that she
got her mysterious scar from an American air raid, "His heart cracked, and he fell in love. He wondered if she would marry him." [p. 163] Then he protects himself from emotion, playing the hard-boiled role of the stereotyped serviceman by tearing up the paper with her address on it.

For a short idyllic period after Yossarian has decided to be indifferent to where his bombs fall, he overcomes his fear of emotional involvement, maintaining a continuing affair with Nurse Duckett. This romance, however, is terminated after Kid Sampson's death makes it impossible to go to the beach. Appropriately, Yossarian's love affair terminates as the specter of death again becomes real to him. Here, as before, Yossarian is afraid to allow any emotion to grow lest he lose control of other emotions, like terror and despair.

Yet when Yossarian learns from Captain Black that the girls have been evicted from the brothel, anger and compassion overcome his instinct for self-preservation, and he leaves for Rome immediately. The brothel is for Yossarian a visible symbol of the life force in direct opposition to the mechanical death culture that he hates. Thus, in his quest for the kid sister, he is searching for two positive values. First, she is a product of the natural environment of the brothel in which, as the old man explains, life (survival, enjoyment and sexuality) is
the ultimate value. And, as a child, she awakens his compassion, uncomplicated by selfish interest.
Second, when he learned from Nately's whore that it is his and everyone's responsibility to save everyone younger than themselves, he thinks specifically of the younger sister; by saving her he breaks the chain of suffering. Armed with humor, irrational logic, hope, ingenuity and compassion, Yosarrian accepts responsibility for the salvation of the young girl. And in doing so, he becomes mentor to the other men and to the reader, and may, if Heller's purpose is served, help to save them as well.

Thus, through the example of fools and Yankees, Heller teaches that although belief in a benevolent God may be impossible in the modern world, belief in mankind and in his ability to survive and to persevere is not, for men can maintain integrity, individuality and the ability to laugh and to care for others and thereby evade metaphysical, social, and psychological entrapment. But with this belief comes responsibility. A man must have courage and compassion and must learn to laugh in the face of an irrational universe, accepting that irrationality and refusing to run to the shelter of rational ideologies. Moreover, he must dissociate himself from any person or institution which denies the humanity of man. And, further, Heller suggests that an individual may accomplish these
ends by looking to the optimism of the past and by emulating the fool.
Notes to Chapter II


2 Constance Rourke, American Humor (Garden City, N. Y., 1953), p. 34.


4 Information in a letter to the author from Joseph Heller, January 31, 1971. In a conversation with David Minter, Mr. Heller had mentioned that the structure of Catch-22 resembled that of Absalom, Absalom. In reply to my letter, which asked permission to mention that conversation, Mr. Heller said, "the form of Catch-22 does resemble Absalom, Absalom, but only in the techniques employed to develop certain of the narrative lines: Snowden and Milo's bombing of the squadron come to mind as conspicuous examples."


7 Waldmeir, p. 195.

8 Information in a letter to the author from Joseph Heller, cited above. In a letter to Mr. Heller I told him I thought "that Catch-22 is not primarily an antiwar novel, but rather an inquiry into man's metaphysical, social, and psychological entrapment" and that "Orr, as fool-seer and as Yankee Tinker, provides a viable example of escape which is completely in tune with the post-existentiel comic view of the novel." Then, I asked his opinion of these ideas. First, he replied, "I would not disagree with any of the ideas you express about Catch-22; in fact, they are my own". Then, in reply to
further inquiry about statements made to Mr. Minter, he replied, "World War II was, by and large, a pleasant, exciting experience for me, as it was for most of the people who were overseas at that time and in that same place with me, and I wrote Catch-22 while working at a series of advertising jobs, but I by no means ever felt "entrapped" by Madison Avenue, certainly much less so than when working as a college instructor. If anything, I regarded these positions as ideal surroundings in which to design and write the book, an ideal platform, in fact, from which to view the metaphysical, social, and psychological entrapment to which you refer in your first paragraph. I do not wish to defend Madison Avenue or my working there; but I do not wish to have it regarded as a phenomenon in itself, rather than as a small part of a total environment."


10Joseph Heller, Catch-22 (New York, 1961), p. 123. All further references to Heller's novel in this chapter will be noted in brackets in the text.


14Ibid., p. 30.

15Solomon, p. 47.

16Ibid.

17Ibid., p. 48.

18Ibid., p. 55.
19 Vance Ramsey, "From Here to Absurdity: Heller's Catch-22" Seven Contemporary Authors, ed. by Thomas B. Whitbread (Austin, Texas, 1966), p. 112.

20 Waldron, pp. 182 and 217.

21 Ramsey, p. 108.

22 Waldmair, p. 192.


25 Ibid., pp. 15-17.

26 Waldron, p. 204.

27 Rourke, p. 21.

28 Waldron, p. 204.

29 Ibid.


31 Willeford, p. 120.


33 See pages 155-158 for discussion of insanity.

34 Solomon, pp. 48-49.

35 Ibid., p. 50.
36 Ibid., pp. 51-53.

37 Ibid., p. 49.


40 Ramsey, p. 117.
Chapter III

The Fool as Negro:

Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man

Therefore, whenever the clown baffles the policeman, whenever the fool makes the sage look silly, whenever the acrobat defeats the machine, there is a sudden sense of pressure relieved, of a birth of new joy and freedom. This kind of emancipation, however, can be won only by the saint in ecstasy or by the fool in jest, never by the revolutionary in earnest. The latter may change the system—and change may be very necessary—but he can do nothing to protest, and is indeed far more likely to attack, that individual integrity which the social group cannot take away, that which owes no allegiance to Leviathans, that possibility which 'owes no homage to the Sun'.

Enid Welsford on the fool

Triumph was in his humor, but not triumph over circumstance. Rather this was an unreasonable headlong triumph launching into the realm of the preposterous. The triumphant note ran through the careless phrasing of most of the minstrel songs and was plain in the swift pulsations of the rhythms. Yet defeat was also clear—that abysmal defeat which seemed the destiny of the Negro. Slavery was often
Imaged in brief phrases or in simple situations....Defeat could be heard in the occasional minor key and in the smothered satire. Hitherto the note of triumph had been unmistakable and unremitting among American comic characters. The sudden extreme of nonsense was new, and the tragic undertone was new.

Constance Rourke on the Negro Trickster

_Invisible Man_, like _One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest_, is narrated by an alienated, seemingly defeated protagonist who, as a member of a persecuted minority, is victimized by white America. His narrative is complex. First, in the linear progression of the novel, the protagonist moves from a naive belief in human possibilities to knowledge of his entrapment and victimization by society; second, in the circular progress of the novel, he (as narrator) moves from despair to hope as he discovers and affirms infinite human possibilities by ordering the chaos of his life. Initially, the protagonist assumes that the world can be reduced to meaningful form, finding form in sacred myth and then in Marxist ideology, but as he becomes progressively more disillusioned, he learns that the world is neither inherently meaningful, purposeful, nor orderly. For a time he desairs. Then, from an American version of the fool--the Negro trickster--he gains hope. Thus, as narrator he proceeds to explore the form of his life in order to discover
his identity. Finally, in ordering the chaos of his life the narrator consciously creates a parable which "tries to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your \( \text{the reader's}\) certainties,"\(^3\) hence concluding his confession with the statement, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" \( \text{\textcopyright \hspace{1em} p. 503}\)

*Invisible Man*, moreover, is an existential novel in which a protagonist becomes a hero as he repudiates all false identities, experiences and then transcends existential despair, and finally affirms his infinite possibilities as fool. He accomplishes this, however, only through the example of the Negro trickster and only because he comes to understand that the Negro trickster is brother to the Yankee. Hence, an individual Negro's story becomes a parable for all modern men, but particularly for the modern American. Since the invisible man has been ably discussed as an existential hero,\(^4\) this study will refer only briefly to existential aspects of the novel and instead will focus on the mentors who make the protagonist's emergence as a hero possible, on the relationship of these mentors to the American tradition, on the relationship of the hero to a comic tradition, and on the novel as a parable of entrapment.

Ellison suggests that the invisible man is a particularly appropriate representative hero because the Negro is a unique cultural symbol in America. First,
Ellison explains that nineteenth-century romantics, such as Emerson, Thoreau, Melville and Twain conceived of "the Negro as a symbol of Man." Second, Ellison explains that the Black was and continues to be associated with Romantic values—sexuality, irrationality, emotion, individualism, primitivism, mysticism, and, ultimately, chaos. Significantly, these are also the values associated with the fool. In twentieth-century America (the modern equivalent of the mythic kingdom which has banished the fool) these values have been sacrificed to the demand for order, conformity and efficiency, and the complete association of the Black with romantic values has become an excuse for his exploitation.

To devalue the values associated with chaos (and with the fool and the Negro) that interfere with a conformist society, Ellison continues, the nation embodied these romantic values in the Negro and then acknowledged his existence only in the dramatization of the grotesque stereotype of the Negro Minstrel, thereby negating the Negro's humanity and devaluing the values he represents. Ellison explains,

the Negro is reduced to a negative sign that usually appears in a comedy of the grotesque and the unacceptable. As Constance Rourke has made us aware, the action of the early minstrel show...constitutes a ritual of exorcism. Other white cultures have their gollywogs and blackamoors but the face of Negro slavery went to the moral heart of the
American social drama and here the Negro was too real for easy fantasy, too serious to be dealt with in anything less than a national art. The mask was an inseparable part of the national iconography....This mask...was imperative for the evocation of that atmosphere in which the fascination of blackness could be enjoyed, the comic catharsis achieved. The racial identity of the performer was unimportant, the mask was the thing...and its function was to veil the humanity of the Negroes...thus reduced to a sign, and to repress the white audience's awareness of its moral identification with its own acts and with the human ambiguities pushed behind the mask.⁸

The portrayal of the Black as stereotyped minstrel, then, exorcises both the values he represents and white guilt over the exploitation of the Negro. Therefore, the stereotype helps to persuade both Blacks and whites to accept the social roles demanded by their society. While whites purge themselves of romantic qualities, becoming uniform, replaceable cogs in an orderly, efficient social system, the Black loses his humanity either by accepting the role of the shuffling Negro stereotype or by attempting to be indistinguishable from white cogs in the social machine. Both, therefore, accept a mask, or a role, which negates individual identity in the interest of conforming to mechanistic cultural values, but because pressure to accept the mask is more obvious in the case of the Negro and because he is culturally associated with the exorcised values, the story of his victimization is a natural parable of the entrapment of all Americans.
Third, Ellison sees the adoption of the mask by Blacks as being as much in tune with American culture as it is a result of cultural alienation.

Very often, however, the Negro's masking is motivated not so much by fear as by a profound rejection of the image created to usurp his identity. Sometimes it is for the sheer joy of the joke; sometimes to challenge those who presume, across the psychological distance created by race manners, to know his identity. Nonetheless, it is in the American grain. Benjamin Franklin, the practical scientist, skilled statesman and sophisticated lover, allowed the French to mistake him for Rousseau's Natural Man. Hemingway poses as a non-literary sportsman, Faulkner as a farmer; Abe Lincoln allowed himself to be taken for a simple country lawyer—until the chips were down. Here the 'darky' act makes brothers of us all. America is a land of masking jokers. We wear the mask for purposes of aggression as well as for defense; when we are projecting the future and preserving the past.9

In short, Ellison utilizes the Negro stereotype consciously, not to encourage the acceptance of the mask by Blacks or by whites, but to oppose it and not to exorcize the values associated with the Negro (and the fool), but to demonstrate the continuing importance of these values. As symbol of humanity, a black protagonist is an appropriate representative hero; as fool and as exemplar of romantic values, he can effectively combat the orderly, rational world of the tyrant's kingdom and therefore can become a viable hero by readmitting into the modern world the values associated with chaos; and as Negro trickster (and version of the Yankee) he suggests the kinship of all Americans and
therefore he can espouse an ethic based upon brotherhood and freedom—what Ellison calls "the American principle", "That all men are created equal and that they should be given a chance to achieve their highest potential, regardless of race, creed, color or past condition of servitude."¹⁰ And, as masking joker, he can suggest viable uses for the mask in the modern world.

Specifically, when the invisible man discovers the form that is his identity, he understands that he is a fool and a trickster, explaining, "I'm no hero, but short and dark and with a certain eloquence and a bottomless capacity for being a fool to mark me from the rest."

He accepts his American heritage not only because he discovers that the Negro trickster is brother to the Yankee—saying "I am in the great American tradition of tinkers. That makes me kin to Ford, Edison and Franklin"—but also because he discovers that the archetypal Negro provides a complex model for a full life. This discovery helps him to reinterpret his grandfather's enigmatic advice as an affirmation and to discover a pattern for living which does justice to the chaos against which it is conceived. And, since he uses the creativity of the Yankee tinker, not to invent a new machine, but to relate a parable which explores the possibilities of avoiding entrapment in the world of the factory, he clarifies his relationship to the Yankee: "Call me, since I have a theory and a concept, a
thinker-tinker." ∑ p. 11 ∑

Although the wearing of the mask is a predominant characteristic of the American trickster and although the trickster is affirmed in the novel, the progress of the novel dramatizes the dangers of equating one's mask or the mask of others with identity, in existentialist terms, of living in "bad faith"—that is, "the surrendering of one's human liberty, in order to possess or try to possess, one's being as a thing" and therefore escaping the responsibility and freedom of complete humanity.¹¹ The protagonist is guilty of "bad faith" because he continually accepts each new name given him by society as his real identity. In order to live in "good faith" and to accept the responsibility and freedom of complete humanity, he must abandon these masks, reject society's stereotypes, and encounter the complex humanity of the men he meets. Thus, at the end of the linear progression of the novel, the protagonist—having rejected society's stereotypes, having discovered the real identities behind the masks of the mentors he tried to emulate, and having divested himself of all masks—is left with no pattern for viable action. In the circular movement of the invisible man's parable, therefore, he learns to discover the complex humanity obscured by the masks and to discover the valuable characteristics suggested by the stereotype.

In a discussion of stereotypes in fiction, Ellison's
comments suggest a possible theory behind the pattern of
discovery in *Invisible Man*.

Archetypes are embodiments of abiding patterns
of human existence which underlies racial,
cultural and religious differences. They are,
in their basic humanity, timeless and raceless,
while stereotypes are malicious reductions of
human complexity....If I should use such
stereotypes as Sambo and Stepin Fetchit
in fiction, I'd have to reveal their
archetypical aspects because my own awareness
of, and identification with, the human com-
plexity which they deny would compel me to
transform them into something more recognizably
human. 12

The invisible man (as narrator), accordingly, learns to
discover the archetypal reality underlying grotesque
stereotypes, and, hence, he discovers a pattern that he
can emulate and that will enable him to act heroically
and effectively in the face of chaos.

The first section of this chapter, therefore, will
analyze the world of the novel, demonstrating that the
values associated with the fool and the Negro have been
perverted or negated in this world and, then, will describe
the effects of such a world on men. The second section
focuses on the invisible man's mentors in order to answer
two related questions: (1) How do these mentors enable
the protagonist to reinterpret his grandfather's troublesome
advice in the context of the modern world? and (2) How do
these mentors provide a model for a viable response to
chaos? Finally, section three will trace the emergence of
the protagonist as he rejects his various false identities
and emerges as a fool, a poet, and a hero.

The Factory

In the paint factory episode, Ellison provides us with an emblem of American society, metaphorically machinelike and literally a system of organized oppression in which men are victimized by their acceptance of their oppressor's ideology. In the hospital scene Ellison symbolically portrays the threat of mental and physical violence which encroaches upon the protagonist's mind, identity and manhood, and which threatens to transform him into a robot by making him an integral part of the factory. Mechanistic metaphors throughout the novel demonstrate that in important ways American society is analogous to the paint factory and to the factory hospital. The following discussion, therefore, will focus on mechanical metaphors as they reveal a mechanistic society, first, examining the factory as an emblem of a society which entraps and victimizes men through mechanistic ideologies; second, analyzing the factory hospital as a metaphor of the processes of victimization, demonstrating that men lose identity, mind and masculinity to the factory; and, finally, explaining the novel's rejection of the values associated with mechanism and its affirmation of the values traditionally associated with the fool and with the Negro.
The Liberty Paint Company serves as a symbol of modern American society in which the victims contribute to their victimization by adopting the values of their oppressors. In the basement of this factory, Lucius Brockway not only makes the indispensable base for Optic White paint, but also contributes the slogan, "if its Optic White, It's the Right White," [p. 190] which echoes, as the protagonist comments, the white racist assumption, "if you're white, you're right," but which also implicitly echoes "might is right"—the basic assumption of the social factory. That Brockway has sacrificed his humanity to be part of the factory is reflected in his identification with the machine, bragging that, "They got all this machinery, but that ain't everything: we are the machines inside the machine." [p. 190] Because Brockway has accepted his role in the factory as his identity, he has become a robot. In an emblematic presentation of the position of such Blacks (or analogous whites) in society, Kimbro orders the protagonist to mix in a few drops of black dope to make the white paint whiter—as Black Americans serve as ritual scapegoats to reinforce the "whiteness" (or rightness) of their oppressors.

Characteristically, while characters who have accepted a mask as their identity are likened to machines, their victimization by the social factory is evidenced by physical pain inflicted by machinery. In the factory, for example,
the protagonist suffers severe physical and psychological damage when Brockway's machine explodes. The protagonist's refusal to choose between the categories available to him in the factory (everyone assumes he may only be a Brockway or a union man) and rejection of the Brockway stereotype results in physical violence and symbolic death. Most characters, however, neither question the factory's categories nor refuse to accept a mask, but the reality of their victimization is similarly evidenced by their enduring electric shocks. As early as the "battle royal", which Ellison calls a "ritual in preservation of caste lines," blindfolded boys are forced to fight each other. As a "reward", they are to compete for coins on an electrified carpet. \[ \text{pp. 28-31} \]

This early incident serves as a parable of the American Dream as embodied in the "black rite of Horatio Alger." Motivated by greed and fear, the boys become victims of a racist society and, thus, enact the role of the comic Negro for relatively small gain, and their pain, resulting from the electric current, emphasizes their victimization. Similarly, after the explosion in the factory, the protagonist awakens, symbolically reborn, in a sort of electrically powered incubator where he presumably receives shock treatments. In this machine as on the electrified carpet, he is at the mercy of the machine's operators, he identifies himself with a racial stereotype,
and his pain emphasizes his victimization. [...]

The protagonist, the boys in the "battle royal", Brockway, and Bledsoe are all entrapped and victimized by their acceptance of the same ideology; they are embued with a religious faith in the American Dream, or in the American Dream as interpreted for the Negro, who must be "humble" and "stay in his place" before he is worthy of liberty. The grandparents of the invisible man "believed in" this dream. "They exulted in it. They stayed in their place, worked hard, and brought up my father to do the same."

[...] The protagonist's faith in this dream is reinforced at college where this version of the American Dream has replaced Christianity as the official religion. Here the protagonist listens to Reverend Barbee, whose sermon relates the story of the Founder: a version of the Horatio Alger story told in religious language with all the trappings of sacred myth [...]. As the invisible man explains,

Here upon this stage the black rite of Horatio Alger was performed to God's own acting script, with millionaires come down to portray themselves; not merely acting out the myth of their goodness, and wealth and success and power and benevolence and authority in cardboard masks, but themselves, these virtues concretely! Not the wafer and the wine, but the flesh and the blood, vibrant and alive, and vibrant even when stooped, ancient and withered. (And who, in face of this, would not believe? Could even doubt?) [...]

The protagonist adopts both the driving ambition and the obsession with bettering his race (a collective form of
ambition) taught through the story of the Founder. The obsession with racial betterment reinforces the protagonist's desire for personal success and is so revered that even in Harlem, Mary Rambo reminds the protagonist of his obligation to help his people by achieving personal success.14

Furthermore, the protagonist is so awed by these incarnations of success that he retains his faith even after Bledsoe reveals to him the poverty of an existence lived by the tenets of Horatio Alger. Bledsoe's dream has blinded him to individual worth and hardened him to the sufferings of others. By accepting the oppressor's morality he has become simply another oppressor aiding the system by his participation in it, and his original idealistic ambition has been transformed into a cynical lust for power. As he explains,

I tell them; that's my life, telling white folk how to think about the things I know about....I didn't make it [the system] and I know that I can't change it. But I've made my place in it and I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am. [p. 128]

Having adopted a mask for gain, Bledsoe admits that he is a hypocrite, saying, "Yes, I had to act the nigger!" [p. 128]

Moreover, he reveals the nihilism underlying the rite of Horatio Alger, for his rationalization for ambition is reminiscent of Korn's "What else is there?"
I don't even insist that it was worth it, but now I'm here and I mean to stay—after you win the game, you take the prize and you keep it, protect it; there's nothing else to do....A man gets old winning his place, son. So you go ahead, go tell your story; match your truth against my truth. [p. 128]

Life, to Bledsoe, is just a power game in which there are winners and losers, oppressors and their victims, and it pays to be the oppressor; the American Dream is merely a euphemism for oppression.

At the factory, Brockway, like Bledsoe, demonstrates both the persuasive power of the American Dream and the potential for violence and sadism implicit within it. Brockway, too, "had to act the nigger", "dissimulating like some of the teachers at the college...to avoid trouble." [p. 185]

Furthermore, since he has achieved limited power within the factory, he has demonstrated to his satisfaction the viability of the Horatio Alger myth for the Negro. He then identifies with the white power structure, negates his blackness, and refuses to admit his brotherhood with the oppressed. He even celebrates the possibilities for deception inherent in the major product of the paint factory, saying Optic White, "is so white you can paint a chunka coal and you'd have to crack it open with a sledge hammer to prove it wasn't white clear through!" [p. 190]

Optic White is associated with the American Dream because it is a "Liberty Paint", because most of it is sold to the government, and because the
particular paint the protagonist mixes will whitewash a national monument. Like the paint, then, the American Dream obscures the oppressive base of society, thereby deceiving men and persuading them to adjust to the same (white) stereotype.

Furthermore, like Bledsoe, Brockway is willing to do violence to his brothers to keep his limited power in the factory. In fact, he uses the machinery of the factory to defeat the protagonist, taking a sadistic pleasure in his destruction. As the machine explodes, the protagonist, "seemed to hear Brockway laugh" \(\text{\textit{c}}\text{p. 200}\). In short, if the protagonist will not become a "machine inside the machine" as Bledsoe and Brockway wish him to, they will actively seek his destruction, while if he follows the tenets of the "black rite of Horatio Alger", he will become like them, a cynical " cog" who helps the oppressive machine to function. Indeed, all the practitioners of the black rite have lost their humanity: Mr. Norton is a robot \(\text{\textit{c}}\text{pp. 73 and 78} \); the gods of the black rite look like dolls \(\text{\textit{c}}\text{p. 106}\); Barbee is named after a doll (suggesting his adoption of a mask that is equally repellent, if unlike, that of the Sambo doll); and Barbee is blind \(\text{\textit{c}}\text{p. 120}\). Moreover, those who preach the black rite help deceive and entrap others: Bledsoe makes a cage with his hands as he speaks of the Founder \(\text{\textit{c}}\text{p. 151}\), and the Founder, as portrayed by the statue, may be lowering
"the veil...more firmly in place" to achieve "a more efficient blinding".\[p. 37\]

If the invisible man repudiates the tenets of Horatio Alger, however, the only alternative provided by his society is the Brotherhood. The equivalent of the Brotherhood at the factory is the union. Never considering that the protagonist may not fit their categories, the union member's decide his fate without asking him what he wants, and they negate his humanity by assuming he is either "a fink" or a worker who isn't "so highly developed as some of us". Prefiguring his criticism of the Brotherhood, the protagonist muses, "I stood trembling...And worst of all, I knew they were forcing me to accept things on their own terms." \[p. 194\]

In the Brotherhood the protagonist is just as blinded by Marxist ideology as he had been by faith in the black rite. In many ways his victimization by the ideology of the Brotherhood is analogous to his victimization by the American Dream. In both ideologies (1) "individual responsibility" is replaced by authority (the committee); (2) individuals are sacrificed to the mass; and (3) emotion is ignored in the interest of scientific objectivity. The Brotherhood's ideology, moreover, clearly exemplifies mechanistic values which are totally opposed to the values of the fool. The Brotherhood exalts rationality, discipline and scientific objectivity, but ignores emotion,
individualism and sense data. As the protagonist rightly observes, only a machine can be totally objective \( \text{(p. 436)} \). The world, interpreted and controlled by the Brotherhood, is reminiscent, therefore, of the mythic kingdom which has banished the fool in the interest of order and efficiency, and consequently has become sterile and oppressive.

The Brotherhood appeals to the protagonist, first, because it seems to be a vehicle by which he may become important. But later he panics at the threat of a chaotic world, clinging to the Brotherhood as a defense against meaninglessness and chaos: "The world was strange if you stopped to think about it; still it was a world that could be controlled by science, and the Brotherhood had both science and history under control." \( \text{(p. 331)} \)

Even after he knows that the Brotherhood's stubborn adherence to doctrine and to discipline is making effective action impossible and necessitating the distortion of events in Harlem to fit their preconceptions, he assumes that the fool must remain outside the kingdom, seeing individuals in the streets and thinking, "They were men out of time--unless they found the Brotherhood." \( \text{(p. 381)} \)

Assuming that historical forces are reality, the protagonist believes that human existence must be in tune with the rational order of historical forces to be meaningful. But later he comes to realize that just the reverse is true! "What if Brother Jack were wrong?", he considers,
"What if history was a gambler, instead of a force in a laboratory experiment, and the boys his ace in the hole? What if history was not a reasonable citizen, but a madman full of paranoid guile." \( \text{p. 381} \) The protagonist then realizes that because the Brotherhood bases its actions on abstractions that have little or no relationship to the truth of individual actions, their truth is as arbitrary as Bledsoe's. The Jacks, the Wrestrums, and the Bledsoes only recognize truths that reinforce their preconceptions about reality. For example, they criticize the protagonist's first speech because although it is emotionally effective, "it was \textit{incorrect.}" \( \text{p. 303} \) The Brotherhood's ignorance of the individual, moreover, is total; they do not even see him. As the falsity of the "black rite of Horatio Alger" is symbolized by Barbee's blindness, the incompleteness of the Brotherhood's solution is revealed to the protagonist by Jack's glass eye.

Finally, the protagonist discovers that the qualities espoused by the Brotherhood--collectivism, rationality, discipline and order--are intrinsically connected to the machine and that the result of adopting the philosophy of the Brotherhood is to become a robot. He decides, "They wanted a machine? Very well, I'd become a supersensitive confirmer of their misconceptions." \( \text{p. 440} \) During the riot, however, he realizes that one cannot serve the factory without becoming its tool (thereby becoming part
of the machinery).

It was not suicide, but murder. The committee had planned it. And I had helped, had been a tool. A tool just at the very moment I had thought myself free. By pretending to agree I had agreed, had made myself responsible for that huddled form lighted by flame and gunfire in the street, and all the others whom now the night was making ripe for death. [p. 478]

Here the invisible man recognizes what Yossarian recognized in the "Eternal City"—that one must dissociate oneself completely from the cycle of systematic victimization of men by refusing to be either victim or oppressor.

While the paint factory is an emblem of a society in which both Marxist and Capitalist ideologies help insure the cooperation of the victims in their sacrifice to a static social order, the factory hospital metaphorically shows how this system affects human identity. The surreal narration characteristic of this passage both underlines the symbolic importance of the passage and obscures the physical reality of the protagonist's wound. Throughout the chapter he seems to receive treatments (such as shock treatments) appropriate for the treatment of mental or emotional illness although, logically, he should be receiving treatment for physical injuries resulting from the explosion. Dramatically, then, the protagonist is experiencing a mental rebirth and is being treated (at least as he perceives events) for a mental injury: his traumatic rejection of the tenets of Horatio Alger.
Symbolically, the hospital scene prefigures the violence done to the protagonist's identity, humanity, mind and manhood by the social factory. By negating the protagonist's identity, humanity, manhood and mental powers, the doctors, as agents of the factory, attempt to transform him into a robot by encouraging him to accept a stereotype as his identity.

"The machine will produce the results of a prefrontal lobotomy without the negative effects of the knife," the voice said. "You see, instead of severing the prefrontal lobe, a single lobe, that is, we apply pressure in the proper degrees to the major centers of nerve control—our concept is Gestalt—and the result is as complete a change of personality as you'll find in your famous fairy-tale cases of criminals transformed into amiable fellows after all that bloody business of a brain operation. And what's more," the voice went on triumphantly, "the patient is both physically and neurally whole."

"But what of his psychology?"

"Absolutely of no importance!" the voice said. "The patient will live as he has to live, and with absolute integrity. Who could ask more? He'll experience no major conflict of motives, and what is even better, society will suffer no trauma on his account."

[pp. 206-207]

His old personality effaced, the protagonist awakens a child of the machine, aware that the "machine is my mother." [p. 210] Furthermore, his old identity gone, he realizes that what he takes to be his identities are really versions of stereotyped masks. "Somehow, I was Buckeye the Rabbit... 'Buckeye' when you were very young"
and hid yourself behind wide innocent eyes; 'Brer', when you were older." \[ p. 211 \] Thus, the protagonist has come to see himself as one version of the Negro stereotype, the hero of an Uncle Remus story, while the doctors see him as the Negro Minstrel: as they send electrical current through his body, one remarks, "They really do have rhythm, don't they? Get hot, boy! Get hot!" \[ p. 207 \]

Robbed of his individuality, an individual becomes a robot, or to use another metaphor, a puppet, who is defined by his role and who is controlled by the mysterious mechanism of those in power. Clifton's Sambo puppets suggest, then, both the dehumanization of the Negro by the Minstrel stereotype and the dehumanization of all modern men.

It was some kind of toy... A grinning doll of orange-and-black tissue paper with thin flat cardboard disks forming its head and feet and which some mysterious mechanism was causing to move up and down in a loose-jointed, shoulder-shaking, infuriatingly sensuous motion, a dance that was completely detached from the black, mask-like face. It's no jumping jack, but what, I thought, seeing the doll throwing itself about with the fierce defiance of someone performing a degrading act in public, dancing as though it received a perverse pleasure from its motions. \[ p. 373 \]

As Clifton says, the doll is "the twentieth-century miracle" \[ p. 374 \], a pictorial representation of dehumanized twentieth-century man transformed into a puppet and controlled, as the vet explains, by "the white folks, authority, the rods, fate, circumstances \[ who are \]... the
force that pulls your strings until you refused to be pulled any more" \(\text{\textsuperscript{p. 137}}\).

The need for confirmation of one's identity to avoid being a puppet or robot is most clearly explained in relation to the Black. Indeed, the invisible man lost confidence in his identity because others ignored his individuality, recognizing him only as a manifestation of the negro stereotype or not recognizing him at all. Introducing himself, the protagonist declares, "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...." When people acknowledge only one's mask, he explains, "You often doubt if you really exist....You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world." \(\text{\textsuperscript{p. 7}}\)

As Ellison explains, modern culture associates the fool's values (which it associates with chaos) with the Black (for example, in the Sambo doll) and then ostracizes him for his supposed possession of these qualities. No matter how different a Black may be from the stereotype, society continues to foister it upon him, as Sybil expects the invisible man to play the role of the Negro rapist.

The protagonist is still controlled by this stereotype in attempting to reject it. Upon reaching New York, for example, he resolves that he will buy a watch, "do everything to schedule", look like a stereotyped businessman, and practice self-effacement \(\text{\textsuperscript{p. 145}}\). He even refuses to
eat foods he likes if they are associated with the Sambo stereotype. Consequently, when he eats a yam on the street, he affirms his human right to like anything he wishes and further affirms the value of his Black heritage, saying "They're my birthmark... I yam what I am!"

Ironically, in attempting to dissociate himself from this stereotype his identity is determined by a predictable negative reaction to that stereotype. More precisely, he has rejected one mask in favor of another, becoming indistinguishable from any white "cog in the machine". As Ellison explains, "The major flaw in the hero's character is his unquestioning willingness to do what is required of him by others as a way to success, and this was the specific form of his 'innocence'. He goes where he is told to go; he does what he is told to do; he does not even choose his Brotherhood name. It is chosen for him and he accepts it." Because he accepts the factory's categories and its metaphysics, he cannot escape society's stereotypes. Hence, he becomes entrapped because he is continually controlled, like the Sambo doll, by mechanism—in his case, by mechanistic patterns of thought. When the protagonist is physically imprisoned on the coal pile at the end of the novel, therefore, he recognizes that "This is the way it's always been, only now I know it." and that he has been "the prisoner of a group consisting of Jack and
Old Emerson and Bledsoe and Norton and Ras and the school superintendent and a number of others...all of whom had run me." \( \text{\textcopyright p. 492} \)

With this knowledge the protagonist criticizes the negative stereotype imposed upon him by his exploiters, declaring that modern Americans not only negate their humanity by adopting a mask, but they also all adopt the same mask. "Why, if they follow up this conformity business, they'll end up by forcing me, an invisible man, to become white, which is not a color but a lack of one. Must I strive toward colorlessness?" \( \text{\textcopyright p. 499} \) He concludes that for men to conform is to become "dull and gray." Because the factory exerts psychological pressure on all its citizens to accept a conformist role, the white benefactor (or oppressor) is just as defined by his role in the factory as his Black victim is. Mr. Norton, for example, trustee and traditional cultural symbol, "a symbol of the Great Traditions," \( \text{\textcopyright p. 39} \) "Has a solid pulse. Instead of beating, it vibrates." \( \text{\textcopyright p. 73} \) By equating his role with his identity (The Negro, Norton says, is "his fate"), he has denied his humanity and has become a robot. Moreover, his paternal plans for the Negro are conceived in mechanistic terms; his plans deny humanity and individuality because he envisions men as machines. As he tells the protagonist, "You are important because if you fail, I have failed by one individual, one defective cog." \( \text{\textcopyright p. 45} \)
Finally, he wishes black men to emulate white men, and, therefore, to become similar robots. The vet explains that the protagonist appears to be the fulfillment of Norton's dream: "Behold! a walking zombie!" the vet says, "Already he's learned to repress not only his emotions but his humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!" \( \int p. \ 86 \) Similarly, the invisible man denies Norton's humanity by seeing him as a force. As the vet explains, "The boy, this automation.... to you he is a thing and not a man...And you, for all your power, are not a man to him, but a God, a force--" \( \int p. \ 87 \). By an unspoken cultural and social agreement, both deny their minds; neither questions the mechanistic assumptions of the factory. Hence, the lobotomy in the factory hospital metaphorically enacts what society has already accomplished.

Whereas to Norton the protagonist is a potential defective cog, to the Brotherhood he is the "instrument of the committee's authority" \( \int p. \ 315 \). And, temporarily lobotomized by his acceptance of the Brotherhood's ideology, he accepts this vision of himself, telling a reporter that he is simply "a cog in the machine." \( \int p. \ 343 \) Yet he is not completely happy as a cog in the machine; during his first speech for the Brotherhood, for example, he "felt the hard, mechanical isolation of the hospital machine and..."
didn't like it" \( \text{\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} p. 296} \). Sensing the death of personality implicit in negating his humanity by embracing the factory, he further likens the microphone to "the steel skull of a man" \( \text{\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} p. 296} \) who "died of disposssession," concluding "we'll be dispossessed of the very brains of our heads." \( \text{\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} p. 298} \) The negation of humanity and of mind to either the Brotherhood or the American Dream is metaphysical death, just as Norton's face, for example, appears to the protagonist, "like a formless white death." \( \text{\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} p. 79} \)

Ironically, in this speech the protagonist outlines the ways in which American society victimizes men--attacking manhood \( \text{\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} p. 297} \), intelligence, identity, and the dislike of being dispossessed \( \text{\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} pp. 298-99} \). Then he charges his listeners not to allow themselves to become stereotypes or victims.

They've got a slogan and a policy. They've got what Brother Jack would call a 'theory and a practice.' It's 'never give a sucker an even break.' It's dispossess him! Evict him! Use his empty head for a spittoon and his back for a door mat! It's break him! Deprive him of his wages! It's use his protest as a sounding brass to frighten him into silence, it's beat his ideas and his hopes and homely aspirations, into a tinkling cymbal! A small, cracked cymbal to tinkle on the Fourth of July! Only give the dumb bunnies the soft-shoe dance! The Big Worry Apple, the Chicago Get Away, the Shoo Fly Don't Bother Me!

'And do you know what makes us so uncommon?' I whispered hoarsely. 'We let them do it!' \( \text{\textsuperscript{\textcopyright} p. 297} \)
Only after the riot does he realize that the Brotherhood uses these same tactics and hence victimizes men and that he not only "let them do it" to Harlem, he helped them.

Men are transformed into robots by a complex process. First, men suffer metaphoric lobotomies and hence, are incapable of imagining any alternative to the ideology of the factory (be it Marxist or Capitalist ideology). Second, this ideology banishes individuality and enforces this ban by a system of rewards and punishments. Individualism is punished either by physical violence (the explosion in the paint factory, for example) or social ostracism (twice the protagonist is reprimanded and ostracized for acting on "personal responsibility"—once by Jack and once by Bledsoe). Conformist, stereotyped behavior is rewarded by financial gain and by social acceptance. Third, the factory actively attacks sexuality and masculine pride. The castration foretold in the factory hospital comes to pass in the invisible man's dream at the end of the novel. But castration is an inherent part of the social order which oppresses men and transforms them into machines.  

In the parable of "The Omnipotent Administrator" (or the upper class white) and the "Super-masculine Menial (the Black), Eldridge Cleaver outlines the relationship between social exploitation and the taboo against sexual contact between Negro men and white women.
The white man loves the Super-masculine Menial -- John Henry, the steel-driving man, all body, driven to his knees by the Machine, which is the phallus symbol of the Brain... The Omnipotent Administrator conceded to the Super-masculine Menial all the attributes of masculinity associated with the Body: strength, brute power, muscles, even the beauty of the brute body. Except one. There was this single attribute of masculinity which he was unwilling to relinquish even though this particular attribute is the essence and seat of masculinity: sex.17

This taboo circumscribes the Negro's sexuality by limiting the women available to him. In Invisible Man the relationship of this taboo to the social order is symbolized by the dancing girl at the "battle royal" who has an American flag tattooed on her stomach. Yet in Invisible Man even the Omnipotent Administrator is "driven to his knees by the machine" and is metaphorically castrated; none of the men who accept the ideology of the factory show any interest in sex (consider the men in the Brotherhood, for example), for both oppressors and victims relinquish individuality and masculinity to serve the factory.

In fact, sexuality is employed by the factory to further entrap and castrate men. In the case of the Negro, the sexual taboo defined by Cleaver transforms the white woman into a symbol of freedom (and, thus, dehumanizes her), and yet, as the vet explains, she is only a substitute for real freedom. [p. 136] Trueblood's dream metaphorically explores the apparent, but false, opposition between the white woman and the machine.
Then I looks over in a corner and sees one of them tall grandfather clocks and I hears it strikin' and the glass door is openin' and a white lady is steppin' out of it.... She runs up and grabs me around the neck and holds tight, tryin' to keep me out of the clock. I don't know what to do then.... But she's holdin' me and I'm scared to touch her cause she's white.... I git loose from the woman now and I'm runnin' for the clock.... I goes up a dark tunnel, up near where the machinery is making all that noise and heat. It's like the power plant they got up to the school.

Since the protagonist associates buying a watch with mechanistic values and the description of the power house suggests the paint factory, Trueblood's dream of the girl emerging from a clock which is like a powerhouse dramatizes his confrontation with the factory's values. Rejecting the symbolic, but false, freedom embodied in the white girl, however, he runs to the clock where he is overcome by machinery and where, like the protagonist, he keeps running in his entrapment.

When he awakens, he again is entrapped between two unsatisfactory alternatives. He chooses to commit incest rather than wake his wife. Consequently, his story demonstrates the second way in which sexuality is attacked by the factory. The factory discredits sex by embodying sexuality in the Negro stereotype and then portraying sexuality, though this stereotype, as uncontrolled and irrational. The Black who is equated with this stereotype, therefore, is dehumanized and castrated by this identification. For example, Trueblood temporarily renounces his
humanity when he becomes a living reinforcement of society's belief that Blacks are immoral, but because he reinforces social prejudices and plays a role, he is rewarded. Thus, as in his dream, he has become part of the machine by renouncing his complex humanity in favor of a mask. He sees his action (not without humor, however) as a loss analogous to death; "I guess I felt then, at that time... just 'bout like that fellow did down in Birmingham. The one what locked hisself in the house and shot at them police until they set fire to the house and burned him up. I was lost..." (p. 58)

Similarly, the invisible man fears the consequences of the stereotype image of the Negro as rapist. When he first arrives in New York, for example, he is panic stricken when trapped in a subway with his body pressed against a white woman's: "'But you're up North now,' I told myself, 'up North.' Yes, but suppose she had screamed...I would walk the rest of the way." (p. 141)

This fear, however, is lessemasculating than the Northern "liberal" woman's acceptance of the myth of the Negro's sexuality. Sybil, for example, demands that he play the role of the rapist. The protagonist recognizes, "she thinks you're an entertainer. That's something else they're taught....A domesticated rapist, obviously, an expert on the woman question." (pp. 45-51)

Actually, the invisible man has little interest in
sex because he is mentally entrapped by the values of the machine. In fact, he thinks he can use sex as a tool to gain information about the Brotherhood from Sybil, for example, and hence to help maintain his position in the factory. He discovers, however, that sex is imprisoning. When Sybil expects him to play the stereotyped role of the Negro rapist, he thinks, "I had set this trap for myself" \(\text{[p. 451]}\). Similarly, when his earlier temptress wants more than an ideological discussion, he suspects, "this was a trap set by some secret enemy of the movement," \(\text{[p. 359]}\) and muses that "if I were really free, I'd get the hell out of here." \(\text{[p. 358]}\)

His reaction to her invitation, moreover, suggests another reason why he habitually rejects sexual involvement and further suggests why the factory must devitalize sex: "I was heading for the door, torn between anger and fierce excitement...I was lost, for the conflict between the ideological and the biological, duty and desire, had become too subtly confused." \(\text{[p. 360]}\) The protagonist sees the biological as antithetical to the orderly and rational values of the brotherhood. The biological is thus associated with chaos, and with the threat of formlessness and of meaninglessness, for sexuality is only a value in the world of the fool, not in the world of the Brotherhood. Thus, sexuality is a trap which might prevent the accomplishment of his goals.
While sex when associated with the white woman results in either another impingement of a stereotype on the protagonist's life or the encroachment of chaos and irrationality as a threat to his position in the factory, sexual potential embodied in the male sexual organs is associated positively with these and other values forbidden in a mechanistic society. For example, when a doctor in the hospital explains how the machine can erase identity, destroy potential threats to the society, and eliminate all "major conflict of motives" a voice asks, "Why not castration, doctor?"  

In this passage, then, as in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, masculinity is associated with identity, with rebellion, and with mental and physical freedom. As agents of the factory, the doctors wish to destroy these qualities.

Only when the protagonist realizes that history "was a gambler, instead of a force in a laboratory experiment... a madman full of paranoid guile" and that nature is chaotic, is his mind freed from entrapment by the factory's ideologies. Only then, therefore, can he conceive of positive alternatives to the values of the factory. When the protagonist dissociates himself from the factory and the Brotherhood and retreats to isolation in a hole, he has a dream-fantasy which embodies his new metaphysics. Castrated by "Jack and Old Emerson and Bledsoe and Norton and Ras and the school superintendent and a
number of others...all of whom had run" him, he is "free of illusion". Consequently, for the first time he sees value in his "blood-red parts," asserting that "There hang not only my generations wasting upon the water...But your sun...And your moon...Your world...there's your universe, and that drip-drop upon the water you hear is all the history you've made, all you're going to make. Now laugh, you scientists. Let's hear you laugh!" \[\text{p. 493}\] Here the protagonist asserts that human reality is biological, not ideological, and suggests that laughter is a more appropriate response to chaos than reason. Then, he symbolically places his genitals in direct opposition to the bridge, which he associates with the robots that the factory has made of men: "the bridge seemed to move off to where I could not see, striding like a robot, an iron man, whose iron legs clanged doomfully as it moved. And I struggled up, full of sorrow and pain, shouting, 'no, no, we must stop him!'" \[\text{p. 494}\] Castrated by the factory and thereby unable to act effectively in society, the protagonist nevertheless combats the factory by writing a novel which demonstrates that the factory is not in tune with nature or with the forces of history, that the universe is chaotic, history is a gambler and the individual is more important than the mass, that biology is more central to the individual's apprehension of life than ideology, and that "a man's feelings are more rational than his
mind." \( \text{p. 496} \)

And therefore, the individual need not be a robot. And, with the fool, he symbolically endorses fertility.

Having rejected scientific objectivity, rationality, the Horatio Alger myth, collectivism, ideologies, and all masks, the invisible man is left with the values of chaos. He is "free of illusion" but this freedom is castration. Having rejected all his false identities (when he burns the contents of his briefcase) he must discover his real identity before he can act. And before he can act meaningfully, he must learn how to live in a chaotic world. In ordering and reliving his experiences through the writing of the novel he discovers, first, the pattern of his life and hence who he is, second, the form of the entrapping factory which is in opposition to the natural chaotic world, and, third, a pattern for heroic and effective action adequate to "the chaos against which" it is "conceived."

\( \text{p. 502} \)

When asked by an interviewer for the source of the invisible man's final ethic, Ellison replies, "he does not get all his standard from himself. He gets it from a lot of people within the action. He even gets something from the fellows who burn the apartment—Dupre and that crowd; he gets something from Mary....He's learning all the time." 20

Thus, before tracing the protagonist's emergence as a hero, section two will examine those whose example helped him to
shape his ultimate affirmation in order to understand how he can reinterpret his grandfather's advice in a way which seems to contradict the literal meaning of that advice.

The Mentors: The Fool As Minstrel And Trickster

As he explains in Shadow and Act, Ellison began writing Invisible Man while reading Lord Raglan's The Hero.²¹ We see Raglan's influence, first, in the invisible man's growth from protagonist to hero and in the importance of his telling his story (traditionally the verbal form of a fertility ritual) to contribute to both his own rebirth and the rebirth of his tribe (or his readers). Second, the novel reflects Raglan's emphasis on the importance of the fool-seer in the evolution of a new hero, or a new king: "It seems clear that... the proper way for a budding hero to behave was to roister with a drunken buffoon" whose "prototype was a soothsayer or prophet."²²

The invisible man meets not one but many fools and fool-seers, but before he begins his voyage of discovery, he, like Oedipus, is confronted with an enigmatic oracle, who, instead of prophesying, gives the protagonist advice. On his deathbed, the grandfather says,

Son, after I've gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the
Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction; let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. [p. 20]

The rest of the novel recounts the attempt of the protagonist to understand the words of his oracle-grandfather and to apply them to his life.

In his attempt to understand his grandfather's advice, the protagonist looks for mentors who will act as symbolic fathers, leading the way toward full humanity. In looking for a fulfilling life, as Ellison explains,

the question should be, What are the specific forms of that humanity [the humanity of the Negro], and what in our background is worth preserving or abandoning. The clue to this can be found in folklore, which offers the first drawings of any group's character....It describes those rites, manners, customs, and so forth, which insure the good life, or destroy it; and it describes those boundaries of feeling, thought and action which that particular group has found to be the limitation of the human condition....it embodies those values by which the group lives and dies.23

Given Ellison's predilection toward folklore, it is no surprise that several of the invisible man's mentors seem to have stepped out of the pages of the folklore of the American Negro. Particularly, these mentors appear as versions of the fool. The fool's appeal is apparent. He is at home, indeed he thrives, in an irrational chaotic world. Because he is primitive, comic, and invulnerable, he is incapable of despair. And because he is imagination incarnate, he can act effectively and creatively in any
situation. Speaking of Rinehart as trickster, for example, the protagonist writes, "Until some gang succeeds in putting the world in a strait jacket, its definition is possibility. Step outside the narrow borders of what men call reality and you step into chaos--ask Rinehart, he's a master of it--or imagination." \[ p. 498 \]

From the fool, and particularly from the trickster, the invisible man gains hope that he can thrive in the world of chaos and learns to employ his creative imagination rather than pure reason to (1) understand his world, (2) to transcend it and (3) to live effectively within this world by utilizing his invisibility to exploit chaos. But there are two primary groups of mentors in the novel: first, a series of negative mentors whom the invisible man as protagonist chooses for himself and who are neither fool-seers nor tricksters, and, second, a series of unsought trickster mentors whose teachings the invisible man does not completely understand until he relives his life through the writing of the novel. It is from this second order of mentor that he gains the knowledge that leads to his affirmation of "the American principle". This section, therefore, will examine the protagonist's mentors, emphasizing the invisible man's positive fool-mentors--the grandfather, the vet, Trueblood, Wheatstraw, Tarp, Rinehart, and Armstrong--because the invisible man learns from them how to live effectively in a chaotic world. Understanding a series of
mentors who are primarily important in the linear progression of the novel are who accept a mask as their identity, however, is a prerequisite for the protagonist's understanding of his fool-mentors. Consequently, Bledsoe, Norton, Jack and Clifton (who is more of a double than a mentor) will also be briefly discussed. Furthermore, each mentor will be examined in the order he appears in the novel because some mentors, such as Rinehart and the vet, are equally important in the linear progression of the protagonist's story as they are in the circular progression of the narrator's.

In order to understand his trickster mentors, the protagonist must learn to make an imaginative leap to see through deceptive surface appearances. In fact, the entire narrative structure of the novel focuses on the protagonist's development of an imagination capable of reinterpreting the message of his grandfather, a message which at first glance appears to be totally negative. In marked contrast to the development of the mentor in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest in which McMurphy evolves from anachronistic fool to modern seer and thereby saves Bromden, in Invisible Man the grandfather remains static, but his message, out of the past and applicable primarily to the past, is reinterpreted by the protagonist for the modern world.
The grandfather, as fool as well as seer, suggests that the proper response to the terrors of modern civilization is laughter:

That night I dreamed...he told me to open my brief case and read what was inside and I did, finding an official envelope with the state seal; and inside the envelope I found another and another, endlessly, and I thought I would fall of weariness. 'Them's years,' he said. 'Now open that one.' And I did and in it I found an engraved document containing a short message in letters of gold. 'Read it,' my grandfather said. 'Out loud.'

'To Whom It May Concern,' I intoned. 'Keep This Nigger-Boy Running.'

I awoke with the old man's laughter ringing in my ears.

(It was a dream I was to remember and dream again for many years after...)

Like the Yankee, the black trickster wears a mask; accordingly, the grandfather adopts the stereotyped mask of the Negro: "He had been the most of men." Furthermore, he advises his son and grandson to adopt the mask of "Slave John". This advice repels the protagonist partly because, although Slave John is a rebel and a trickster, he prevails by adopting the mask of the Negro Minstrel.

In this regard, Ellison's discussion of Faulkner's The Reivers is instructive. Speaking of Ned, Ellison writes,
seen superficially he appears to be the usual head scratching, eye-rolling Negro stereotype. But beneath this mask, Ned is a version of John, the archetypical Negro slave of Negro folklore who always outwits and outtalks his master. Ned masterminds the action of the novel and in so doing he is revealed as Faulkner's own persona. He is the artist disguised as Negro rogue and schemer.²⁵

Roger Abrahams finds John to be one of the most popular Black folk heroes. John "crops up in many stories in direct confrontation with his 'ol' Marster!" and typically "is able, sometimes inadvertently, to get out of a tight spot which he has gotten into because of being stereotyped (and living up to one or another trait) by an act which is at one and the same time an act of submission and aggression."²⁶ Similarly, the grandfather advises the protagonist to act humble, to act the stereotype, but to use his role to disarm his oppressor and thus to defeat him.

In Bledsoe, the protagonist encourages what seems to be a particularly vicious version of Slave John, who defeats his oppressors as he exploits the invisible man by the adoption of a "bland mask" (p. 93). As the protagonist describes him, "while black and bald and everything white folks poked fun at, he had achieved power and authority; had, while black and wrinkle-headed, made himself of more importance in the world than most Southern white men. They could laugh at him but they couldn't ignore him." (p. 92) Not only does he look like the stereotype, but he had to "act the nigger" (p. 128) to gain power,
refusing "to eat in the dinning hall with white guests of the school, entering only after they had finished and then refusing to sit down....his favorite spiritual \( \text{was} \) 'Live-a-Humble'."\( \text{p. 96} \)

Yet Bledsoe is not Slave John rebelling against oppression. He has merely employed the stereotyped mask in order to join the ranks of the oppressors. Calling the protagonist "a fool" \( \text{p. 126} \), Bledsoe explains that he has adopted this mask to gain power, revealing that he is willing to accept the ruthless world in which power rules (as long as he is an oppressor) and to sacrifice his own people to maintain his power: "I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on limbs by morning if it means staying where I am." \( \text{p. 128} \)

As the protagonist learns from young Emerson, Bledsoe is certainly willing to sacrifice the invisible man. After this experience, the protagonist feels "suddenly that my grandfather was hovering over me grinning triumphantly out of the dark," \( \text{p. 131} \) for his confrontation with Bledsoe provides him with data that later will enable him to understand one aspect of his grandfather's advice: that "the black rite of Horatio Alger" is a euphemism for "the old sacrificial merry-go-round" \( \text{p. 437} \) and that Bledsoe's use of his mask is dehumanizing.

To increase his understanding of the world around him, the protagonist is furnished with another seer, one who demonstrates that symbolically, as well as literally,
the road from the college "turned off to the insane asylum."[p. 35] The vet is a seer who proposes a comic response to life. As the protagonist muses, the vet's "played a vast and complicated game whose goal was laughter and whose rules and subtleties I could never grasp"[p. 70], and the vet says, "I put into words things which most men feel...but I'm really more clown than fool."[p. 138]

The vets in general exemplify the failure of the Horatio Alger myth for the Black American:

Many of them had been doctors, lawyers, teachers, Civil Service workers; there were several cooks, a preacher, a politician, and an artist. One very nutty one had been a psychiatrist. They were supposed to be members of the professions toward which at various times I vaguely aspired myself.[p. 70]

To be sure that we are reminded of the American Dream, one of the inmates claims to be the grandson of Thomas Jefferson on the "field-nigger side".[p. 73] The vet had been a doctor abroad, but the conflict of his aspirations (to dignity) and his ability (to help others) with the intolerance and narrowness of American society has driven him mad—if, indeed he is really mad and is not simply adopting a protective mask.27 With the insight of one outside society he explains the relationship between the individual and the machine and demonstrates that both the invisible man and Mr. Norton have become robots by refusing
to think. [p. 86] On the bus the vet tells the protagonist how he can avoid being a puppet:

And remember you don't have to be a complete fool in order to succeed. Play the game, but don't believe in it—that much you owe yourself. Even if it lands you in a strait jacket or a padded cell. Play the game, but play it your own way...Learn how it operates, learn how you operate...You might even beat the game. It's really a very crude affair. Real Pre-Renaissance—and that game has been analyzed, put down in books....They wouldn't see you because they don't expect you to know anything, since they believe they've taken care of that... [p. 137]

Thus, the vet expands upon the advice of the grandfather. One can play the game and succeed, but first one must understand both himself and the game. Then the vet helps the protagonist embark upon his voyage of understanding, first, by warning against settling for symbolic freedom (the white girl) [p. 136], second, by admonishing him to work out his own freedom, and, third, by providing hope that the world is possibility: "Be your own father, young man. And remember, the world is possibility if only you'll discover it." [p. 139]

Before the protagonist can discover the world of infinite possibility he must better understand the world of the machine. He gains this knowledge with the help of false and true fool-seers, who characteristically appear in the guise of the Negro trickster. As Abrahams explains, in trickster stories animals often play parts analogous to the roles of "ol' Marster" and "Slave John." "At one
time," he writes,

tales of tricksters in the guise of Br'er Rabbit were quite common. . . . Rabbit must not only have audacity and drive, but also the self-serving purpose and direct expression of hungers, characteristic of the child. And it is in the guise of the childish creature who really cannot be held accountable for his actions that we commonly observe and judge Rabbit. 28

In particular the invisible man alludes to the famous story of the Tar Baby. Discussing Black folklore, Ellison explains the significance of the Tar Baby:

Let Tar Baby, that enigmatic figure from Negro folklore, stand for the world. He leans, black and gleaming, against the wall of life utterly noncommittal under our scrutiny, our questioning, starkly unmoving before our naive attempts at intimidation. Then we touch him playfully and before we can say Sonny Liston! we find ourselves stuck. Our playful investigations become a labor, a fearful struggle, an agon. Slowly we perceive that our task is to learn the proper way of freeing ourselves to develop, in other words, technique.

Sensing this, we give him our sharpest attention, we question him carefully, we struggle with more subtlety; while he, in his silent way, holds on, demanding that we perceive the necessity of calling him by his true name as the price of our freedom. It is unfortunate that he has so many, many 'true names'—all spelling chaos; and in order to discover even one of these we must first come into the possession of our own names. For it is through our names that we first place ourselves in the world. Our names, being the gift of others, must be made our own. 29

Brer Rabbit of the Uncle Remus story loses his conflict with the tar baby and as a result is trapped by Brer Fox (the animal version of ol' Harster). But Brer Rabbit (the
trickster) wins his freedom by cleverly utilizing the mask of the scared child: "Skin me, Brer Fox...snatch out my eyeballs, t'ar out my years by de roots, en cut off my legs, but...don't fling me in dat brier-patch." He bests his captors by capitalizing on their inability to see the cleverness behind his mask.

As a version of the fool, Rabbit is at home in the world. Most characters in *Invisible Man* are entrapped by their encounters with a chaotic world. The many allusions to the tar baby story suggest that they could free themselves by adopting the stereotyped mask of the Negro, while employing the tactics of the archetypal trickster. Moreover, before the recitation of Rabbit's escape, Uncle Remus says, "Some say Jedge B'ar come 'long en loosed 'im--some way he didn't." The allusions to the Uncle Remus tale, therefore, raise the possibility that the protagonist--"Call me Jack the Bear"--can help to free Rabbit, presumably by writing the novel.

Before he can free anyone else, however, the protagonist must learn his own name, and to do this he must understand his grandfather's true identity as well as his advice. Meeting Lucius Brockway, who is "old enough to be my grandfather," the protagonist finds another possible embodiment of his grandfather's "agreeing um to death and destruction." Brockway has made himself invulnerable to the onslaughts of college trained engineers,
first, by making himself indispensable to the company and,
second, by adopting a humble mask so that he appears to be
harmless (as Brer Rabbit or any fool always appears). The
protagonist muses that "he was dissimulating by appearing
to be a janitor or other menial, like some of the
teachers at the college, who, to avoid trouble when driving
through the small surrounding towns, wore chauffeur caps
and pretended that their cars belonged to white men."
\[p. 185\] Brockway's mask is very successful; he even
beats 'ol' Marster' when an Italian engineer has been given
his job. When he threatens to retire after an illness, Mr.
Sparland visits his home to ask him to return to the
factory.

Yet Brockway lacks the freedom and the rebellion
of the trickster. Believing in his mask, he is happy to be
"a machine within the machine" and to accept a system
which is based on the premise that "White is right."
When the protagonist remembers aloud the childhood
jingle on which the Optic White slogan is based, Brockway
replies, "That's right." \[p. 191\] Although he makes
the "tar" which is the base for the paint which helps to
obscure the reality of the factory, he is deceived
and imprisoned by his belief in that factory, just as Brer
Rabbit was entrapped by the tar Baby: "Great tucks showed
in his overalls where the folds were stuck together by
the goo with which he was covered, and I thought, Tar Baby,
and wanted to blot him out of my sight." [p. 198] Yet Brockway is not a tar baby, but is trapped in the tar by his acquiescence to his victimization. Therefore, although he employs some of the wiles of the trickster, the protagonist recognizes him as a Negro Minstrel who has chosen to live in "bad faith," by equating his identity with his role in the factory. Therefore, the protagonist, alluding to his Sambo mask, calls him, "you old-fashioned, slavery-time, mammy-made, handkerchief-headed bastard" and tells him he "should have known better" [p. 198].

Brockway should have remembered the possibility embodied in the trickster archetype behind the Sambo mask he has assumed, but he cannot transcend his situation, he is only a fool, not a fool-seer. Therefore, the protagonist rejects his example, saying, "You were trained to accept the foolishness of such old men as this even when you thought them clowns and fools;...But this was to much....he was not grandfather or uncle or father, nor preacher or teacher." [p. 197]

In contrast to Brockway, Trueblood is a true fool-seer. He is introduced, however, as a perfect incarnation of the Negro Minstrel:

he had seldom come near the campus but had been well liked...told the stories with a sense of humor and a magic that made them come alive. He was also a good tenor singer, and sometimes when special white guests visited the school
he was brought up along with the members a
country quartet to sing what the officials
called 'their primitive spirituals.'
\[ p. 47 \]

Trueblood is both a poet and a high priest intoning the
verbal portion of a rite, telling his story with "his voice
taking on a deep incantatory quality, as though he had told
the story many, many times." Illustrating that his story
is one version of Rabbit's confrontation with the tar baby,
Trueblood begins his narration with a description of the
night, "Black as the middle of the bucket of tar." \[ p. 53 \]

Then he tells the story of his dream and of his awakening
to find himself entrapped, forced into violating his own
child and therefore into reinforcing the white community's
concept of the stereotyped immoral Negro. Consequently,
Trueblood is richly rewarded; Norton, for example, gives
him a hundred dollar bill. Trueblood comments, "I done
the worse thing a man could ever do in his family and
instead of chasin' me out of the country, they gimme more
help than they ever give any other colored man, no matter
how good a nigguh he was...." \[ p. 65 \]

Ironically, as Baumbach explains, "Norton is a kind
of euphemistic alter-ego—a secret sharer of the atavistic
Trueblood."\[32^{*} \]

Having described his daughter as "too pure
for life...too pure and too good and too beautiful" and
having declared that "Everything I've done since her passing
has been a monument to her memory," \[ pp. 43-44 \] Norton
looks at Trueblood with "envy and indignation." Norton's and Trueblood's different approaches to their confrontation with the tar baby--evidenced by the desire of each for his daughter--reveal their differing approaches to life. Reducing everything to order, Norton sees his daughter as the personification of beauty and truth and, in the rationalistic tradition, sees life as a tragedy, saying to Trueblood with astonishment, "You have looked upon chaos and are not destroyed." Norton becomes ill just listening to Trueblood's recitation, but Trueblood, the comic hero, answers Norton's inquiries concerning the inevitable tragic consequence of his act, saying "I'm all right, suh...My eyes is all right too. And when I feels po'ly in my gut I takes a little soda and it goes away." His heritage as fool and trickster allows Trueblood to transcend the stereotypes imposed upon him by the community (who see him as the incarnation of the immoral Negro) and even by his family (who see him as a traitor).

Trueblood realizes, however, that he is not just what he has been, but has a life before him of infinite possibilities, asserting, "I'm still a man." Furthermore, he knows that remaining static is living in "bad faith", that he still retains existential choice and has a responsibility to choose to be something transcending what he has been--even though he would not speak of his
knowledge in these terms. In his own way Trueblood realizes with Sartre that "The essential freedom, the ultimate and final freedom that cannot be taken from a man, is to say No." Trueblood asserts his freedom by an act of simultaneous negation and affirmation: he affirms the importance of individual human life by refusing to allow his wife to arrange an abortion for Matty Lou because "That woulda been pilin' sin up on toppa sin." 

Thus, Trueblood is not destroyed by his action (as he would be in a tragedy), and, furthermore, he does not accept a stereotype as his identity. Instead, he experiences a metamorphosis. Symbolically killed when his wife strikes him with the axe, he emerges (in the tradition of the American Comic Hero) almost unchanged. As Daniel Hoffman explains the mythic pattern,

The metamorphic pattern of American life and of the American folk hero's career sets its exemplars in linear motion through as many conditions of 'reality' as possible. These metamorphoses, as we have seen, are only outwardly comparable to the rebirths achieved by initiatory rites in cultures or institutions of sacred orientation. Their function, nonetheless, is a ritualistic one: not a rite de passage but a ritual of intensification, in which the powers of the self are affirmed, reinforced, and glorified by each demonstration of their successful use. These powers prove the self spiritually indomitable and adaptable to the wildest vicissitudes of fortune or nature.

Thus, in his confrontation with the tar baby of chaos and with the grandfather clock of his society, Trueblood affirms "the powers of the self" and in so doing, affirms his...
existential freedom and the life of infinite possibilities.

Furthermore, like Louis Armstrong, Trueblood reaffirms his freedom through art. Entrapped momentarily by despair and by bewilderment at the chaos he has found to be life, Trueblood "thinks and thinks, until I thinks my brain go'n bust, 'bout how I'm guilty and how I ain't guilty. I don't eat nothin' and I don't drink nothin' and caint sleep at night." But then he transcends his situation by singing the blues, and thereby by affirming and ordering chaos and irrationality.

Finally, one night, way early in the mornin', I looks up and sees the stars and I starts singin'. I don't mean to, I didn't think 'bout it, just start singin'. I don't know what it was, some kinda church song, I guess. All I know is I ends up singin' the blues. I sings me some blues that night ain't never been sang before, and while I'm singin' them blues I makes up my mind that I ain't nobody but myself and ain't nothin' I can do but let whatever is gonna happen, happen. I made up my mind that I was goin' back home and face Kate; yeah, and face Matty Lou too.

The blues, according to Ellison, "is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism." Furthermore, Ellison explains that Louis Armstrong, one mentor of the poet-protagonist, is an example of the trickster, his medium being music rather than words and pantomine. Armstrong's
clownish license and intoxicating powers are almost Elizabethan; he takes liberties with kings, queens and presidents; emphasizes the physicality of his music with sweat, spittle and facial contortions; he performs the magical feat of making romantic melody issue from a throat of gravel; and some few years ago was recommending to all and sundry his personal physic, 'Pluto Water,' as a purging way to health, happiness and international peace.36

Similarly, Trueblood as trickster corrects Norton's abstract view of life with his recitation of physical reality, even interpreting Norton's metaphysical inquiries as questions about the state of his physical health. Transcending his situation by singing the blues and by reciting his parable of man's confrontation with the tar baby, he turns his suffering into lyric beauty. Furthermore, as trickster and as Brer Rabbit, he is able to prosper and to exploit those who would exploit him by wearing the stereotyped mask without being confined by it.

Although it is crucial to recognize Trueblood's originality, it is his adherence to the archetypal pattern of fool and trickster that points the way toward the life of infinite possibility. Several other fool-mentors provide variations on the same basic pattern, clarifying the possibilities embodied in the archetype. Peter Wheatstraw, for example, is a classic version of the Negro trickster as a poet. Discussing rabbits and bears in the novel, Floyd Horowitz explains,

The bear and the rabbit are sometimes psychologically one in the same, as in Jack
the Rabbit, Jack the Bear. But it would seem that the rabbit can be Peter as well. Or he is called Buckeye, which describes Jack the Communist later on. Or he is about to be peppered with Buckshot. Or, there is a pun on bear, so that the hero cannot bear his existence. There is, in short, a rich language play which intertwines this motif with many others, which perhaps too gratuitously on occasion identifies rabbit with Brer Rabbit.37

Relating Peter Wheatstraw to the rabbit and bear theme, Horowitz comments, "on the streets of New York City he meets the second rabbit man, in this instance named Peter...Peter Rabbit is not the same as Brer Rabbit; yet he belongs to the same tradition. He knows how to escape the McGregors of the world."38

The protagonist introduces Peter as a poet and as a fool who sings the blues and who wears "Charlie Chaplin pants".39 p. 154. Perhaps, as the protagonist suggests, Peter's foolishness is only a guise for the expression of the wisdom of the seer, for according to the invisible man, Peter "was like one of the vets from the Golden Day."

Furthermore, he is linked to the protagonist's past. When Peter warns him that Harlem is a "bear's den", the protagonist thinks,

I tried to think of some saying about bears to reply, but remembered only Jack the Rabbit, Jack the Bear, who were both long forgotten and now brought a wave of homesickness. I wanted to leave him, and yet I found a certain comfort in walking along beside him, as though we'd walked this way before through other mornings, in other places. 39 p. 154.
Peter specifically invokes the past asking, "Why are you trying to deny me?" As trickster and as agent of destruction, Peter does away with the useless blueprints of the factory, but he is not entrapped by the machine, saying "Damn if I'm-a let 'em run me into my grave." \(\text{p. 155}\)

Peter's most outstanding characteristic, however, is his continual recitation of nonsense rhymes that celebrate his identity as trickster and as poet:

All it takes to get along in this here man's town is a little shit, grit and mother-wit. And man, I was bawn with all three. In fact, I'maseventsonofaseventsonbawnwithacaulover botheyesandraisedonblackcatboneshighjohnthe conquerorandgreasygreens...I'll verse you but I won't curse you--My name is Peter Wheatstraw, I'm the Devil's only son-in-law, so roll 'em! ...My name's Blue and I'm coming at you with a pitchfork. Fe Fi Fo Fum. Who wants to shoot the Devil one...I'm a piano player and a rounder, a whiskey drinker and a pavement pounder..." \(\text{p. 155}\)

Writing of the Negro version of the archetypal trickster who inspired the Negro Minstrel stereotype, Constance Rourke writes,

Triumph was in his humor, but not triumph over circumstance. Rather this was an unreasonable headlong triumph launching into the realm of the preposterous. The triumphant note ran through the careless phrases of most of the minstrel songs and was plain in the swift pulsations of the rhythms...Hitherto the note of triumph had been unmistakable and unremitting among American comic characters. The sudden extreme of nonsense was new and the tragic undertone was new.\(^39\)

Wheatstraw's transformation of reality into nonsense verses evokes nostalgia in the protagonist, for to enter
the rational, ordered world of the factory, the protagonist has forsaken the heritage of nonsense verses, and therefore he has lost the ability to transcend despair by turning chaos into song or into literature. Unlike the protagonist, moreover, Wheatstraw knows his identity. He knows that his form is multiplicity, for he is the sum of the various facets of his personality, including his heritage; similarly, the narrator learns from Rinehart that his experiences have defined him \( \sqrt{p. \ 439} \) and that he can utilize diverse masks in response to chaos. Because Peter knows who he is, he can cope with the tar baby. He sings, "She's got feet like a monkeee/Legs/Legs, Legs like a maaad/Bulldog..." \( \sqrt{p. \ 156} \)

The protagonist is puzzled by Wheatstraw's song, thinking, "What does it mean... Was it about a woman or about some strange sphinxlike animal? Certainly his woman, no woman, fitted that description. And why describe anyone in such contradictory words?" \( \sqrt{p. \ 156} \) Yet, Peter and his song rend from the protagonist the grudging recognition, "they're a hell of a people." \( \sqrt{p. \ 156} \)

Wheatstraw's song is only puzzling to one who assumes that the universe is rational and orderly, for the song is an evocation of chaos, of parts which do not fit together into any rationally acceptable form. Indeed, Peter is not just recognizing but celebrating chaos by transforming its elements into a literary form, and therefore he creates form out of formlessness. Similarly, his actions throughout
the scene demonstrate his continual effort to create or discover form (in song and in nonsense rhymes) through his imagination without ignoring "the chaos against which" his patterns are "conceived." Patterning his actions after the Negro trickster, the protagonist learns that "to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I myself, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility" \(\text{p. 10}\)---or the form potentially diverse enough to do justice to chaos. Therefore, he writes a book which celebrates and gives order to the chaos that is reality, discovers the form of his identity, and affirms the diversity of the life of infinite possibilities (embodied in the trickster archetype).

As Wheatstraw's presence in the novel develops the possibilities of transcendence and salvation through art suggested by Trueblood's story, Tarp's story embodies the possibilities for action available to one who, like Trueblood, asserts his existential identity and freedom and who therefore refuses to be entrapped. Tarp's importance is underlined by his relationship to the protagonist's grandfather. When Tarp hangs a picture of Frederick Douglass on the wall, the protagonist feels "a sudden piety, remembering and refusing to hear the echoes of my grandfather's voice." \(\text{p. 329}\) The next time Tarp enters the protagonist's office, the protagonist thinks, "my grandfather seemed to look from his eyes." \(\text{p. 332}\) But
only when Tarp gives the invisible man the link from the chain does he realize that Tarp has become a surrogate for his grandfather.

I felt that Brother Tarp's gesture in offering it was of some deeply felt significance which I was compelled to respect. Something, perhaps, like a man passing on to his son his own father's watch, which the son accepted not because he wanted the old-fashioned time-piece for itself, but because of the overtones of unstated seriousness and solemnity of the paternal gesture which at once joined him with his ancestors, marked a high point of his present, and promised a concreteness of his nebulous and chaotic future. And now I remembered that if I had returned home instead of coming north my father would have given me my grandfather's old-fashioned Hamilton, with its long, burr-headed winding stem.  

By accepting the chain, the invisible man accepts his Black heritage and with it his grandfather.

Tarp's story clarifies his grandfather's sphinxlike pronouncement. Tarp was imprisoned for his refusal to acquiesce to his victimization: he "said no to a man who wanted to take something from" him. As he refused to be victimized, he refused to be entrapped forever. He is, in fact, the epitome of Camus' rebel, defined by Camus as follows:

What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion...

Rebellion cannot exist without the feeling that somewhere and somehow, one is right. It
is in this way that the Rebel slave says yes and no simultaneously. He affirms that there are limits and...he confronts an order of things which oppresses beyond the limit that he can tolerate. 40

Tarp said "no! And...kept saying no until...nineteen years later, he broke the chain and left." \(\text{p. 336}\)

Like Orr, he is an American trickster, who has patience, endurance, and ability; he makes friends with the dogs and waits, and he breaks his chain and survives a flood. Tarp teaches the invisible man that after negating entrapment one must affirm the world and one's own abilities: "I asked myself, Tarp, can you make it? And inside me I said yes; all that water and mud and rain said yes, and I took off..." \(\text{p. 136}\) Then after telling his story, he (as fool) affirms infinite possibilities, laughing "so gay it startled" the invisible man. \(\text{p. 136}\) Summarizing his story Tarp says, "Funny thing to give somebody the broken link, but I think it's got a heap of signifying wrapped up in it and it might help you remember what we're really fighting against. I don't think of it in terms of but two words, yes and no; but it signifies a heap more..." \(\text{p. 136}\)

Trueblood, Wheatstraw and Tarp provide the foundation for the invisible man's final affirmation--his reinterpretation of his grandfather and of his grandfather's philosophy. But he only understands these mentors after Rinehart provides him with hope. Prerequisite to the understanding
of Rinehart's psychological force, however, is an understanding of Jack, the protagonist's second important false father, and of Clifton, whose death frees him from bondage to the Brotherhood.

Relating Jack to the Brer Rabbit motif in the novel, Horowitz calls him "the biggest, most persistent rabbit of all...Brer Jack the Communist, alias Buckeye, the one-eyed international hopper." As the agent of the Brotherhood he seems to have complete control of the tar baby. Yet he is a total anti-fool (and, therefore, anti-rabbit); because he believes that order and rationality are the only realities, he is half-blind. When the protagonist discovers that Jack is one-eyed, he realizes that he is part of the machine, the "old sacrificial merry-go-round":

that is the meaning of discipline, I thought, sacrifice...yes, and blindness, he doesn't see me. He doesn't even see me...discipline and sacrifice. Yes, and blindness...Look at it [the glass eye] there, a good job, an almost perfect imitation that seemed alive.

[p. 411]

In the trickster tradition, Jack is neither Brer Rabbit nor Slave John but Ol' Marster who exploits Harlem and the protagonist for his own advantage. The protagonist concludes that for the oppressor, action is simple:

Sacrifice and leadership, I thought. For him it was simple. For them it was simple. But hell. I was both. Both sacrificer and victim. I couldn't get away from that...I thought of Jack, the people at the funeral, Rinehart.
They'd asked us for bread and the best I could give was a glass eye—not so much as an electric guitar. \[\text{p. 437}\]

Before the protagonist learns of Jack's glass eye, however, Clifton's suicide and the Brotherhood's callousness toward it undermine Jack as a mentor. Clifton is a potential folk hero: as Ras says, "In Africa this man be a chief, a black king." \[\text{p. 323}\]; although Clifton is associated with the grinning Sambo dolls which epitomize the stereotype of the Negro Minstrel--devitalized perversions of the black trickster--his death while selling the dolls is redemptive and the closest approximation to martyrdom in the novel.

As the protagonist's double, Clifton dramatizes the mental and emotional suicide which will result if the invisible man remains with the Brotherhood; Clifton's death, therefore, frees the protagonist from mechanism so that he may seek alternative values. In rebelling by resisting the policeman, he is identified with the puppets, dancing like a doll:

thrown off balance...Clifton spun on his toes like a dancer and swung his right arm over and around in a short, jolting arc, his torso carrying forward and to the left in a motion that sent the box strap free as his right foot traveled forward and his left arm followed through in a floating uppercut that sent the cop's cap sailing.... \[\text{p. 377}\]

Thus, his rebellion is a form of suicide, just as his selling of the dolls is a negation of humanity. He despairs because
he cannot see through the stereotyped Sambo to the possibilities of freedom demonstrated by its trickster prototype. Because he can find meaning only in the rational world of the Brotherhood, he believes "that only in the Brotherhood" can "we make ourselves known," can "avoid being empty Sambo dolls." \( \text{p. 376} \) Given his assumptions, his only alternative when he recognizes that the Brotherhood participates in the universal exploitation of the weak is to "fall outside of history" \( \text{p. 376} \), to be a Sambo doll. He proceeds to sell the dolls, dramatizing his understanding that the Brotherhood is as blind as the rest of organized society.

Nevertheless, Clifton's death is instrumental in the rebirth of the protagonist. His complex humanity disproves the Brotherhood's hypothesis that the individual is unimportant, and his death negates the assumption that abstract history precedes the particular existence and actions of individuals. The protagonist learns that to be inside history is to be finally and totally equated with a false stereotype imposed by society: "Now he's a part of history, and he has received his true freedom. Didn't they scribble his name on a standardized pad? \( \text{p. 396} \)

Wondering whether Clifton's life might be more in tune with history than Jack's, the protagonist considers that perhaps
history was a gambler, instead of a force in a laboratory experiment and the boys his ace in the hole? What if history was not a reasonable citizen, but a madman full of paranoid guile and these boys his agents, his big surprise! His own revenge? For they were outside, in the dark with Sambo, the dancing paper doll, taking it on the lambo with my fallen brother, Tod Clifton (Tod, Tod) running and dodging the forces of history instead of making a dominating stand.

By Tod's funeral, the protagonist has become apolitical, realizing that "Brother Jack probably wouldn't approve of it [his speech] at all [p. 395]," for instead of moving the crowd to political action he relates a parable of social and metaphysical entrapment.

Such was the short bitter life of Brother Tod Clifton. Now he's in this box with the bolts tightened down. He's in the box and we're in there with him, and when I've told you this you can go. It's dark in this box and it's crowded. It has a cracked ceiling and a clogged-up toilet in the hall. It has rats and roaches, and it's far, far too expensive a dwelling. The air is bad and it'll be cold this winter. Tod Clifton is crowded and he needs the room. 'Tell them to get out of the box,' that's what he would say if you could hear him.

Understanding that mankind is entrapped metaphysically by death, socially by the machine and psychologically by his acceptance of restrictive ideologies, the invisible man despairs completely, thinking,

I felt as though I'd been watching a bad comedy. Only it was real and I was living it and it was the only historically meaningful life that I could live. If I left it, I'd be nowhere. As dead and meaningless as Clifton...After tonight
I wouldn't ever look the same or feel the same
...Some of me, too, had died with Tod Clifton.
\[p. 413\]

If history is a madman, life a bad comedy and society
a prison, then who is better equipped to live in this world
than the fool, for the fool is traditionally mad, comic, and
invulnerable to mental entrapment. Meeting an American
fool, the protagonist gains hope, recognizing that with
imagination one can thrive in an irrational world. Adopting
a disguise to flee Ras, the protagonist is continually
mistaken for Rinehart. Listing Rinehart's various identities,
the protagonist says,

Can it be, I thought, can it actually be? And
I knew that it was. I had heard of it before
but I'd never come so close. Still, could he
be all of them: Rine the runner and Rine the
gambler and Rine the briber and himself be both
rind and heart? What is real anyway? But how
could I doubt it? He was a broad man, a man of
parts who got around. Rinehart the rounder.
It was true as I was true. His world was
possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead
of me and I was a fool. I must have been crazy
and blind. The world in which we lived was
without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world
of fluidity, and Rine the rascal was at home.
Perhaps only Rine the rascal was at home in it.
It was unbelievable, but perhaps only the
unbelievable could be believed. \[p. 430\]

Through Rinehart, the protagonist comes to know that in a
fluid world, a world without prescribed form, "You could
actually make yourself anew" \[p. 431\] by exploiting the
chaos and your invisibility and by changing masks at will.

Discussing Rinehart, Ellison says,
Certainly B. P. Rinehart (the P. is for 'Proteus', the B. for 'Bliss') would seem the perfect example of Hyman's trickster figure. He is a cunning man who wins the admiration of those who admire skullduggery and knowhow; an American virtuoso of identity who thrives on chaos and swift change; he is greedy, in that his masquerade is motivated by money as well as by the sheer bliss of impersonation; he is godlike, in that he brings new techniques--electric guitars, etc.--to the service of God, and in that there are many men in his image while he is himself unseen; he is phallic in his role of 'lover'; as a numbers runner he is a bringer of manna and a worker of miracles, in that he transforms (for winners, of course) pennies into dollars, and thus he feeds (and feeds on) the poor.

Then, Ellison cautions against ignoring Rinehart's "role in the formal structure of the narrative," which is "to suggest to the hero a mode of escape from Ras, and a means of applying, in yet another form, his grandfather's cryptic advice to his own situation." Rinehart, then, provides modes of literal and symbolic escape from Ras. The protagonist adopts the mask of the trickster to avoid being killed by Ras, but he also learns from Rinehart an alternative to violence turned outward (Ras) and to violence turned inward (Clifton)--the only alternatives to the machine that seem left to the protagonist before he learns of Rinehart. Moreover, because his version of the trickster is so dramatic, Rinehart awakens the protagonist to the possibilities inherent in the lives of the other tricksters.

Unfortunately, the protagonist cannot immediately apply the pattern of Rinehart's life to his own in any meaningful way. When he tries, he follows Rinehart's
example too literally and becomes a charlatan. Rinehart exploits his masks without danger to his identity because he has no separate identity, but the protagonist must learn to utilize masks while maintaining his identity. To effectively emulate Rinehart, therefore, he must reinterpret the trickster pattern, not simply copy the individual manifestation of that pattern. Specifically, he must learn from Rinehart how to master chaos through the imagination. \[ p. 498 \]

Unless we understand the importance of Rinehart as trickster and of his relationship to the family of fools presented in the novel, the protagonist's final reinterpretation of his grandfather's advice will seem arbitrary and certainly not based upon any experience which would cause him (on the surface) to affirm "American principles". On his deathbed his grandfather says that America is the "enemy's country". \[ p. 19 \] Two statements by Ellison illuminate the protagonist's affirmation and suggest the relationship of the Negro trickster to that affirmation. First, Ellison maintains that

I have to affirm my forefathers and I must affirm my parents or be reduced in my own mind to the white man's inadequate—even if unprejudiced—conception of human complexity. Yes, and I must affirm those unknown people who sacrificed for me. I'm speaking of those Negro Americans who by living their own lives and refusing to be destroyed by social injustice and white supremacy, real or illusory, made
it possible for me to live my own life with
meaning.\textsuperscript{44}

In \textit{Invisible Man} the past is of primary importance. The
protagonist's past is the south, but his past is also
associated with certain ideas of the Negro, both stereotyped
and archetypal. His grandfather and Trueblood directly
partake of this past; Wheatstraw insists that the invisible
man affirm his past; and Tarp is related so closely to the
grandfather that he seems to be an incarnation of the past.
The protagonist is blinded to the viability of the mode of
existence offered by these mentors because he rejects the
archetype with the stereotype and rejects his past because
he associates it with stereotyped images of the Negro.

\textsuperscript{\textcopyright p. 197} When he sees Rinehart's updated version of the
trickster, however, he begins to see possibilities in the
trickster pattern. Then through writing the novel, he
understands his mentors. The use of the trickster to connect
a man with his past is very natural, since tricksters, in
general, are thought to be vestiges of prior, more infantile
stages of human development,\textsuperscript{45} while the particular forms
of the trickster seen in this study--the Yankee, the
Backwoodsman and the Negro--are nineteenth-century folk
heroes who are out of place in the modern world.

Second, the emphasis on the trickster archetype in
the novel also links the Black folk hero with the American
Yankee, thereby demonstrating that Blacks and whites are
brothers. Brockway, for example, is linked in oppression with Kimbro, the "Yankee-cracker" \( \land p. 176 \), for both are equally victimized. As Ellison maintains, "For better or worse, whatever there is of value in Negro life is an American heritage and as such it must be preserved." 46 The Negro as folk hero is, after all, a version of the American trickster, whose Yankee ingenuity has been transformed into an imaginative approach to life in every situation. Faced with chaos, the Negro, like the Yankee, discovers a form adequate to that chaos and exploits it for his own advantage. If he is invisible, he wears masks to maximize his invulnerability. When he suffers, he transforms his pain into comedy through verbal wit. Finally, as the unique Black contribution to the archetypal pattern, he transforms chaos and suffering into verses. Similarly, the protagonist is able to transcend his situation by a triumph of the imagination; in the blues tradition, he is able to answer the question, posed by Louis Armstrong, "What did I do/to be so black/and blue," by turning his suffering and all the chaos of his life into a novel and, thereby, playing "the invisible music of my isolation." \( \land p. 16 \) Thus, he transcends his experience "not by the consolation of philosophy, but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism."

Through the act of creation, he gains freedom. As the woman who loved enough to poison her white master and
the father of her children says, freedom "ain't nothing but knowing how to say what I got up in my head." ∫ p. 14
From this woman, the protagonist learns how to gain freedom through love and to combine affirmation, rebellion and hatred. Similarly, he learns complex lessons from many minor characters in the novel. From Mary Rambo (rhymes with Sambo like her Sambo bank) he learns to believe in the Black's kininess and powers of survival. From "Dupre and his crowd" he learns that the people of Harlem "organized it ∫ the fire ∫ and carried it through alone; the decision their own and their own action. Capable of their own action" ∫ p. 474: that individuals alone or together are capable of destroying their prisons. From Ras he learns that unbridled hatred and a propensity toward violence play into the hands of the factory and are not at all incompatible with it: "Ras was not funny, or not only funny, but dangerous as well, wrong but justified, crazy and yet coldly sane....Jack had seen it, or had stumbled upon it and used it to prepare a sacrifice." ∫ p. 488
Furthermore, while he learns from Rinehart how to use the mask of the trickster for protection, he learns from his grandfather how to avoid losing his humanity to the role. The protagonist says,

I'm a desperate man--but too much of your life will be lost, its meaning lost, unless you approach it as much through love as through hate. So I approach it through division. So
I denounce and I defend and I hate and I love. Perhaps that makes me a little bit as human as my grandfather....Hell, he never had any doubts about his humanity—that was left to his 'free' offspring. He accepted his humanity just as he accepted the principle. It was his, and the principle lives on in its human and absurd diversity. [pp. 501-02]

Recognizing that the universe is chaos and that life is characterized by diversity, the protagonist can employ as many masks as he needs to facilitate his freedom and to protect it from his would-be oppressors because he knows who and what he is. Like Peter Wheatstraw he can celebrate his diversity and discover his form through art, while like his grandfather he can be confident of his humanity.

Because he has gained faith in individuals, in the Yankee archetype, and in personal humanity, and because he now understands his grandfather's advice because he understands his grandfather (at least as trickster and fool-seer), the protagonist reinterprets his grandfather's advice as an affirmation of Americans and of American principles.

Could he have meant—hell, he must have meant the principle, that we were to affirm the principle on which the country was built and not the men, or at least not the men who did the violence. Did he mean say 'yes' because he knew that the principle was greater than the men, greater than the numbers and the vicious power and all the methods used to corrupt its name? Did he mean to affirm the principle, which they themselves had dreamed into being out of the chaos and darkness of the feudal past, and which they had violated and compromised to the point of absurdity even in their own corrupt minds? [pp. 496-97]
In the context of the novel, the principle on which the country was built must be the value of the individual, his ability, his right to equality and, most important of all, his right to freedom.

Explaining man's need to affirm a common value even in a nihilistic universe in which chaos is the norm, Camus writes, "if men cannot refer to a common value, recognized by all as existing in each one, then man is incomprehensible to man. The rebel demands that his values should be clearly recognized in himself because he knows or suspects that, without this principle, crime and disorder would reign throughout the world." Similarly, the invisible man affirms the principle as a response to chaos, but also because this principle is a prerequisite to living a full life.

Or did he mean that we had to take the responsibility for all of it, for the men as well as the principle, because we were the heirs who must use the principle because no other fitted our needs? Not for the power or for vindication, but because we, with the given circumstance of our origin, could only thus find transcendence? (p. 497)

Like Tarp the protagonist believes he must say yes before embarking on a quest for freedom and transcendence. And, as Ellison explains and as the protagonist learns, one must affirm one's heritage as a prerequisite to learning one's identity.

Furthermore, the principle, and even suffering, must
be affirmed as an act of responsibility, for a freer society results from freer people; made free from their own greed, men become invulnerable to "the black rite of Horatio Alger".

Was it that we of all, we most of all, had to affirm the principle, the plan in whose name we had been brutalized and sacrificed—not because we would always be weak nor because we were afraid or opportunistic, but because we were older than they, in the sense of what it took to live in the world with others and because they had exhausted in us, some—not much, but some—of the human greed and smallness, yes, and the fear and superstition that had kept them running. (Oh yes, they're running too, running all over themselves.) [p. 497]

Moreover, affirmation is necessary because we all are brothers in entrapment.

Or was it, did he mean that we should affirm the principle because we, through no fault of our own, were linked to all the others in the loud, clamoring semi-visible world, that world seen only as a fertile field for exploitation by Jack and his kind, and with condescension by Norton and his, who were tired of being the mere pawns in the futile game of 'making history'? Had he seen that for these too we had to say 'yes' to the principle, lest they turn upon us to destroy both it and us?

'Agree 'em to death and destruction,' grandfather had advised. Hell, weren't they their own death and their own destruction except as the principle lived in them and in us? And here's the cream of the joke: weren't we part of them as well as apart from them and subject to die when they died? [p. 497]

Thus, the protagonist affirms human value, potential, and freedom and learns to laugh in the face of death, entrapment and an absurdly comic world, because the alternative to
affirmation is nihilism, despair, or the oppression of
Jacks and Nortons. In what could almost be a warning against
nihilism and the Brotherhood, Camus writes,

Whatever paths nihilism may proceed to take,
from the moment that it decides to be the
creative force of its period and ignore every
moral precept, it begins to build the temple
to Caesar. To choose history, and history
alone, is to choose nihilism in defiance of
the teachings of rebellion itself. Those who
rush blindly to history in the name of the
irrational, proclaiming that it is meaningless,
encounter servitude and terror and finally
emerge into the universe of concentration
camps.

By an act of the imagination the protagonist becomes
free of entrapment in the factory's world. Symbolically,
his freedom is manifested by an image which is remarkably
similar to the Indians' fishing off the dam on One Flew
Over the Cuckoo's Nest or Orr's rowing to Sweden on a U. S.
life raft in Catch-22. The invisible man drains power from
the Monopolized Light and Power Company.

Without light I am not only invisible, but
formless as well; and to be unaware of one's
form is to live a death. I myself, after exist-
ing some twenty years, did not become alive
until I discovered my invisibility.

That is why I fight my battle with Monopolized
Light and Power. The deeper reason, I mean: It
allows me to feel my vital aliveness. I also
fight them for taking so much of my money before
I learned to protect myself. In my hole in the
basement there are exactly 1,369 lights. I've
wired the entire ceiling, every inch of it.
And not with fluorescent bulbs, but with the
older, more-expensive-to-operate kind, the
filament type. An act of sabotage, you know.
I've already begun to wire the wall. A junk
man I know, a man of vision, has supplied me with wire and sockets. Nothing, storm or flood, must get in the way of our need for light and ever more and brighter light. The truth is the light and light is the truth. When I finish all four walls, then I'll start on the floor.... And maybe I'll invent a gadget to place my coffeepot on the fire while I lie in bed, and even invent a gadget to warm my bed--like the fellow I saw in one of the picture magazines who made himself a gadget to warm his shoes! Though invisible, I am in the great American tradition of tinkers. That makes me kin to Ford, Edison and Franklin. Call me, since I have a theory and a concept, a 'thinker-tinker'. (pp. 10-11)

As existential hero, the invisible man is most alive while saying no to slavery; as fool he takes advantage of chaos; and as Yankee tinker he uses ingenuity to imagine a viable mode of rebellion. As in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and Catch-22, therefore, the epitome of freedom in the factory's world is based upon understanding the processes of the machine. The protagonist can build an island of freedom in the midst of the factory by utilizing its machinery, knowledgeably, to maintain that freedom. Furthermore, as Negro trickster, the invisible man utilizes his imagination to discover the form of his life and of the trickster's lives, to create a parable in the novel that does justice to the chaos against which it was conceived, and to emulate the trickster so that he can cope with chaos. Like Armstrong, he will make music of chaos while flouting the physicality of the mask of the Negro "for purposes of aggression as well as for defense." As Ellison explains,
"the motives behind the mask are as numerous as the ambiguities the mask conceals." As trickster, therefore, the invisible man can use the mask to escape entrapment in the factory and to best his oppressors, while affirming human imagination (the essence of the trickster) because imagination is a worthy antagonist to both the factory and to chaos and because it enables men to enjoy lives of infinite possibilities.

**The Emergence of the Hero**

The invisible man's growth from naive protagonist to fool-hero has been obliquely discussed in the preceding two sections, and the nature of his affirmation and of the heroic tradition to which he aspires has been suggested in the discussion of his mentors. Yet there are two critical distinctions between the protagonist and his mentors that clarify the uniqueness of his heroism.

This section, therefore, will examine these two distinctions and then briefly summarize the evolution of the invisible man from protagonist to poet, fool, and hero.

First, speaking of Louis Armstrong, the protagonist says, "Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he is invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music." [p. 11](#)

As presented in the novel, no mentor (with the possible
exception of the vet) must encounter illusion, self-doubt and despair before affirming the values of the fool. Only because his mentors are simple or mad or just old-fashioned can they present a viable pattern for living in the modern world. The protagonist, therefore, displays a heroism far more profound than that of his mentors because he understands both the terrors of the factory and the metaphysical and social consequences of confronting chaos.

Second, the protagonist improves upon the "blues tradition." The blues transform suffering into lyric beauty, but each blues number is a transitory and limited expression of one portion of reality—limited by the necessity for simplicity of statement imposed by the blues form. After Clifton's death the protagonist ponders those outside history whom he later affirms.

What...of us transitory ones? Ones such as I had been before I found the Brotherhood—birds of passage who were too obscure for learned classification...We who write no novels, histories or other works. What about us...

...Men out of time, who would soon be gone and forgotten...But who knew...who knew but that they were the saviors, the true leaders, the bearers of something precious? The stewards of something uncomfortable, burdensome...
There was no one to applaud their value and they themselves failed to understand it. pp. 360-61

Formerly one of those "who write no novels," the protagonist becomes a novelist, choosing a mode of lyric expression adequate to the presentation of chaos and the celebration
of those "transitory ones." In so doing, he becomes
Clifton's historian and the historian of all his mentors,
so that "the stewards of something uncomfortable" might
understand their own value.

As Ellison comments,

there is something else in Harlem, something
subjective, willful and complex and compellingly
human. It is 'that something else' that
challenges the sociologists who ignore it, and
the society which would deny its existence. It
is that 'something else' which makes for our
strength and which makes for our endurance and
our promise."

As chronicler of that "something else," the protagonist
makes it permanent and, in a sense, more real by giving form
to the chaos and to the value embodied most clearly in the
tricksters, but his novel is not an example of "art for
art's sake" but a parable, designed to teach those transient
ones. Thus, as Ellison comments,

_Invisible Man_ is a memoir of a man who has gone
through that experience and now comes back and
brings his message to the world. It's a social
act; it is not a resignation from society but
an attempt to come back and to be useful. There
is an implied change of role from that of
would-be politician and rabble-rouser and
orator to that of writer. No, there's no
reason for him to lose his sense of social
role."

Summarizing the pattern of the protagonist's journey
from rabble-rouser to writer, Ellison writes,

it's a novel about innocence and human error,
a struggle through illusion to reality. Each
section begins with a sheet of paper; each
piece of paper is exchanged for another and
contains a definition of his identity, or the social role he is to play as defined for him by others. But all say essentially the same thing, 'Keep this nigger boy running.' Before he could have some voice in his own destiny he had to discard these old identities and illusions; his enlightenment couldn't come until then. Once he recognizes the hole of darkness into which these papers put him he has to burn them.52

In each of his identities, the protagonist expresses his credo in a speech, demonstrating his tendency to explore reality through language. In the first section, the protagonist's identity is conferred by the school superintendent who presents him with a scholarship. His belief in the "black rite of Horatio Alger" is articulated in his high school graduation address in which he "showed that humility was the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress." (p. 20) In the North, Bledsoe's letters provide him with an identity, but he does not learn his name until he is reborn in the factory hospital as "Brer Rabbit". As Rabbit, he affirms his Black heritage, becomes an antagonist of the American political and economic machine (p. 239) and in his eviction speech, asserts that the solution to dispossession by the machine is to be found in organized political activity. (pp. 239 and 245)

When the Brotherhood confers him with still another name, he delivers a speech in which he exposes "the black rite of Horatio Alger" as a conspiracy of victimization and accepts responsibility for political oppression because
"we let them do it." At Clifton's funeral, however, he is not so hopeful, concluding that he is entrapped with all his brothers and that no organized political solution is adequate to provide an escape from entrapment. Furthermore, he recognizes that men are entrapped by death as well as by society, but he can find neither a metaphysical nor a social answer to entrapment.

In each of these sections, the protagonist confronts the tar baby with different, but equally inadequate, assumptions about reality. Moreover, in each he loses a contest with "old Harster" who represents the machine. Traditionally, an emerging hero must defeat a magic antagonist; in his hibernation, therefore, the protagonist wins a contest, draining power from Monopolated Light and Power. He bests his antagonist because he emulates a pattern of life diverse and imaginative enough to counter pressure from the factory.

Even in the south, the protagonist knows he is destined to be a hero, but until the Harlem riot he does not know what sort of hero he will be. Early in the novel he expresses his desire to be a hero and a spokesman for his people, thinking of himself as a potential Booker T. Washington. Even after his alienation from the "rite of Horatio Alger", he is excited when the Brotherhood calls upon him to become a new Booker T. Washington.
As a spokesman for the Brotherhood he thinks of himself as the spokesman for Harlem, "I had learned that the clue to what Harlem wanted was what I wanted." He is introduced at his first Brotherhood gathering as a "Hero of the people": "This young man pushed history ahead twenty years today....," Jack maintains, "He simply arose out of a crowd." Moreover, the protagonist even considers that he may be an heroic anachronism in an unheroic age:

Perhaps an accident, like Douglass. Perhaps each hundred years or so men like them, like me, appeared in society, drifting through; and yet by all historical logic we, I, should have disappeared around the first part of the nineteenth century, rationalized out of existence. Perhaps, like them, I was a throw-back, a small distant meteorite that died several hundred years ago and now lived only by virtue of the light that speed through space at too great a pace to realize that its source has become lead.

Beneath this confidence, however, is a nagging fear that he may be part of what he sees as an anti-heroic tradition. Bledsoe calls him a fool; the vet says he does not "have to be a complete fool"; at the factory he feels "like a clown"; avoiding the police after the eviction speech, he fears he looks like "a black-face comedian shrinking from a ghost"; at the Brotherhood reception he fumes, "What does she want, a black-faced comedian"; after his first sexual encounter, he
thinks, "What a fool" [p. 361]; and, after Clifton's death he recognizes that both he and Clifton played the fool: "It [the doll] had grinned back at Clifton as it grinned forward at the crowd and their entertainment had been his death. It had still grinned when I played the fool and spat upon it." [p. 386] Moreover, as Baumbach explains, "after his showdown with the Brotherhood... the hero becomes aware that he has been performing all along as if he were, in life size, the dancing puppet-doll."53

In writing the novel, however, the hero learns from his mentors that the fool and the hero are not antagonists, but brothers. If he is to be heroic, he must also be a fool. Even before his hibernation, he recognizes himself as a fool and, moreover, understands that his qualities as fool make him able to be a seer. In the midst of the Harlem riot, the protagonist understands that Ras

held me responsible for all the nights and days and all the suffering and for all that which I was incapable of controlling, and I no hero, but short and dark with only a certain eloquence and a bottomless capacity for being a fool to mark me from the rest; saw them, recognized them at last as those whom I had failed and of whom I was now, just now, a leader, though leading them, running ahead of them, only in the stripping away of my illusionment.

[p. 463]

Facing death, he also faces his identity (as an invisible man, a fool, and American trickster): I

recognized the absurdity of the whole night and of the simple yet confoundingly complex arrangement
of hope and desire, fear and hate, that had brought me here still running, and knowing now who I was and where I was and knowing too that I had no longer to run for or from the Jacks and the Emersons and the Bledsoes and Nortons, but only from their confusion, impatience and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine.

Recognizing and accepting the "beautiful absurdity" of his American heritage as well as his brotherhood in suffering with all men (even the Jacks and the Nortons), he asserts, in both the American (individualist) and existential traditions, that "it was better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others, whether for Ras's or Jack's." \[ p. 484 \]

Living out his own absurdity the protagonist sees the world as comic and absurd, saying it is "a bad comedy" \[ p. 413 \] and "a crazy Thurber cartoon." \[ p. 447 \] In hibernation he achieves a "belated appreciation of the crude joke that had kept me running." \[ p. 496 \] Moreover, he understands that laughter is an effective and appropriate defense against such a world. With his grandfather's grinning face often before him, as early as the "battle royal" he discovers that laughter protects against the machine: "Ignoring the shock by laughing, as I brushed the coins off the rug quickly, I discovered that I could contain the electricity." \[ p. 29 \] At the Brotherhood party he relieves communal embarrassment by laughing when the drunk asks him to sing. \[ p. 272 \] And, in hibernation...
he realizes that he had beaten a man who "had not seen" him, a man who "was in the midst of a walking nightmare." Consequently, he despairs: "It unnerved me. I was both disgusted and ashamed. I was like a drunken man myself, wavering about on weakened legs." But then his comic sense saves him. "Then I was amused. Something in this man's thick head had sprung out and beaten him within an inch of his life. I began to laugh at this crazy discovery...I ran away into the dark, laughing so hard I feared I might rupture myself." ∫p. 8∫

Here, the Protagonist has learned to laugh at entrapment, at the blindness of those who are entrapped, and at his own paranoia when faced with proof of his invisibility.

Consequently, he writes a novel which in the blues tradition is near-tragic, near-comic. As Samuel Hux explains, the invisible man is an existential hero who faces existential despair:

Ellison's protagonist is pretty nearly a prototype of the existential outsider. First, he is 'invisible' because the other refuses to see him, preferring instead to convert him with a look into a preconception. The invisible man both chooses and is driven to an underground existence which serves as a Dantesque exploration of his own invisibility....his underground existence has provided the existentialist's perception...He knows that whatever pattern he projects he 'must never lose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived.'

He transcends despair, however, and the novel he writes propounds a comic response to life. Certainly a novel in
which Trueblood is a positive example, embodying a reaction to life which is in tune with the universe and which provides a pattern for a hero's life, proposes a comic response to life. Thus, Ellison reminds an interviewer, "Look, didn't you find the book at all funny?"\textsuperscript{55}

After writing a novel which proposes transcending despair through laughter, the comic hero, fool and self-proclaimed fertility god (who ritually dies when he burns his identity symbols and who is reborn in the Spring), explains that positive action must follow his creative act. Further, he explains why both individuals and society must acknowledge the fool and the values he represents, saying, "the mind that has conceived a plan of living must never lose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived. That goes for societies as well as for individuals. Thus, having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your certainties, I must come out, I must emerge."\textsuperscript{\textit{p. 502}} After reinstating the fool into the kingdom, he is able to create a pattern that is not exclusive and that provides the wholeness necessary to the heroic task of providing fertility, and hence meaning, in the mythic kingdom. Emphasizing the alliance between death and spring, moreover, he suggests the interrelationship of existential despair in the face of a chaotic universe and a comic affirmation of that universe.
The hibernation is over. I must shake off the old skin and come up for breath. There's a stench in the air, which, from this distance underground, might be the smell either of death or of spring—-I hope of spring. But don't let me trick you, there is no death in the smell of spring and in the smell of thee as in the smell of me...a decision has been made. I'm shaking off the old skin, and I'll leave it here in the hole. I'm coming out, no less invisible without it, but coming out nevertheless. [p. 503]

Thus death, the ultimate in man's entrapment, is symbolically defeated by the protagonist, who is martyred by despair, who suffers for those "transitory ones" for whom he writes the novel and who is reborn by affirming his identity as fool. He triumphs over mental death to the machine by asserting his freedom as fool, saying no to the machine and yes to his infinite possibilities. And to be certain that the reader recognizes that his life will be modeled after the fool's, he ends the novel with humor, anticipating the reader's charge that he is a fool, whose story is "buggy jiving", by explaining the importance of the fool; the fool as seer tries "to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking through?...who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"

[p. 503]
Notes to Chapter III


2 Constance Rourke, American Humor (Garden City, N.Y., 1951, 53), p. 83.

3 Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York, 1947, 53, 64), p. 503. All subsequent references to this novel will be noted in the text of this chapter.


5 Ralph Ellison, Shadow and Act (New York, 1953, 64), p. 49. He explains, "the Negro's emergence as a symbol of value came...with the rise of the romantic individual of the eighteenth century. This, perhaps, because the romantic was in revolt against the old moral authority, and if he suffered a sense of guilt, his passion for personal freedom was such that he was willing to accept evil (a tragic attitude) events, identifying himself with the 'noble slave'--who symbolized the darker, unknown potential side of his personality, which might, if given a chance, toss a fistful of mud into the sky and create a 'shining star'."

6 Ellison, Shadow and Act, p. 63.

7 Ibid. The ideas in this paragraph are all Ellison's except the extension of his ideas to apply to the Pool and to the mythic kingdom defined in the introduction to this study.

8 Ibid.

9 Ellison, Shadow and Act, pp. 69-70.

10 Ibid., p. 261.

11 Ibid., p. 263.

Ellison, Shadow..., p. 175.


Ellison, Shadow..., p. 178.

The pressure to become a stereotype is more complex than I suggest, since the attacks on mind, identity, and manhood are related and intertwined. I separate them for convenience and clarity and because Ellison provides these categories dramatically in the hospital scene.

Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice (New York, 1968), p. 154-65. The imagery of Soul on Ice parallels that of Invisible Man. Cleaver speaks of himself as entrapped, physically by the prison and mentally by the myth defined in this quotation. Moreover, he learns to understand his situation through "an old fool" and Black folk hero, Old Lazarus.

Floyd Horowitz, "Ralph Ellison's Modern Version of Brer Rabbit and Brer Bear in Invisible Man," Midcontinent American Studies, iv. no. 2 (Fall 1963), 24.

Brockway's story parallels the protagonist's in many ways: first, the explosion in his dream prefigures the explosion in the paint factory and both suggest the violence inflicted upon humanity by the machine; second, both men are entrapped in machinery and keep running in their entrapment; third, Trueblood inadvertently sacrifices his daughter and helps white society as the protagonist sacrifices his brothers in Harlem and helps the Brotherhood; and finally, each transcends entrapment as an artist and as a trickster.

21 Ellison, Shadow..., p. 177.


23 Ellison, Shadow..., p. 172.

24 Welsford, p. 76. Fools often seem mad.

25 Thompson, p. 83.


27 Traditionally many seers are thought to be mad.

28 Abrahams, p. 63.

29 Ellison, Shadow..., p. 151.


31 Botkin, p. 654.


33 Barrett, p. 241.

34 Daniel Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction (New York, 1961), pp. 80-81.

35 Ellison, Shadow..., p. 90.

36 Ibid., p. 67.

37 Horowitz, p. 23.
Horowitz, p. 24. Horowitz mentions all the references to the tar baby story mentioned in this study, but he employs these references to argue the importance of the protagonist's (the bear's) being continually defeated by rabbits.

Rourke, p. 83.

Albert Camus, The Rebel (New York, 1956), p. 13. I am by no means suggesting that Ellison was influenced by Camus or vice versa. Indeed, the whole point is the coincidental verbal similarity employed in stating very similar, if not identical ideas.


Ellison, Shadow..., p. 71.

Ras has not been considered in any detail as a mentor to the protagonist because the invisible man never seems tempted to follow Ras or his ideas. Ras can be seen, however, as a version of the folk hero, the "gorilla," to use Abrahams' terminology. In noted contrast to the "cat" or the "monkey" who are descendants of tricksters like Br'er Rabbit and the Slave John and who "live through wits and operate aggressively through indirection," the "gorilla" is the "bad man" who attempts to succeed through violence. (Abrahams, pp. 86-89) The protagonist does see some value in Ras—notably in his perception of injustice and his angry and proud response—but is not tempted by the tactics of the gorilla. However, he sorrow that the men he overhears can only see the comedy of Ras' existence not the emotional truth behind the stance.

Thompson, p. 83.


Ellison, Shadow..., p. 40.

Camus, p. 22.

Ibid., p. 246.

50. Thompson, p. 76.

51. Geller, p. 159.


Conclusion

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Catch-22 and Invisible Man reflect existential thought in their similar definition of man's metaphysical situation and in their parallel discovery of a pattern for heroism adequate to the complexity of such a world. Portraying a nihilistic universe, mass conformity, individual alienation and mental paralysis in the face of the absurd, each novel recounts the story of a man in complete despair who nevertheless says no to his enslavement. Furthermore, after rejecting imprisonment, he affirms human value and approaches life in an absurd universe with joy and with courage. Yossarian, Bromden, and the invisible man are all existential heroes because each achieves his essence after refusing to be a robot by affirming his own value in the face of meaninglessness and by imagining a viable alternative to enslavement. In each novel the viable alternative is communicated by a symbolic action: the Indians fish off the dam; Orr rows to Sweden; and the invisible man steals power from Monopolized Light and Power. In each novel, moreover, the fool is a "philobat", or, as Michael Balint explains,

a person who finds pleasure in existing or moving about in what are to him friendly open spaces, who is not so much interested in leaving a place or arriving at another, as in the thrills and pleasures he experiences
during his journey. These thrills are proportionate to his satisfaction in his skills, physical and mental, which enable him to make the journey. His pleasures therefore are partly in himself, in his own competence and power, and partly in the achievement which allows him to feel at one with objectless space.\textsuperscript{1}

Hence, as they learn to be fools, the protagonists, like Sisyphus, achieve a meaningful existence without transcendent meaning and without ultimate goals. Furthermore, each novel rejects reason as an adequate means of discovering truth, and each protagonist achieves heroism by laughing in the face of a nihilistic universe. As Martin Esslin explains, "the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions--and to laugh at it."\textsuperscript{2}

Yet it is those aspects that differentiate the novels discussed in this study from the mainstream of existential thought that make these novels interesting and significantly different from other novels of entrapment. First, metaphysical and psychological concerns are subordinate in these novels to the novelist's exploration of the possibilities for individual freedom within the social, economic and political machine. Although man cannot escape entrapment in the physical universe, since he is mortal and therefore subject to pain and death, he can reorganize his society; consequently, these novels are optimistic about possibilities for change. And, although each proposes an affirmation of individual freedom as a primary response to the machine,
secondarily each is a social protest novel which implicitly proposes social change through satirizing the machine.

Second, although most existentialist philosophers transcend despair and affirm some value (as Kierkegaard affirms Christianity or Camus affirms humanity), in the novels discussed in this study metaphysical despair is eclipsed by a personality rather than transcended through philosophic inquiry. By embodying optimism and individual capability the fool convinces the protagonist both that it can be fun to live and that the individual has the capacity to break bonds and thereby enjoy a viable life. The speculations of William Barrett in *Irrational Man* (1958) concerning the American response to existentialism suggests the ultimate source of this optimism.

Existentialism was so definitely a European expression that its sombreness went against the grain of our native and youthful optimism. The American has not yet assimilated psychologically the disappearance of his own geographical frontier; his spiritual horizon is still the limitless play of human possibilities, and as yet he has not lived through the crucial experience of human finitude.

The total despair of Bromden, Yossarian or the invisible man when faced with man's mortality and the attendant meaningfulness of life belies Barrett's contention at least as it applies to these novels; yet, although each protagonist begins in existential despair, he regains "our native youthfulness and optimism" and a belief in "the limitless play of human possibilities" through the example
of an anachronistic American hero.

The novels discussed in this study, therefore, affirm American optimism, but they are also concerned with basic and universal psychological truths. Even though men crave order and desire meaning, another part of each man (if he chooses to live) enjoys life for its own sake despite his rational apprehension of life's meaninglessness. This human quality, related to Freud's life force, is personified in the fool in each of these novels, and thus these works dramatize Bergson's insistence "on the insufficiency of the abstract intelligence to grasp the richness of experience" by embodying the imagination in a character who teaches the rational man to fully experience life. Since the fool demonstrates that the despair and paralysis of modern man results from a failure of the imagination, not from a failure to recognize meaninglessness, the protagonist is not regressing to adolescent wish fulfillment but is transcending his limitations when he affirms human possibilities. Hence, these novels are not so much existential as they are comic dramatizations of a post-existential philosophy.

Third, although the world of each novel is initially portrayed as meaningless, the universe as reinterpreted by each protagonist is not the neutral or hostile world of the existentialist but an appropriate setting for comedy. In Kesey's novel, nature seems to be mechanistic and hostile,
but McMurphy reveals that it is benevolent. In Heller's novel and to some extent in Ellison's, the universe is comic. Optimism is not out of place in a benevolent universe, and laughter is the only appropriate response to a cosmic joke. The optimism embodied in these novels, therefore, is based upon metaphysical assumptions which differ substantially from the assumptions characteristic of existential thought, and they differ because Heller, Kesey and Ellison choose, through affirming the powers of the imagination, to view their metaphysical situation from a comic perspective, for the difference between a tragic and a comic universe is not one of substance but of interpretation.

Although various versions of the fool recur throughout American literature, the comic optimism characteristic of the novels discussed in this study is unusual in twentieth-century fiction. Generalizing about American realism, Camus writes,

The life of the body, reduced to its essentials, paradoxically produces an abstract and gratuitous universe, continually denied, in its turn, by reality. This type of novel, purged of interior life, in which men seem to be observed behind a pane of glass, logically ends, with its emphasis on the pathological, by giving itself as its unique subject the supposedly average man. In this way it is possible to explain the extraordinary number of 'innocents' who appear in this universe. The simpleton is the ideal subject for such an enterprise since he can only be defined—and completely defined—by his behavior. He is the symbol of the despairing world in which
wretched automatons live in a machine-ridden universe, which American novelists have presented in a heartrending but sterile protest.3

The novels relevant to Camus' analysis are too numerous to name; however, many novels which exemplify Camus' theory may occur to the reader, specifically novels in the naturalistic and realistic traditions. For example, Clyde Griffiths, the simple, naive protagonist of Dreiser's An American Tragedy is typical of the simpleton of naturalist novels who is totally controlled by his environment. Camus' critique of American literature, moreover, is equally applicable to the novels of the grotesque. In Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts, for example, the grotesques who write Miss Lonelyhearts for aid are so entrapped by circumstance that no one could help them, and their simplicity is pathetic not humorous.

Kesey, Heller and Ellison utilize this tradition to portray a "despairing world in which wretched automatons live in a machine-ridden universe"; dolls, puppets and two-dimensional comic characters illustrate the potential destruction of individuality in a world dominated by the machine. As Camus suggests, the fool is at home in this world. Yet according to Willeford, although "two dimensionality belongs to the essence of the fool...it is not the whole of his essence: the surface of folly sometimes breaks open to reveal surprising depths, and these are as
much a part of what the fool finally is as are his shallowness and triviality. Hence, Kesey, Heller and Ellison present two-dimensional fools as victims of the machine, but then penetrate into the depths of at least one fool to demonstrate the possibilities for fulfillment open even to wretched automatons—if an automaton rejects mechanism, chooses infinite possibilities, and thereby becomes a man not a machine.

Other authors explore these depths too. Because a brief discussion such as this can neither do justice to individual works nor define a complete tradition, the abbreviated references to individual novels and to the works of Faulkner that follow are only intended to provoke the reader's thoughtful appraisal of the importance of the fool in modern American literature. In the following pages, accordingly, I will briefly mention a few American novels in an attempt to suggest some significant variations on the pattern defined in this study. Both John Steinbeck and Flannery O'Connor, for example, explore an important aspect of the irrational ignored by Kesey, Heller and Ellison. Lennie, the idiot of Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, embodies the optimism and love characteristic of the fool, but his ignorance and irrationality consistently result in violence as a response to fear. Hence, Steinbeck suggests that fear and violence are as intrinsically related to chaos and the irrational as are love and hope. Because Lennie kills,
he must be destroyed, but his death evokes a strong
emotional reaction in the reader because with his death
violence and fear will be purged from the kingdom, but
innocence and naive goodness will be destroyed, too, leaving
alienated, lonely men whose dreams of a heavenly city (the
farm) no longer seem possible. 9

In The Violent Bear It Away Flannery O'Conner explores
violence as an aspect of the fool's character in a Christian
framework. The fool, as either idiot (the child) or lunatic
(the great-uncle), is the representative of numinous powers,
and Christian grace and violence are inherently connected.
Hence, when Tarwater baptizes the idiot child, he drowns
him, paralleling the violence of his own salvation. However,
although O'Conner is operating in a Christian context and
although her fools are allied with violence, the basic plot
structure of The Violent Bear It Away is similar to the
comic plot structure characteristic of the novels central to
this study: a protagonist (Tarwater) feels out of place in
the rational world, but he attempts to be a normal part of
society; therefore, he chooses to follow his rational
mentor (Rayber), but the example of his fool-mentor (his
great-uncle) is more powerful and more personally satisfying
to him than that of the rational man; consequently, he
allies himself with the irrational, the chaotic, the
violent, and in the Christian context of this story, the
good. 10
The universe portrayed in Carson McCuller's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is similar to that which entraps Yossarian, Bromden and the invisible man. Jake Blount and Dr. Coleman are entrapped by ideology and by an oppressive economic and political system; Nick is entrapped by economics; and Biff is entrapped by biology. Each looks to Singer—a mute, a simpleton and an artist—as a savior. In contrast to the novels central to this study, however, this novel is tragic, since the seer commits suicide and therefore fails the three protagonists he might have helped. Yet the novel does suggest that a secular salvation through love is possible and that salvation originates with the fool. Singer understands the protagonists' emotions since he relies on a corresponding experience: he looks to Antonapoulos exactly as Blount, Coleman and Nick look to him. Consequently, the happiness of all the major characters ultimately depends upon Antonapoulos: a mute, a buffoon, a glutton, and to all appearances, an idiot. Therefore, the themes of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* are not unlike those of the novels which provide the basis for this study; love, imagination, a belief in individual importance and potential, hope, and art—all depend on the fool for their existence.

In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Enormous Room*, and *Invisible Man* interpretation and understanding are important as prerequisites to action. However, in a pessimistic but
very important tradition--evidenced in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Beckett's *Watt*, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*, for example--constructive social change is unlikely. The only hope for the individual is to free himself from the mechanical thought processes of his culture. However, if he repudiates his culture's order and values, he then finds himself without values, facing a chaotic universe. His task, accordingly, becomes one of constructing viable myth--myth which adequately orders chaos and explains personal suffering. Consequently, the fool redeems mankind, not as an active hero, but as a seer and a poet, and redemption brings only mental freedom, not the capacity to act freely or effectively.

The structure of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s *Cat's Cradle* embodies simply and clearly the elements central to this tradition. The protagonist and the reader must choose between science and rationality which cannot, finally, make men happy and which will ultimately destroy humanity and a religion which admits to being a lie. The protagonist chooses the lie and thereby chooses Bokonon as his mentor. Bokonon is a seer and an artist who founds a religion and writes a holy book. Although his religion is pessimistic, he proposes a comic approach to life, suggesting as the world is destroyed by ice-nine that
If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity; and I would climb to the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison \(\text{ice-nine}\) that makes statues of men; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who.

As the fool in the novels on which this study is based does not free the protagonist but merely provides him with a viable example, Bokonon's holy book does not free the protagonist from his own responsibility for creating a humanly satisfying personal myth. Bokonon provides a model, but the protagonist becomes a hero only when he writes a novel (Cat's Cradle), embodying his own mythic (and comic) interpretation of life.\(^{12}\)

No examination of the fool's role in modern literature would be complete without including Faulkner. Three versions of the fool recur throughout his novels: the simpleton (or natural), the idiot and the seer (or artist). Moreover, his novels characteristically portray a universe in which the incompatibility between the natural world—which is chaotic, irrational and cyclical—and the cultural world maintained by men—which is orderly, ultimately meaningful and goal oriented—destroys and entraps mankind. Those characters who compulsively seek order and rationality are destroyed by the dichotomy between their view of life and the reality of the natural world. Some such characters, like Quentin Compson, for example, are imprisoned by social
conditioning and therefore are incapable of repudiating the values of the old South even when those values are proven to be inapplicable to the modern world. Other characters have become mechanical products of an economic age—Pop-eye, Flem Snopes, and Jason, for example. They, too, are ultimately defeated by natural forces, as Pop-eye's impotence results from hereditary syphilis.\footnote{13}

In most cases these rational or mechanical men are contrasted with characters (usually women or Negroes) who are allied with the natural world: such paired naturals and rationalists include, for example, Ruby and Pop-eye, Sam Fathers and Edmonds, Lena and Christmas, Eula and Flem, Candy and Quentin, and Dilsey and Jason. Furthermore, the natural world is the home of both comedy and art (consider Lena Grove as comic heroine and as urn) while man's world of order is tragic and sterile. Since the rational and orderly is characteristically destroyed in its clash with reality, the natural and the comic is victorious. In \textit{Light in August}, for example, Christmas dies sacrificially, but the novel ends with a comic sequence in which Lena has given birth to a child, continues her journey, and only postpones her marriage to Byron. Thus, in the tradition of comedy, the novel celebrates fertility and ends with a marriage (in this case implied).\footnote{14}

The simple or natural characters, moreover, exemplify a pattern for a fulfilling life in tune with nature. Dilsey,
for example, who has "an expression at once fatalistic and with a child's astonished disappointment", endures. Furthermore, she is the only Compson to live a productive and creative life. However, while the fool as natural exemplifies a positive and creative approach to life in tune with nature, the simple heroes are not idiots. They are able to prevail because each has a satisfying personal philosophy, which is not rational and which may not even be consciously chosen as a philosophy, but which provides meaning for their lives by ordering their experiences through myth. For Dilsey, that myth is Christianity; for Sam Fathers it is the ethic of the hunt. Both these myths are anachronistic; yet both provide a model by which the protagonist or the reader might construct a myth which would minister to the needs of modern man. In Go Down Moses Isaac McCaslin fails to reinterpret the myth of the hunt as a satisfactory personal ethic, and no character in The Sound and the Fury verbalizes an adequate modern myth; that task is left to the reader. The artist, however, implicitly becomes a hero in a meaningless world which cries out for imaginative interpretation.

Both The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom end with an idiot who inherits the modern world because he is its most suitable inhabitant, and both novels explore the problem of interpretation and understanding in a chaotic world. In each, only the idiot and the artist (or the
simpleton who is part idiot, part artist) escape psychological destruction. In *The Sound and the Fury*, for example, Benjy is protected from destruction because he is totally natural; yet he can no more order his world than can Quentin. As fool he can love, but not think, and his instinctual demand for order is satisfied by the rigidities of habit. Quentin, on the other hand, demands order, but above all meaning, his sister's chastity becoming for him a symbol of all static and meaningful values. Indeed, his demand for order is so great that he would rather burn in a Christian hell for committing incest than acknowledge the natural, amoral world in which chastity is abnormal and unimportant. In despair, therefore, Quentin drowns himself; similarly, Mr. Compson, sharing Quentin's obsession, drinks himself to death. Jason, who orders his life around a strict morality of economics, is no more successful in ordering his life than his brother or father. The natural world defeats his economic schemes; he is disabled by migraine headaches, and Quentin, who is associated with Caddy and hence with nature, takes the money he has saved.  

When Dilsey dies (she is described as so old she is almost a skeleton), the only person in tune with nature will be the idiot. Then, no anachronistic heroes will remain who can find solace in anachronistic myths; therefore, new myths must be created in order that there may be new heroes.
Ironically, Rev. Shegog, portrayed as a conman and a trickster, provides the pattern for a viable modern myth. Indeed, he becomes a sacrificial victim to restore community to the congregation and to explain life through myth.

He was like a worn small rock swelled by the successive waves of his voice. With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him. And the congregation seemed to watch him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words, so that when he came to rest against the reading desk, his monkey face lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene, tortured crucifix.19

That the Christian myth of cyclical suffering expounded by Shegog provides a model for an organic myth of cyclical process is suggested by Shegog's name. Accordingly, that "she" is a "chinese spirit of the earth and crops" and that "gog" means "earthly power antagonistic to God" suggests that the new myth must expound a natural, not a superhuman, myth.20

While the narrators of The Sound and the Fury try to interpret nature as embodied in Caddy, the narrators of Absalom, Absalom attempt to understand the failure of their cultural order by understanding Sutpen's history. Each of the narrators of Absalom, Absalom fails as profoundly as the narrators of The Sound and the Fury do, and each fails because he brings his preconceptions about the order, meaning, and rationality of events to bear upon his interpretation.
Rosa Coldfield's interpretation is characterized by demonology; entrapped by outrage at Sutpen's affront to her pride and her concepts of morality, she compulsively interprets him as an exemplar of evil. The well-educated Mr. Compson attempts to understand Sutpen in the terms of a classical tragedy and further interprets his story in accordance with social theories about the South. Quentin and Shreve come closest to recreating the story for the reader because they react to the story imaginatively and emotionally, empathically experiencing the conflict between Henry and Charles. Finally, however, Quentin is destroyed by his apprehension that the values of the South have failed precisely because they are unnatural and inhumane, crying compulsively, "I dont hate it \(\subset\) the South\(\supset\)...
I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!" and soon thereafter, as we know from *The Sound and the Fury*, committing suicide.

Again the positive affirmation in the novel comes not from the protagonist narrators, but from Faulkner. Faulkner provides only one statement from an original participant in Sutpen's story that is not biased by interpretation by a narrator—Charles Bon's letter to Judith. In this letter Bon redeems his experience through art, using the useless (and Northern and therefore modern) stove polish to write a letter which interprets his contemporary experience. In this letter, he, first, rejects "mind", "the gross
omnivorous carrion-heavy soul which becomes inured" to privation and which would interpret events by claiming to "be a voice from the defeated" (suggesting the inadequacy of Mr. Compson's rational interpretation) or "from the dead" (suggesting the inadequacy of Rosa Coldfield's demonic interpretation). Second, he affirms the body because it is "never reconciled from the old soft feel of soap and clean linen and something between the sole of the foot and the earth to distinguish it from the foot of the beast."

Third, he affirms laughter as a viable and courageous reaction to suffering: "Yes, we laughed, because I have learned this at least during these four years, that it really requires an empty stomach to laugh with, that only when you are hungry or frightened do you extract some ultimate essence out of laughing just as the empty stomach extracts some ultimate essence out of alcohol." And fourth, he defines himself as an artist who has become "once more for a period without boundaries or location in time, a mindless and irrational companion and inmate of the body." Thus, Bon reveals himself as the seer, artist and fool, allied with the irrational, with imagination, and with human courage.\footnote{21}

In short, in Absalom, Absalom as in The Sound and The Fury Faulkner suggests that unless the imagination of man mediates between reason and emotion, mind and body, culture and nature, culture, mind and reason will be destroyed--only the Jim Bonds and Benjy's will survive. Furthermore,
only imagination can reconcile these opposites, and therefore, create a myth by which men can live. But armed with myth, courage and humor, modern men could live heroic lives.

The trinity of fools who occur together with such frequency in Faulkner's novels embody the primary functions of the fool in the modern novel. Moreover, the relationship between the three helps define a pressing modern problem. The simpleton, or the natural, can live a viable active life, but such heroes are anachronistic--their roots are with a culture which is now dead. The idiot is natural and is associated with numinous powers (hence, Benjy's role as Christ symbol), but his mental deficiencies prohibit his transcending the purely natural state. Thus, men must turn to the artist, or seer, who will create a myth which both corresponds to nature and satisfactorily explains human life. Then, modern men can become active heroes. In Faulkner's novels, the modern active hero is never realized; similarly, in McCuller's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* active heroism is impossible because the seer fails; but in *The Enormous Room*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *Invisible Man*, Faulkner's requirements for heroism are realized when active heroism follows creative interpretation.

The concern with the failure of rationalism evidenced in these novels has obvious roots in our cultural awareness that technology and reasoning have failed mankind. It is
clear that when men can create a bomb that could destroy
the world but cannot keep peace, then rationality has
failed. However, these novels reflect still another modern
concern. Increasingly, modern philosophers have reacted
to the death of God by deifying man; yet, in order to create
a religion or even a system of ethics based upon humanity,
one must define man. Historically man has striven for
self-definition, finding his uniqueness in those traits that
differentiate man from animals--such as reason, the intellect,
the capacity for ordered speech, and the ability to build
and to transmit a culture. Modern man, however, finds that
machines, especially the computer and mass communications,
have usurped many of those functions that once seemed to
define man. Consequently, man's uniqueness must be
redefined to differentiate man from both animals and the
machine. Man, then, emphasizes his creativity, his emotion,
his humor, his memory (and his consequent free movement in
time), his imagination (and consequent ability to mentally
project the future and thus to hope or despair), and,
finally, his consciousness of his individuality. Since the
fool embodies all these qualities, he is a natural and
appropriate metaphor for man's uniqueness and, therefore,
effectively reminds men that they need not remain entrapped
in the world of the machine if they affirm their humanity
and if they realize that with imagination they can dominate
the machine that threatens to enslave them.
As Hart Crane reminds us in "Chaplinesque", "we can still love the world" in spite of suffering and death, if we can only view it through the eyes of the fool, for the world which makes "a grail of laughter of an empty ash can" may well be comic and death be but a "final smirk". Finally, man cannot escape his heart and therefore cannot escape those attributes that make him unique and that he shares with the fool.

We make our meek adjustments,
Contented with such random consolations
As the wind deposits
In slithered and too ample pockets.

For we can still love the world, who find
A famished kitten on the step, and know
Recesses for it from the fury of the street,
Or warm torn elbow coverts.

We will sidestep, and to the final smirk
Dally the doom of that inevitable thumb
That slowly shapes its puckered index toward us,
Facing the dull squint with what innocence
And what surprise!

And yet these fine collapses are not lies
More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane;
Our obsequies are, in a way, no enterprise,
We can evade you, and all else but the heart:
What blame to us if the heart live on.

The game enforces smirks; but we have seen
The moon in lonely alleys make
A grail of laughter of an empty ash can,
And through all sound of gaiety and quest
Have heard a kitten in the wilderness.22

Thus, through affirming the fool, Crane, like Cummings, Kesey, Heller, and Ellison, affirms the power of man's imagination because the imagination enables man to evade despair, to affirm his uniqueness, and to transform his
life into a comic "pirouette". The fulfilling life suggested in this poem and in the novels central to this study, then, is similar to a dance; each performer bases his movements upon an imaginative artistic structure—upon that creative form that makes beautiful and vivacious actions possible—and thus his individual adaptation of that pattern celebrates life, human beauty and value and enables him to act effectively and live fully.
Notes to Conclusion


4. Ibid., p. 15.


7. American authors are unique neither in their fascination with the fool as a character, in their rejection of science and rationality as means for discovering truth, nor in their consequent turn to imagination and myth. British and European novels relevant to this discussion include Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, Franz Kafka's *The Castle*, Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Günter Grass' *The Tin Drum*, for example. This discussion excludes non-American novels in the interest of economy. Moreover, a limitation by nationality seems logical in this study since the three novels central to it are concerned with the viability of the American dream.

8. The particular emotive force of Lennie's death demonstrates in Frye's terms that "The rejection of the entertainer, whether fool, clown, buffoon, or simpleton, can be one of the most terrible ironies known to art, as the rejection of Falstaff shows, and certain scenes in Chaplin." Northrop Frye, *An Anatomy of Criticism* (N. Y. 1967), p. 49.


Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Cat's Cradle* (N. Y. 1963), 223 p., quotation, p. 221.


Roger A. Abrahams, *Deep Down in the Jungle* (N. Y. 1964), p. 67. Abrahams describes "the preacher" and the "signifying monkey" as versions of the Negro trickster. His description of these heroes of Black folklore suggests Faulkner's description of Shaggy, especially as monkey, as tight rope walker, and as a small verbal man who beats a larger man (the other preacher) in a contest.


List of Works Consulted


