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JOSEPH HELLER: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

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JOSEPH HELLER: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

by

MELANIE M.S. YOUNG

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

JOSEPH HELLER: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

MELANIE M.S. YOUNG

This study provides both a general overview and specific analyses of Joseph Heller's major works: Catch-22, Something Happened, Good as Gold, and We Bombed in New Haven. The first chapter places Heller's writing in a biographical context, while the last chapter (VI) demonstrates the unity of vision underlying Heller's works by discussing them in terms of a theme they all share: that of the institutional systems of "order" that produce human "chaos"—i.e., the destruction of human life, sanity, and shared values. The intermediate chapters (II through V) analyze how each work develops this theme, examining the conflict between the protagonist and an American locus of power and authority: Yossarian (Catch-22) and Henderson (We Bombed in New Haven) fight to save life and conscience from the military bureaucracy, Slocum (Something Happened) tries to salvage his identity and sanity from the corporate milieu that threatens them, and Gold (Good as Gold) must struggle to save his humanity from the corrupt and dehumanizing political and social establishment of Washington, D.C.

This conflict between the individual and society's systems of order forms the heart of Heller's satirical vision. For his deepest concern, articulated through this protagonists' struggles, is the
possibility of preserving human values in a world where the few who control its most powerful institutions seem bent upon subverting these values by replacing them with private and self-serving interests. Each of Heller's works exposes a society organized in absurd and destructive ways that promote divisive competition over cooperation and trust, madness and mindless conformity over sanity and individual conscience, and death over life.
To Victor,

who gave laughter and life to others,

1949-1974,

and Tex,

for his patience, flexibility, support, love,

and gourmet cooking.

I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation to

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a constant source of inspiration.
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CHRONOLOGY


1929: Father dies from ulcer surgery.

1941: Heller works as filing clerk at a casualty insurance company after graduating from Abraham Lincoln High School. After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor (December 7), H. works as blacksmith's helper at the Norfolk Navy Yard. The United States enters World War II (December 11).

1942: In October H. enlists in the U. S. Army Air Force; attends armorer's school, then changes to aviation cadet school, where he trains as bombardier.

1944: Arrives in Corsica (May) as combat replacement and serves as wing bombardier in the 488th Squadron, 340th Bombardment Group. Flies 60 missions in B-25 aircraft over Italy and France.

1945: Enrolls in University of Southern California, Los Angeles, for a year. Marries Shirley Held (October 2). His first story published in Story magazine.


1948: Receives B. A. degree in English Literature from New York University; begins M. A. program at Columbia University. Several stories published in Atlantic and Esquire.

1949: Receives M. A. degree in American Literature from Columbia University. In September, begins Fulbright Fellowship year at Oxford University.


1952-1953: Writes advertising copy at Merrill Anderson Company, an advertising agency.


1955: First chapter of Catch-22 published in New World Writing, No. 7, as "Catch-18."


1962: Quits job at McCall's. Writes one of the original pilot scripts for the television series, McHale's Navy. Something Happened conceived.

1963: Receives award for literature from the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Rewrites the screenplay for Sex and the Single Girl (Warner Brothers).

1964: Begins writing Something Happened.

1965: Conceives We Bombed in New Haven, a play.

1966: Submits draft of his play to Robert Brustein, the Dean of the Yale School of Drama. The original first chapter of Something Happened published in Esquire.

1967: Playwright-in-Residence at Yale; teaches dramatic writing. We Bombed in New Haven opens December 4 at Yale School of Drama Repertory Theater and runs through December 23.

1968: Revises play for Broadway opening; attends European premiere of his play in September in Berlin. We Bombed in New Haven opens on October 16 at Ambassador Theater on Broadway, and closes after 86 performances, December 29. B. moves to Knopf with his editor, Robert Gottlieb. Knopf publishes his play.
1970: Film version of *Catch-22* released, directed by Mike Nichols (Paramount).


1974: Finishes *Something Happened* in January; it is published by Knopf in October.

1975: Quits teaching position at City College of New York. *Good as Gold* conceived in April; H. begins writing it that summer.

1977: Receives record advance for *Good as Gold* and moves back to Simon and Schuster.

1979: *Good as Gold* published by Simon and Schuster in March.

1981: H. reportedly working on his fourth novel.
Chapter I

JOSEPH HELLER

Joseph Heller's life, like his art, is haunted by the image of flight. Like Yossarian striking out for Sweden at the end of *Catch-22*, Heller's father left a threatening situation: an agnostic Jew and active Socialist, Isaac Heller fled the Czar during the Russian revolution and came to the United States, accompanied by his wife and a son, Lee. But if Isaac Heller left behind persecution for his political beliefs, his new life in America was not an easy one. Soon after the birth of a daughter (Sylvia), his first wife died, and three years later he married Lena, who had recently emigrated from Russia and knew little English. They settled in a poor neighborhood of European-Jewish immigrants in Coney Island, New York, where Isaac drove a truck for a local bakery. It was here, when he and Lena were 38 years old, that Joseph Heller was born on the first of May, 1923.

Perhaps this youngest son's image of his once politically active father, fleeing because of his ideals, helped shape the critical view of society that was later to become an integral part of Joseph Heller's aesthetic. Apart from his image of flight, however, Heller scarcely remembered his father, for Isaac made a second and final exodus when Heller was only five: he died of a bungled ulcer operation. Because Lee was 14 years older than Joseph (and Sylvia 7 years older), he became a father figure to him. Nevertheless, his father's second flight had a profound effect upon Heller, an absence making more
impact, perhaps, than any other presence during his upbringing.\(^2\)

In later years Heller has commented on his father's death, saying that he didn't realize until much later just how traumatized he was. What made the experience traumatic was less his young age than the fact that no one explained to him what had happened: his father simply vanished. Apparently, his family hoped to protect their youngest member from the death and grief they feared he wouldn't understand. Thus Heller remembers the day of his father's funeral as a "party" where people doted on him, feeding him special food while trying to keep him amused.\(^3\) Some time went by before he found out the truth, a discovery which may have been more startling than learning, at the age of 15, that Lee and Sylvia were only his half-brother and half-sister. No one had told him that his mother was their stepmother. Again, Heller felt enraged and betrayed by his family's withholding of important facts.\(^4\)

But if Heller's father was absent physically, his mother seemed absent emotionally because she was always so restrained and undemonstrative in her behavior. Heller once said of her that he "was not aware of coldness or of warmth," but what epitomizes his image of her as unemotional was his utter amazement upon learning, from Sylvia, that after walking dry-eyed and collected to put him on the trolley that would eventually take him to fight in World War II, his mother "collapsed into heartbroken sobs as soon as he was out of sight, and had to be helped home."\(^5\)

His mother's natural reserve and his father's absence may have left Heller feeling emotionally orphaned; it is unclear how much his
older brother and sister were able to fill this void. At any rate, this "orphaning" may account for Heller's admitted wariness of emotional depth and intimacy; "I can't take too much friendliness," he once joked.6 A similar distrust of feeling and intimacy can be seen in his male protagonists' often shallow relationships with women: not one has a close, lasting bond with a woman, and few of his female characters have both psychological complexity and major roles. It is as if Heller has denied his women characters the same emotional attention that his mother denied him. While his father provided an image of flight from external dangers, his mother taught him, however unintentionally, a flight from feeling. His emotional orphaning has probably contributed to what a friend calls a "dreadful malaise"7—a depressive, brooding melancholy that dominates his temperament, according to Heller, who once remarked, "Actually I am a very morbid, melancholy person. I'm preoccupied with death, disease and misfortune."8 But his father's death, the Great Depression, and a special gift have had the most pervasive effect in shaping Heller's concerns and values.

Besides providing an image of flight, his father gave him death disguised as a party. Perhaps because the delayed shock of discovery intensified its impact, death has become nearly an obsession in Heller's life and art. Death has a central, and often a precipitating, role in his works. In Catch-22 so many people die it appears to be a character in its own right, and the gradual discovery of death is of primary importance in this novel as well as in his play, We Bombed in New Haven. Death lurks beneath even the most idyllic scenes of
Catch-22, just as it was the real presence behind what the five-year-old Heller mistook as a celebration. Given this initial experience of death, it is not surprising that Heller mistrusts even his own happiness and literary success, as if death is just waiting to snatch them away when he is off guard. Nor, in this light, does it seem strange that his protagonists Bob Slocum (Something Happened) and Bruce Gold (Good as Gold) see entropy and decay everywhere. In the Heller cosmos Death has usurped religion, morality, and love as the bedrock of being and action.

It is also at the core of Heller's most brilliant, biting satire and humor, as in Catch-22's presentation of the bombing of an innocent village to achieve a "tighter bomb pattern" (197), or the revelation of "Snowden's secret" (i.e., death). A friend speculates that the reason death and humor are so entwined in Heller's work is that they were entwined in his life: he transformed his repressed horror and rage at his father's death and apparent desertion into the dark humor that focuses upon death and the forces that help it along in an absurdly organized society. Humor provided a way of dealing with death without being hurt by it; Heller's dark comedy could confront death and at the same time keep it at a distance. Of course, this crucial event in Heller's life and the circumstances surrounding it didn't create his gift for humor so much as they may have shaped its direction and made it important to him. Humor became a way of surviving the shocks of life and death.

As both repression and obsession, death has played a major role in Heller's art and life, motivating his own behavior as well as his
characters. For example, after a friend had a heart attack, Heller decided to lose the 40 or so pounds he had gained when he quit smoking, thus beginning a rigorous regimen of dieting and running which he maintains still—his own way of outrunning at least an untimely death like his father's.  

Not long after his father "disappeared," the Great Depression struck, adding new worries and uncertainties to Heller's young life. For families barely surviving economically, the Depression turned poverty into the painful ordeal Heller describes in an early short story, "Castle of Snow," where the young narrator's uncle (and surrogate father) must finally sell his only remaining escape and consolation, his books:

Our misfortunes prolonged themselves in a way that was unintelligible to my young mind. It was like a string of rubber being stretched beyond its limits, growing thinner as the tension increases with no promise of respite, and I was aware that a point was being approached at which everything must suddenly and disastrously snap.  

Whether the Hellers experienced the "harsh punishments of poverty" described by the child narrator above is unknown; they were poor, and to make ends meet during this time Heller's mother took in sewing while Lee and Sylvia went to work right after highschool, instead of attending college. Certainly the strong undercurrent of appalled amazement unifying "Castle of Snow"—epitomized by the narrator's horror at "a pile of furniture stacked desolately in the street," his "first experience with eviction"—suggests autobiographical roots in feeling, if not in the precise facts.  

Furthermore, the narrator's uncle and Heller's father share similar pasts: the uncle was "an
active socialist in his youth" during the Russian revolution, "so active that he had been forced to flee the authorities." This story and portions of *Good as Gold*, where the protagonist describes his Coney Island family's poverty during the Depression, may be the closest Heller comes to obliquely sketching this part of his past, about which he is notably reticent. At any rate, Heller grew up during the Depression (he was six when it began and around sixteen when it ended), when money could make the difference between quite literally holding one's place in the world or being evicted onto the street. Thus the Depression and his family experiences schooled Heller in the uncertainty and unpredictability of the world and one's place within it. He knew firsthand how rapidly things could change: like the character Dunbar in *Catch-22*, Heller's father suddenly vanishes without explanation; his brother and sister of 15 years turn out to be not what he assumed; a family might be nextdoor neighbors one day and on the street with their furniture the next. Long before he wrote *Catch-22*, then, Heller knew something about the sudden changes and violent dislocations that were later to become so basic to that novel's narrative structure. The instability of one's place in the world is likewise reflected in his life and works. Yossarian has an unstable and life-threatening position; Slocum constantly worries about his executive job in the corporate hierarchy and who might be scheming to supplant him; Gold frets over his place in his family's esteem and covets a high position in the government and genteel society. Heller himself is acutely conscious of his status as a writer and worries about being forgotten, in spite of his established reputation as a
major American author and writer of at least one American classic in
*Catch-22*. He also worries about losing his talent, becoming destitute,
and not getting another idea for a novel. His own uncertainty about
his work appears in his remark that he is not sure about what he has
written until people read his work and give him their reactions.16

Besides contributing to a sense of the world's instability, the
Depression showed Heller firsthand the effects of a social order gone
awry. In the poverty, humiliation, and suffering of large numbers of
people, the Depression exposed the human chaos produced by the way the
world was organized. Heller's acute sense of the wrongs and absurdities of society and its systems of order, as well as his pessimistic
view of many social and political trends, may be rooted in his ex-
perience of the Depression. Just as Heller's father had politically
rebelled against the established ruling regime in Russia, the satirical
edge in Heller's fiction often flays the social and political order of
the world. But whereas the Depression and his father's political
activism probably influenced his satirical view of society, the deeper
undercurrent of pessimism about the universe itself and human
existence in Heller's work—a kind of metaphysical despair—may be
rooted in his initial experience of death as the unpleasant void lurk-
ing behind all achieved order and happiness.

But if death made Heller pessimistic, the Depression also made
him pragmatic, inspiring in Heller considerable zeal for financial
security. "My generation was oriented to the Depression," he told an
interviewer, "When I was in school, we all wanted to get out and make
a good living."17 Heller has made a good living from his writing:
from Catch-22 and Something Happened alone he has earned over $1.25 million. In practice Heller has seemed almost as driven by the desire to earn a great deal of money as he has been by his art. Until 1975 he always had sources of income besides his novel writing, such as teaching or polishing screen plays, and money crops up as a persistent theme during interviews; he has often joked about not having to write another book because he already has enough income from his previous work. And after Something Happened became a best-seller in 1974, he commented that money was no longer a "primary consideration." Clearly the Depression played a major role in the high valuation Heller accords financial security, inspiring his drive to put as much capital as possible between himself and the poverty of his childhood. Equally strong, however, was his ambition to create something enduring, which began with a gift.

The desire to write "masterpieces" began in elementary school when his cousin gave him a children's prose version of The Iliad. It was this book, according to Heller, that made him want to become a writer, "And the book I most wanted to write, of course, was The Iliad." He read it continuously, beginning again as soon as he finished. Eventually he wrote his own version of that epic in Catch-22, containing, like The Iliad, what Heller called "heroes of imperfect character, adversaries with sympathetic, sometimes even likeable faults and a good many old people mourning the deaths of the young." That Catch-22 has become an American classic as well as reported-

ly the "biggest selling 'serious' novel in American publishing history" exemplifies the fortunate harmony Heller has achieved between
his desires to make money and create masterpieces. Furthermore his slow, painstaking habit of writing and then revising only two or three pages a day has fit in well with his outside work. Although his early juggling of a full-time advertising career and writing his first novel over a span of ten years may have established the pattern, Heller insists that he wouldn't have written any more or any faster even if he had had extra time. In view of Heller's balance of monetary and literary ambitions, it is not surprising that the two subjects at which he excelled in school were math and English.

While still in elementary school (Public School #188) Heller made his first bid at publication by sending a story about the Russian invasion of Finland to the New York Daily News (he was in the 6th grade at the time). After graduating from Abraham Lincoln High School in 1941, he worked as a filing clerk at a casualty insurance company, a job that provided the setting and atmosphere of Slocum's first job in Something Happened. But after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941), Heller worked as a blacksmith's helper at the Norfolk Navy Yard, and in October 1942 he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force, where he attended armorer's school. He soon switched, however, because "rumors circulated that armorer's were going to be turned into gunners—and a gunner's life was supposed to be worth no more than three days. So I went to cadet school." Like Yossarian in Catch-22, Heller became an aviation cadet and trained as a bombardier, figuring that the war would be over long before he finished his training. In May 1944 he found himself stationed on Corsica, an island off the coast of Italy, ready to begin flying
combat missions as a wing bombardier in the 488th Squadron of the 340th Bombardment Group.

At first he was excited. Flight still held an aura of romance and daring. The war seemed like a "movie" to him, and he was so eager to participate in its heroic airborne battles that he was disappointed when, on his first bombing mission (May 17, 1944), there was no "flak"—the exploding shells fired at aircraft from cannons on the ground. 26 Heller also liked army life; for a boy from a poor immigrant family, "the standard of living was higher in the Army than in Coney Island. I ate better and had more money in my pocket than ever before. And when I got home, I went to college on the GI Bill." 27 The travel, education, and money that the army offered all added to the war's glamour for Heller until his 37th mission, over Avignon, when the wounding of a crewmember in his plane made him realize, all of a sudden, that he could be killed. As this new awareness of death swept over him, it washed all glamour from the war, leaving fear in its place. From that point on, Heller just wanted to go home, vowing that if he survived he would never fly again. But he obediently flew the required 60 missions before he waited for a boat going home in 1945 (he kept his vow until 1960). 28

Many details of his war experience, like his realization over Avignon, reappear transformed in Catch–22. At least two of the characters, Orr and Hungry Joe, were modeled after people he knew in the squadron (though Milo Minderbinder had an earlier source in a childhood friend, "Beansy" Winkler, who became a highly successful California entrepreneur). 29 Among his notes for the novel is a list of
49 missions "actually flown" by "Hungry Joe," which includes one with
the notation, "Perfect Bomb Pattern"—a phrase that sums up an impor-
tant event, theme, and turning point of Catch-22. In an interview
Heller noted that the meeting between Yossarian and Luciana was based
on an identical experience of his own, and the three missions forming
the structural core of Catch-22—Ferrara, Bologna, and Avignon—
follow the outlines of Heller's experience: on June 3rd (1944) his
squadron lost a plane over Ferrara; on August 3rd he saw his first
plane shot down and in flames over Avignon; and on August 15 over
Avignon he realized that he didn't want to die.

Thus much of the novel's action spans Heller's time on Corsica;
his description of Milo's bombing the squadron is based on a night
air raid during May 1944 that killed 22 men and wounded 219—this last
incident being from Heller's list of events occurring in his bomb
group "during the period covered by the novel and upon which much of
the material [of Catch-22] is actually based." His notes also in-
cluded a grid covering a large desk blotter, aligning characters and
events in the novel with the important events of World War II. This
grid aligns the opening chapter with the liberation of Paris from
Germany on August 23, 1944, so that the novel begins when the Allies
have started winning the war. Such correspondences reveal how care-
fully Heller constructed his novel with real events in mind, although
Catch-22 greatly transcends its historical and autobiographical roots;
it is "about" much more than the war.

But besides providing the factual foundation of his first novel,
the war, through the GI Bill, gave Heller the education that initiated
his apprenticeship as a writer, from 1945 to 1952. During this period he read and studied intensely, writing approximately 25 short stories, which he later described as imitations of Irwin Shaw, John O'Hara, and Ernest Hemingway—"New Yorker-type stories... about Jewish life in Brooklyn" during the Depression. After leaving the army with a good conduct medal, Heller married Shirley Held of Brooklyn on October 2, 1945, and enrolled in the University of Southern California at Los Angeles for a year. Here he wrote a humorous piece (about the racetrack and his friend, Beansy Winkler) as a freshman theme, later published in Esquire in May 1947 as "Bookies, Beware!" But his first short story, "I Don't Love You Anymore," appeared the fall he began college (in the September-October issue of Story magazine). It focused on a war veteran come home to find his feelings towards his wife have changed. In his ambivalence towards his wife—resenting her and wanting to leave, yet unable to—the protagonist resembles Slocum in Something Happened.

Unhappy away from New York, however, Heller returned and enrolled in New York University the next fall (1946), where he continued writing short stories in a creative writing course. Several of these were published in Esquire and Atlantic in 1948, so that by the time he graduated that same year with a B.A. degree in English Literature, he was considered one of America's most promising young writers.

Not long after their publication he grew dissatisfied with these stories; he wanted to write something very good but felt he had nothing good to write. So he "formally gave up writing those trivial stories" and "began looking for a novel that [he] could consider
important.35 Yet the stories weren't trivial in that they affirmed and exercised his talent, particularly for convincing dialogue and rapid characterization. What is most striking about these first efforts compared to his later work, however, is that they are almost devoid of humor, a sign that Heller was indeed still searching for a style of his own. And while waiting for something "important" to come along, he continued studying the masterpieces of others. He received his M.A. degree in American Literature from Columbia University, writing his thesis on the plays that won the Pulitzer Prize, and was awarded a Fulbright fellowship to Oxford University, where he studied Chaucer, Milton and Shakespeare during the 1949-1950 academic year.36 The more he read, apparently, the more he set his sights on writing either a work of enduring quality and originality or nothing at all. Thus while he taught English Composition at Pennsylvania State University (1950-1952), he observed his moratorium on writing.

In the fall of 1952 he and his wife, now expecting their first child, returned to New York City, where he took a job writing copy at Merrill Anderson Company, an advertising agency. That year marked the turning point from his apprenticeship to his career as a serious writer. His idea for Catch-22 was born that year, as well as his successful ten-year career as an advertising-promotion executive. Great energy and ambition characterized Heller's life during this time, as he poured as much effort into writing advertising presentations by day as he put into his novel by night, working two to three hours on it in the evenings.37 He would often leave parties early in order to
have his writing time.

Several factors led up to the inspiration that started him writing again in 1952. One was his longstanding desire to write his own "Iliad," while another was his reading, particularly Nabokov's comic approach to "situations deeply tragic and pathetic" in Laughter in the Dark, Faulkner's structure and epic sweep in Absalom, Absalom!, and Celine's Journey to the End of Night—"the book that touched it off," Heller said. "Celine did things with time and structure and colloquial speech I'd never experienced before." These works all revealed to Heller unique ways of organizing the novel as well as the "possibilities still inherent" in the form. A conversation with two friends wounded in the war, about the humor and horror of their wartime experiences, also made its impression, for after that, he said the opening and other incidents came to him.

He rapidly wrote the first chapter and sent it to his agent, then spent the next five or six months outlining the novel on notecards, not even starting the second chapter until a year later, by which time he had changed to a job at Remington Rand Company. The first chapter was published in 1955, and in February 1958 Robert Gottlieb, then a young editor at Simon and Schuster, signed "Catch-18" and began editing segments as Heller handed them in. While Heller's novel progressed, so did his executive career, moving him with promotions and raises from Remington Rand to Time, Inc. for three years (where he worked mostly for Fortune magazine) before he went to Look magazine for a year and then to McCall's magazine, where he served as advertising sales promotion manager for two years.
He seemed to enjoy this double existence as business executive and author, though he admits to secretly looking forward to leaving his advertising job if his novel succeeded. Apparently he revealed little about his nocturnal work-in-progress to his associates, for when Catch-22 came out in 1961, they were incredulous about his authorship, saying, as Heller tells it, "Come on Joe, . . . a few of the jokes, maybe yes, but not that whole book. You don't have that kind of tragic sense." 42

Although Catch-22 didn't become a bestseller upon publication, by the end of its first year in print it had made Heller a well-known author and enabled him—after the sale of the movie rights—to quit his executive job. 43 Famous actors badgered Heller to let them play Yossarian in the movie version, and invitations to speak or work on various projects followed. Some of these he accepted, writing one of the original pilot scripts for the television series, McHale's Navy, rewriting the screenplay for the movie Sex and the Single Girl and participating in a British symposium on "Sex in Literature." 44 On this same trip to England he and his family visited Bertrand Russell at his home in Wales, Russell being one of the thinkers and writers Heller most admired then. 45 In the wake of Catch-22's publication, he worked on several minor projects as well, though none reached maturity: among these were a collaboration with his friend, George Mandel, on a screenplay based on Mandel's novel, The Breakwater, and a musical comedy about two New York criminal lawyers at the turn of the century. 46 On May 22, 1963 he received an award for literature from the National Institute of Arts and Letters for Catch-22's "rambunctiousness of humor
and gustiness of style, which do not undercut but accent a sense of pathos in the human story."47

By the time Catch-22 appeared Heller was 38 years old. His relatively sudden fame, following nearly ten years of work on his novel, made few changes in his life besides freeing him to leave his job at McCall's. He did move his family, which by now included both a son and a daughter, to a larger apartment in the same building on Manhattan's West Side. His literary success didn't alter his pessimism, either. In interviews during this time (1962-63) he cites greed and corruption as crucial problems, along with the nation's lack of purpose and "chaotic ignorance," noting that "society is treating the wrong wounds."48 He also predicted that the same pessimism underlying Catch-22 would permeate his next novel.49

His overall conception of Something Happened came to him during the summer of 1962. But Heller didn't begin writing his second novel until two years later, giving himself a "personal deadline" of January 1, 1969.50 While Heller's advertising promotion experience provided the atmosphere and contours of the corporate business environment where Slocum works as an executive, the protagonist's deep malaise is anticipated in one of Heller's short stories, "World Full of Great Cities."51 In this troubling tale of sexual voyeurism and misery in the midst of material success, a man and his beautiful wife try to persuade a young boy to make love to her. The husband voices the same profound, mysterious unhappiness shared by Slocum, using an image almost identical to Slocum's comparison of his tormented mind to a metropolis: calling the human mind a "great city" where one is always
lost, the husband describes "a naked arm in every brain groping its way through a great black city. . . . I can feel the arm in my own head. I get headaches. I can almost feel the fingers probing through the tissues." This antecedent suggests that Slocum's melancholy and the novel's pessimism reach farther back in time than Heller's business career and thus cannot be attributed wholly to the protagonist's corporate environment, dehumanizing though it is. Slocum would like to flee from his unhappy mental metropolis and almost retreats into insanity, but the social embarrassment of a nervous breakdown deters him.

In Slocum's anguish can also be seen a reflection of Heller's negative feelings about social conditions and his country's direction. President Kennedy had been assassinated in November 1963, and American intervention in the Vietnam conflict—perhaps one of the "wrong wounds" he felt America was treating—was escalating, both in practice abroad and as an issue at home. By 1966 his concern about the political and military situation in the U.S. and Vietnam had begun to distract him. Having written about 250 pages of his second novel, he reached the part where the ten-year-old son asks his father, "Do I have to go into the army?" According to Heller, that started him thinking. He "finished that chapter, set the novel aside and started to put down the ideas that eventually evolved into the play," We Bombed in New Haven. 53

We Bombed in New Haven was a response to Heller's anguish over Vietnam, and in many ways it represents an intensified involvement in political and social issues during this part of his life, from 1966 (when he began the play) to the early Seventies. "I have to write
about what is bothering me," he said about his play, "What began to bother me was the Vietnam war. . . the draft law, compulsory military service, that many people are required to go fight a war they don't believe in."54 Besides attacking, in this play, the assumptions that permitted wars like the one in Vietnam to continue, he toured the country and spoke out against the war on college campuses and during interviews, supported the "antiwar" candidate who hoped to become the 1968 Democratic nominee for President (Senator Eugene McCarthy), signed a petition with 533 other writers urging a cease-fire in Vietnam, and even agreed to run in the New York state primary as an anti-Johnson delegate in a coalition of Democrats opposed to President Johnson's Vietnam policy. He also decried, in a letter to the New York Times, the FBI's harassment of individuals protesting the war. 55

Yet the play may have cost Heller as much anguish as it expressed. As if unsatisfied with or undecided about the result, he rewrote We Bombed in New Haven many times between 1966 and 1970. Nor did he like relinquishing control over the play during its first productions at Yale University, then Broadway, while director and actors reinterpreted it and suggested changes. "I just hate to let go," he told a reporter during rehearsals, "I get credit for things I didn't create. . . . Also, things I was blamed for weren't my fault, either!"56 Moreover, Heller was stung by some of the negative reviews; although New York Times critic, Clive Barnes, called it "a bad play any good playwright should be proud to have written," many were less kind. 57 But what seemed to bother him the most was not having complete control over the play, for it made achieving a masterpiece far more difficult.58
Looking back on his experience of *We Bombed in New Haven*'s production as "excruciating torture," Heller refrained from attending rehearsals of his next play in 1971, a stage version of *Catch-22* that he had worked on from time to time since 1962.59

Yet he didn't consider *We Bombed in New Haven* a failure. For one thing, he said, in the first five weeks on Broadway more people saw the play than bought *Catch-22* the first year; and for another, its relatively short run was in part a result of achieving his objective: making the audience feel guilty about allowing American participation in the Vietnam War to continue.60 And if capturing a nation's mood is any measure of success, the play certainly, according to Barnes, "caught the anarchic mood of the present, the callousness, brutality, cynical jokiness, dissent and protest."61

Having nearly finished revising the final library edition of *We Bombed in New Haven*, Heller returned to *Something Happened* in February 1969.62 While this novel does not address the particular political issues of the play, its protagonist's anguish frequently focuses on the dehumanizing or destructive social conditions surrounding him. In this sense *Something Happened* reflects, though in broader terms, the same serious concern over social and political issues expressed in the play. Yet at the same time this novel marks a turning away from the current situation towards a more philosophical orientation in his writing—what Heller called the "existential."63 At this time Heller was particularly intrigued by experimental fiction, and one of the writers who most interested him was Samuel Beckett, whose novels weave experimental techniques with philosophical speculation. After reading
Beckett's trilogy of novels (Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable) during the summer of 1971, Heller was struck by certain similarities of technique between his own and Beckett's work, and from then on felt consciously influenced by this writer as he worked on Something Happened. 64 Heller finished it on January 11, 1974. During the editing process, Heller cut about 300 of the 1100 manuscript pages of the work he originally thought would be an 80-page novelette. 65 Describing the growth of Something Happened, Heller commented, "One section of three pages eventually became more than six hundred with the same opening and closing sentences. . . . I just filled in a little." 66 The novel was published in October 1974 by Knopf. 67

Heller's shift from the "topical" to the "existential" didn't end his political concern however. In a 1971 interview Heller vehemently stated his views, explaining that "the enemies of this country are in Washington," and in the forward (written in July 1972) to his dramatization of Catch-22 he again upbraided the government's persecution and harassment of people protesting the Vietnam War (mentioning by name many of those being persecuted). 68 Furthermore, he actively supported the 1972 Democratic Presidential candidate, George McGovern. 69 Teaching also became a part of Heller's life again: he taught at Yale and the University of Pennsylvania in 1967, and from 1971 to 1975 taught creative writing at City College of New York.

Nor were We Bombed in New Haven and the antiwar movement of the late Sixties and early Seventies the only dramas in Heller's life during this time. He finished his stage version of Catch-22 (first performed in July 1971 on Long Island), published the one-act play
Clevinger's Trial (a favorite chapter of Catch-22, but too long to fit into his dramatization of the novel), and worked briefly polishing some screenplays. Moreover, a special dramatic event occurred in June 1970: Mike Nichols' film of Catch-22 was released. Although Heller had little to do with making the movie itself (Buck Henry wrote the screenplay), besides once suggesting Nichols as the director and Alan Arkin as Yossarian, he felt pleased with Nichols' cinematic version of the novel, saying it was the best American movie he had ever seen and praising Arkin's subtle, "surpassing artistry" as Yossarian. Because Nichols wanted to be as faithful to the novel as possible, he had reassembled an entire World War II squadron of B-25's from junk aircraft, and for the scene in which Milo bombs the airbase, Nichols built the base and blew it up—-with 17,000 sticks of dynamite, 8 tons of black powder, and thousands of gallons of gasoline. Such fidelity didn't come cheap: the film cost around $16 million and lost $10 million (Heller was to receive 2-1/2% of the profits). Heller did benefit financially, however; after the movie's release Catch-22 became an American bestseller for the first time, as well as the fastest-selling paperback Dell had ever produced.

Although the movie captured much of the novel's humor, it emphasized the dark side of Heller's vision. His pessimism was evident in many of his comments during this period, even though his active involvement in the current issues attested to some hope for positive change. In 1968 he summed up these mixed feelings with the remark, "If it weren't for my basic optimism, I'd be packing up to leave the country." But if his optimism kept him from leaving, nothing prevented such
optimism from eroding. After the defeat of the candidates he had supported in the 1968 and 1972 Presidential elections, followed by the sordid revelations of Watergate in 1973, Heller's political involvement decreased. Perhaps Slocum's isolation and despair at the end of Something Happened prefigures this withdrawal.

It may seem slightly ironic that Something Happened, a novel exposing the seamy underside of material success—and thereby effectively demolishing any equation of money and happiness—would be the one to make Heller feel financially secure. An American bestseller for 29 weeks (from October 1974 to May 1975), Something Happened proved one of Knopf's biggest money-makers, as well as the best selling American book of Heller's Swedish publishers. For the first time Heller felt secure enough to rely on his income as a novelist. He resigned his teaching post at City College of New York in 1975, and by April of that year he had mentally planned Good as Gold, about the Jewish experience in America, Washington politics, publishing and money, and a disintegrating society. Bruce Gold wants to flee from his roots—his Jewishness, family, and past poverty—until he realizes that these are a positive and essential part of his identity. This third novel ripens Slocum's depression into the mocking disillusionment of Gold, while Gold's brief foray into Washington society seems to look back at Heller's political involvement with a cynical squint.

Much of Gold's cynicism and disillusion about his world Heller shares, admitting to "a lot of Bruce Gold" in himself. Like his protagonist, Heller sees a decaying society, where neglect and "inhuman callousness" reign, where the Presidency has become a "public-relations
enterprise," and where "the world of finance dominates the world of government." Moreover, like Gold, Heller has become slightly more conservative than his earlier liberal stance allowed, but "with unclear conscience for having done so." Given Heller's view of a world that appears almost as dangerous and threatening during peace as Yossarian's world at war—in 1979 Heller noted "Much that happens in society is of a savage nature"—it is not surprising that he would seek to insulate himself from this world with economic security. Thus when his former publisher, Simon and Schuster, offered him a record $1.2 to 2 million advance in 1977 for Good as Gold, Heller accepted and thereby left his editor, Robert Gottlieb (then president of Knopf). Gottlieb remarked that he didn't "believe in guaranteeing such immense sums," adding that "money is what Joe wanted this time." Heller also felt some of Gold's envy and irritation at the large advances received by politicians and movie stars for not very good autobiographical books. Published in March 1979, Good as Gold lampoons these second-rate works, particularly those derived from political experience; Heller noted that "It's now so profitable to get a book out of political office, that few can resist." Unlike Gold, Heller's literary and financial success have brought him from the poverty of Coney Island to East Hampton, where he bought an expensive home soon after beginning Good as Gold. Yet while he admits to enjoying his success, his wealth sometimes makes him uneasy: "I don't think I deserve all this money. It puts me into a class for which I have very little sympathy." Though humorously expressed, this remark suggests a cautious awareness of the danger of insulating
himself, whether by wealth or other means, from the political and social realities that have concerned him in the past—material upon which his great gift for satire and humor has thrived. The wrongs and absurdities of the world's chaotic "order" have been the mooring and matter of Heller's imagination. Of course the question of whether these will inform his future work, or whether Heller will strike out in a new direction, may be answered by his fourth novel, which he is reportedly writing.
FOOTNOTES

1 Sam Merrill, "Playboy Interview: Joseph Heller," Playboy, June 1975, p. 59.


3 Gelb, p. 15.

4 Ibid., p. 53.

5 Ibid., pp. 48, 54.


7 Gelb, p. 16.


9 Gelb, p. 42. Heller's friend, Mario Puzo, said of him, "I never knew anybody so determined to be unhappy, so suspicious of happiness. . . . Joe is afraid to be happy. If he's happy, he gets unhappy."

10 Ibid., p. 51.


12 Atlantic Monthly, March 1948, pp. 53-54.

13 Ibid., pp. 52-53.

14 Ibid., p. 52.

15 Heller made the following comment about the Depression: "Well, in the early 30s, there were a lot of suicides by people who had seen their income drop in the Depression from, say, $150,000 a year to
$40,000. They weren't broke by any means, but they couldn't stand going back to a lesser standard of living. It may have been the humiliation that killed them." See Jack Schnedler, "Joseph Heller: Catch-22 Author Takes his Time Producing Another Smash Novel," Star-Ledger (Newark, N.J.), 6 October 1974, rpt. in Authors in the News (Detroit: Gale, 1976), I, 216.


19 Explaining why he doesn't have a "work compulsion," Heller said, "I just want to write a good novel or play once in a while. I can make enough to live comfortably doing movie polishes." See Braudy, p. 45. And when asked in 1974 if he was planning another novel, Heller said he felt "absolutely no necessity for it. I have enough income from the two books [Catch-22 and Something Happened] and my teaching." See Robert Alan Aurther, "Hanging out," Esquire, September 1974, p. 54.

20 Merrill, p. 70.


23 Plimpton, p. 145.


25 Wershba, p. 54.

26 Merrill, p. 60. The date of Heller's first mission is from a list Heller made of events during his service in Corsica. The list,

27. Merrill, p. 64.

28. Ibid., p. 68.

29. Ibid., p. 61. Among the miscellaneous papers of Joseph Heller at Brandeis University, items #2c and #2d, are photographs of the real persons on whom Orr and Hungry Joe were based (hereafter cited as Brandeis Miscellaneous Papers of Joseph Heller). Gelb, p. 51, notes that Milo was modeled after Beany Winkler.


32. Brandeis Catch-22 Papers, item #4.

33. Brandeis Miscellaneous Papers of Joseph Heller, item #1.

34. Merrill, p. 68. Most of these stories are among the Brandeis Miscellaneous Papers of Joseph Heller, items #14, "Other Works - Published," and #15, "Other Works - Unpublished (1945-1950)."

35. Merrill, p. 68.


39 Weatherby, p. 7.


42 Braudy, p. 44.

43 Heller sold the movie rights to Columbia Pictures for $125,000; later Columbia sold them to Paramount. See Barnard, p. 295.


45 Writer's Yearbook, p. 49.

46 Ibid., p. 49.


49 Weatherby, p. 7.

50 Aurthur, p. 54.

51 Although written in 1947 while Heller was at New York University, "World Full of Great Cities" wasn't published until 1963 in Nelson Algren's Book of Lonely Monsters (New York: Bernard Gels), pp. 7-19.

52 Ibid., p. 15.

54. Murry Frymer, "He Adds Another Catch to List," Newsday, 14 October 1968, p. 40A.


56. Frymer, p. 40A.


58. Not long before the play opened on Broadway, Heller told a reporter, "I'm trying to write a play that's a masterpiece... But now I'm the least important person in the production." See Frymer, p. 40A.


60. Shenker, "Did Heller Bomb...", p. D1; Merrill, p. 72.


63. Wallach, p. 24A. Heller notes the "new direction in his
writing away from the topical and toward 'what I suppose might be called the existential'."

64 Gonzales, p. 216.

65 Aurthur, pp. 50, 54; Schnedler, p. 216.

66 Aurthur, p. 54.

67 When his editor, Robert Gottlieb, moved from Simon and Schuster to Knopf (to become its editor-in-chief) in 1968, Heller went with him.


69 Heller participated in a benefit softball game with other celebrities in East Hampton for Democratic Presidential Candidate George McGovern and wrote a letter in support of him. See New York Times, 15 August 1972, p. 28 and 31 August 1972, p. 32.

70 The screenplays were for the movies Casino Royale and Dirty Dingus Magee; his experience with the former he turned into a humorous article, "How I Found James Bond, Lost my Self-Respect, and Almost Made $150,000 in my Spare Time," Holiday, June 1967, pp. 123–25, 128, 130. Clevinger's Trial was published in 1973 by Samuel French, New York.


73 "Conversation with an Author," Book Digest, 3, No. 5 (May 1976), 22; Barnard, p. 300.

74 Heller told Schnedler, p. 216, that in 1970 alone his royalties from Catch-22 came to $80,000.

75 Shenker, "Did Heller Bomb...", p. Dl.

76 In her 1979 article, Gelb notes that Heller hasn't voted for 12 years, p. 15.


79 "Joseph Heller on America's Inhuman Callousness," U.S. News and World Report, 9 April 1979, p. 73; Merrill, p. 65.


81 U.S. News, p. 73.

82 "Heller Moves Back to Simon and Schuster for Third Novel," Publishers Weekly, 7 February 1977, p. 37. See also "Stellar Sum for Heller Novel," New York, 7 February 1977, p. 60, which reports that Henry Kissinger's memoirs were being offered for a figure similar to Heller's advance.

83 Lenhart, p. B3.

84 Gelb, p. 44.
Chapter II

CATCH-22

_Catch-22_, a novel set on a Mediterranean island during World War II, centers around its hero's efforts to avoid death. As a bombardier in the U.S. Army Air Corps, Yossarian soon learns that avoiding death is difficult because he must fly dangerous combat missions, where "strangers he didn't know shot at him with cannons every time he flew up into the air to drop bombs on them" (17).\(^1\) If he finishes the required number of missions he can be sent home, but his commanding officer keeps raising the requirement. If he escapes flying missions by fleeing to the hospital, he never quite manages to stay there forever, as he hopes, or even until the war ends. His oscillation between missions and hospital exemplifies his personal mode of survival, a style that likewise marks his strategy on bomb runs, where the evasive action at which Yossarian excels is the key to staying alive:

The men had loved flying behind Yossarian, who used to come barreling in over the target from all directions and every height, climbing and diving and twisting and turning so steeply and sharply that it was all the pilots of the other five planes could do to stay in formation with him, leveling out only for the two or three seconds it took for the bombs to drop and then zooming off again with an aching howl of engines, and wrenching his flight through the air so violently as he wove his way through the filthy barrages of flak that the six plans were soon flung out all over the sky like prayers... (30-31).\(^2\)

Narrative also mimics its hero's erratic motion, deliberately avoiding a direct, chronological approach to events and instead shifting rapidly back and forth in time and space among episodes usually
filtered through Yossarian's consciousness, thus creating a breathless sense of speed and spontaneity as it ranges from his cadet training in 1941 to December 1944, when Yossarian decides to desert. And with its deliberate disregard of chronology, evasive narrative techniques, seemingly chaotic surface, and bizarre juxtaposition of humor and horror, Catch-22 came barreling into a literary atmosphere dominated by "muted mood-piece" novels.³

Reviewers were stunned. Hostile critics called Catch-22 everything from redundant to ridiculous, decrying its disorder and sometimes even denying its claim to be a novel: for one reviewer, Catch-22 was "not really a book," but instead gave the "impression of having been shouted onto paper."⁴ Yet the novel received admiring appraisals as well, such as Nelson Algren's judgment that "this novel is not merely the best American novel to come out of World War II; it is the best American novel that has come out of anywhere in years", or British critic Philip Toynbee's assessment of Catch-22 as "the greatest satirical work in English since Erewhon."⁵ No one guessed, however, that this first novel by a promotion executive at McCall's magazine would explode into worldwide fame within a year of its publication, becoming the center of cultlike adoration. "Not since 'The Catcher in the Rye' and 'Lord of the Flies'," proclaimed Newsweek in "The Heller Cult," "has a novel been taken up by such a fervid and heterogeneous claque of admirers."⁶ The novel's flamboyant success sparked equally wild and enthusiastic gestures: television newscaster John Chancellor had stickers printed with the words "Yossarian Lives" and "Better Yossarian than Rotarian"; the director of CARE's public relations
considered a publicity flyer advising, "Send CARE packages to the hungry overseas. They need it. And don't fail to read 'Catch-22'.
You need it." Producer David Merrick hoped to turn the novel into a Broadway musical, and several famous actors inquired about playing Yossarian in the movie version, for which rights Columbia Pictures paid $125,000. Even after the fervor subsided, steady popularity has made Catch-22 into the "biggest selling serious novel in American publishing history," exceeding eight million copies sold by 1975.

Catch-22's success may have surprised Heller as much as anyone else, for he claims that during the eight years of working on it in the evenings, he was not even sure he was going to be a writer. In 1953 he outlined his ideas for the novel on notecards, but 1955 was the turning point, when the opening sentence suddenly came to him. After that, Heller said,

the book began to evolve clearly in my mind—even most of the particulars. . .the tone, the form, many of the characters, including some I eventually couldn't use. All of this took place in an hour and a half. . . . Before the end of the week I had typed it [the first chapter] out and sent it to Candida Donadio, my agent. One year later, after much planning, I began chapter two.

This first chapter, titled "Catch-18," appeared in New World Writing, No. 7 (1955), a semi-annual volume featuring new authors. Heller and his editor changed the novel's title to "Catch-22," however, when they learned that Mila-18, by the well-known novelist Leon Uris, would appear at about the same time as Heller's book. Heller liked the new title because it tied in with the novel's many events that happen at least twice.
Some of the events, as well as many physical details of the setting, derive from Heller's experience during World War II, when he flew 60 missions as a bombardier in the 488th squadron of the U.S. Army Air Corps stationed in Corsica. During an interview Heller elaborated on this background:

I would say all the physical details, and almost all of what might be called the realistic details do come out of my own experiences as a bombardier in World War II. The organization of a mission, the targets—most of the missions that are in the book were missions that I did fly on. The structure of a B-25, the fact that there are no fighters in Catch-22 (there were no German fighters when I was overseas), the organization of a squadron, the fact that there is an intelligence tent, there is a mess hall, there are enlisted men, there was a squadron commander, the flight surgeon—all of these as details come out of my experience. In many cases, actual people I know were starting points for the characters.10

What happened to Heller on his 37th mission (over Avignon) likewise coincides in many details with Yossarian's crucial experience over Avignon:

The mission to Avignon, for example—and that's the one on which Snowden gets killed—corresponds perhaps ninety percent to what I did experience. I did have a co-pilot go berserk and grab the controls. The earphones did pull out. I did think I was dying for what seemed thirty minutes but was actually three-hundredths of a second. When I did plug my earphones in, there was a guy sobbing on the intercom, "Help the bombardier," but the gunner was only shot in the leg.11

And for Heller, as for Yossarian, this mission marked a turning point in his awareness of the war and death; suddenly Heller realized, "Good God! They're trying to kill me, too!" After Avignon, he noted, "the war wasn't much fun... all I wanted to do was go home."12 But although the author gave this same intense awareness of death to his hero, he stresses that for the most part, Yossarian's emotions are not the feelings
he experienced during combat, nor does the novel reflect his own attitude toward World War II, which he viewed as a "war we wanted to fight--a war we knew had to be won." In fact when he first went overseas as a bombardier he felt he was "going to Hollywood" and was eager to get into combat. But although the realistic details grew out of Heller's war experience, he points out that in spirit Catch-22 reflects American life during the postwar years:

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

While worried about Communism and Russia's acquisition of the atomic bomb as external threats, internally the country was divided over civil rights for Blacks and what came to be known as "McCarthyism." A demagogue convinced that American institutions were infiltrated by Communists conspiring to sell secret U.S. military and scientific information to the Russians, Senator Joe McCarthy spearheaded a congressional committee on "un-American Activities," which diligently sought out and accused numerous people of treasonous acts and intentions. As the spirit of McCarthyism spread, many employees were required to sign oaths and take tests to determine their loyalty, and "scholars and artists, pacifists and Quakers and Unitarians, reformers and internationalists, non-conformists of every stripe, were suspect." To capture the feeling of American society during the McCarthy period,
Heller "deliberately seeded the book with anachronisms like loyalty oaths, helicopters, IBM machines and agricultural subsidies." Such details reinforce the theme of absurdity as well as satirize prominent persons and events of the postwar period.

Captain Black's Great Loyalty Oath Crusade, for example, satirizes the spirit and practices of McCarthyism, while the line "Who promoted Major Major?" (88) mimics McCarthy himself, who asked an identical question about a Major Peress, who had refused to sign loyalty oaths. And when the chaplain is accused of stealing a plum tomato because it perhaps contained "important secret papers," (212) Heller alludes to the Alger Hiss trial. Whittaker Chambers accused Hiss of being a Communist spy and produced "stolen documents" to prove it—evidence he claimed he found in a pumpkin. Thus both interrogations—Clevinger's trial and the chaplain's questioning—reflect the absurdity, vicious stupidity, and sadistic arrogance of those in power who turn justice into a semantic circus based on lies and innuendo. Heller also satirizes, through Milo Minderbinder, close relations between large corporations and government. Milo's slogan, "What's good for M and M Enterprises is good for the country," (446) both paraphrases and stresses the implications of a similar statement made to a Senate committee by Charles E. Wilson, President Eisenhower's Secretary of Defense and the former president of General Motors: "What is good for the country is good for General Motors, and vice versa."

These topical allusions and the novel as a whole illustrate not only Heller's satirical assessment of the political mood of the 1950's, but also his serious concern about the conflicts within American
society and its values and institutions. According to Heller in a 1970 interview,

"Until that time [the 1950's] we were in a process of restoring ourselves. The same factionalism, the same antagonism, the mortal enmity that exists between groups today in this country existed then as well. But to me it was a new phenomenon. I chose the war (World War II) as a setting because it seemed to me we were at war. Certainly that was the start of the civil rights movement, for example. There were whites who wanted to kill every black. . . . Then there was the same type of antagonism developing between (Senator) Joseph McCarthy—and Nixon and his committee—and people who, well, it then was called the Communist conspiracy. Teachers and Quakers were being fired. There was a kind of war going on between groups."

Thus the war in Catch-22 may be viewed on one level as a dramatization of certain negative forces and values within American society. Yet the novel's main theme transcends any particular people or period: it is the individual's predicament in a world whose systems of order have been subverted by the private aims of the few in power, causing suffering and death rather than protecting the value of human life. By posing, within the context of world war, the question of how our institutions have become bureaucratic systems of destruction, Heller questions the rationality and justice of the universe as well, for war is the one human area where doubts about our man-made systems merge with metaphysical doubts about the nature of man and the universe.

Caught in a world that systematically subverts human values in order to exploit and manipulate those without power for the profit of those who do, Yossarian embodies the individual's predicament. His survival strategies form the plot's nucleus, while counterpointing his actions are two subplots dominated by the forces threatening his life: the hierarchical military bureaucracy and Milo's vast economic empire.
These three strands of the narrative—Yossarian's "survive" plot, Milo's "monopoly" subplot, and Peckem's "military" subplot—these interact to shape the moral struggle in the novel, a struggle which for Yossarian coincides with his efforts to stay alive. Both Milo's and Peckem's organizations will dispose of any human lives or values obstructing the aims of those within their power structures: Colonel Cathcart will raise the required number of missions to 6,000 if it will win him a promotion to general, and Milo will bomb his own squadron to save his empire from financial ruin. Caught within such systems, Yossarian's doom seems only a matter of time. To save his own life, he must not only survive the combat missions; eventually he realizes that moral and physical survival means escaping the entire system requiring him to fly the missions.

But as Yossarian aspires to live, the ambitious play for power. General Peckem schemes to oust General Dreedle as wing commander and Milo builds his vast cartel. Both subplots exemplify the American dream of "success" defined as wealth and power. Milo's rise from mess hall officer to majordomo of an economic empire makes him another version of the Horatio Alger myth and its implications carried to extremes: when all value resides in the attainment of wealth or "profits," then any means to this end can be justified. But if Milo's web of world-wide financial power provides a grim paradigm of the American dream of wealth, Peckem's "war" against Dreedle comically critiques the aspiration to power within a bureaucracy. As soon as Peckem clinches his ambition to be wing commander, he learns that his former parade-happy assistant, Colonel Scheisskopf (the name is German for
"shithead"), has been promoted to a generalship over him—and following the law of slapstick comedy in which every plan misfires in the hands of its maker, the promotion results from his own memorandum. Similar ambitions permeate the military hierarchy in Catch-22: Colonel Cathcart wants to be a general, and his assistant, Korn, tries to better him; Captain Black, coveting the post of squadron commander, revenges himself against Major Major, the only man who does not want promotion to the post and gets it—thereby losing all his friends.

These additional versions of Peckem's war question not only the value of aspiring to higher position and power, but also the human cost of the competitive ethos which accompanies such goals in a hierarchical structure. And of those who compete for promotion, only Korn seems aware of the ambition's emptiness; when Yossarian asks him why Colonel Cathcart wants to be a general, he replies,

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. So we're both aspiring" (435).

But that such competition kills becomes evident as Cathcart keeps raising the required missions in order to win promotion; that it breeds hatred shows in Captain Black's gloating joy over the death of Major Duluth, who held the position he wants; and that it promotes organized absurdities like the Great Loyalty Oath Crusade points to the larger question of whether such competition, as an integral part of the hierarchical systems man creates, intensifies the conditions which lead to the organized absurdity, hatred, and killing of war.

When two members of this competitive hierarchy, Colonel Cathcart
and ex-Pfc. Wintergreen, join Milo's syndicate as executives, the two subplots coalesce. This conjunction between the military and economic versions of the American dream represents a powerful and dangerous alliance between government and business—an alliance whose real interests in *Catch-22* are jauntily expressed by the Texan as "more votes for the decent folk" (9). Since "decent folk" to the Texan are "people of means,"—i.e., those who have wealth and power—his plan would give even more power ("votes") to those who already have plenty: Milo's. plenty, for example. Such interests turn the two subplots into plots against human life and conscience, since they would reduce all but the few in power to manipulable quantities having no more ability to think and act autonomously than the soldier in white, a war casualty "encased from head to toe in plaster and gauze" with "two useless legs and two useless arms." (10). Thus, Yossarian's and Dunbar's charge that the Texan "murdered" the soldier in white is thematically appropriate, since the Texan's theory of power would result in the same death of self—among those ruled by the "decent folk"—that the soldier in white signifies. It is also appropriate that this accusation occurs in the opening chapter, thereby encoding the values of the world where Yossarian finds himself. And as he experiences and learns the conditions of this cosmos, the narrative unfolds the process leading to his decision to desert.

Before Yossarian reaches this last step, however, he tries other survival measures, such as his liver complaint in the first chapter. Because the pain cannot be proven or disproven, it gets him off combat status and into the hospital, where he retreats with real or feigned
illness seven times during the course of the narrative. He sees the hospital as the antithesis of the dangerous missions; it seems a sane refuge where at least death must behave with "manners"—no violent or bloody deaths like Kraft's or Snowden's. But Yossarian's assumption proves false; eventually he learns that the hospital is not the haven of rest and safety he first believed it to be. As much a part of the institutional system as the missions themselves, the hospital can be just as deadly as flak. His friend Dunbar is suddenly "disappeared" there, shortly after announcing to the other patients that "There's no one inside" the soldier in white (374), a paralyzed collection of bandages wrapped around emptiness. If Snowden symbolizes the grisly death lying in wait on the missions, the soldier in white represents the more subtle extinction of individual self and conscience by the institutional bureaucracy running hospital routine and combat maneuvers alike. And if Snowden dies of flak, the soldier in white is symbolically killed by a system which reifies human beings into parts as mechanically interchangeable as the bottles of fluid and urine with which "he" is alternately fed. Between them, Snowden and the soldier in white represent the two types of death possible in Catch-22: the one physical, the other a death of the inner spirit, like that of the "Hollow Men" in T. S. Eliot's poem. And for revealing this "nauseating truth" (172) about the soldier in white, Dunbar is "disappeared" (376).

Thus gradually the hospital changes from a hypothetical refuge to a dangerous place where people mysteriously disappear and gun-toting doctors sadistically impose their specialties on the patients. And because staying there forever proves futile as well as dangerous,
Yossarian also attempts to get off combat status through the help of people within the military bureaucracy: the chaplain, Major Major, Doc Daneeka. When he asks Doc Daneeka to ground him so he won't have to fly missions, Daneeka responds with an explanation of the "Catch-22" regulation, which with circular logic defines sanity and insanity solely in terms of flying missions:

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 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 (47).

The circularity of this formulation suggests that Yossarian is trapped within a system whose only exits are insanity or death. For "Catch-22" threatens mind as well as body: by forcing men to fly missions, it forces them to risk their lives physically, and because missions are acts of insanity because of the risk to life, being made to fly them means giving up one's sanity, however involuntarily. And by being forced to part with their sanity repeatedly for the even larger insanity of war, the men seem infected with the madness which, in turn, characterizes their actions even when they are not flying missions: Hungry Joe has nightmares about being smothered by Huple's cat, Flume becomes a reclusive paranoid, Chief White Halfboat decides to die of pneumonia, McWatt delights in daredevil, low-level flying, and Havermeyer sets up an elaborate apparatus for sadistically shooting field mice. But these crazy reactions to the war often find perverse fulfillment in Catch-22: Huple's cat does suffocate Hungry Joe in his sleep, and pneumonia kills
Chief Halfloat when he said it would. In a world made mad by war and absurd by death, destructive fantasies and nightmares seem the controlling forces of waking reality, causing the chaplain to reflect that "So many monstrous events were occurring that he was no longer positive which events were monstrous and which were really taking place" (287).

But neither the chaplain, Daneeka, nor Major Major are able to help Yossarian evade the nightmare of flying missions, and as he grows more desperate, his survival tactics become increasingly irrational. During the time of the dreaded Bologna mission, for example, he asks the mail room clerk, Wintergreen, to mimeograph orders canceling the mission; he has the cook put laundry soap in the sweet potatoes so that the resulting diarrhea epidemic will delay the mission; he secretly moves the bomb line ribbon on the map so that everyone thinks the Allies have already captured Bologna, thereby negating the need to bomb it; he even starts a rumor about a new German weapon: the "Lepage glue gun," he claims, "glues a whole formation of planes together in mid-air" (128). The temporary effectiveness of some of these measures implies that survival within an irrational system requires equally irrational strategies.

Yet delays only postpone the inevitable, and Yossarian still must fly an ever-escalating number of missions. After the one to Avignon, however, where he witnesses the death of Snowden, Yossarian changes from delaying tactics to dissociation, gradually separating himself from the exploitative systems surrounding him. The first symbolic step in this process is his refusal to wear his uniform after Snowden bled
all over him. However comic during a ceremony where he is awarded a medal, Yossarian's nakedness repudiates the military by rejecting its primary symbol, the uniform—a word which in itself implies the reduction of all soldiers to identical objects.

Nakedness also links Yossarian to Snowden, who comes to represent all the innocent young men who die in Catch-22. Yossarian dramatizes this innocence as he sits naked in a tree while watching Snowden's funeral nearby and talking to Milo. The tree, he tells Milo, is the "tree of life," and "of knowledge of good and evil, too" (269). His comments establish a parallel between himself and the Biblical Adam before the Fall, a parallel further elaborated by a "temptation": Milo offers him chocolate-covered cotton and invites him to be his business partner. But unlike Adam, Yossarian retains his innocence by refusing the cotton and the partnership, and this rejection signifies an essential step in Yossarian's moral growth and separation from a destructive enterprise. This refusal to exploit (by joining M and M Enterprises) or be exploited (by eating the cotton) marks the birth of Yossarian's moral identity and foreshadows his later rejection of another temptation, the "odious deal" (451) offered by Cathcart and Korn.

Eventually Yossarian refuses to fly more missions (he has flown 70), a rebellion causing considerable unrest and speculation among the other flyers, who are also tired of risking their lives because Cathcart wants to be a general. Then he goes AWOL (Absent Without Official Leave) to Rome, where human civilization has become a brutal hell on earth, where the forces of order have become agents of
torture, and where no one, himself included, seems capable of helping anyone else; or even willing to try: Yossarian watches a man "beating a small boy brutally in the midst of an immobile crowd of adult spectators who made no effort to intervene" (424). During this nightmarish journey through the streets of Rome, Yossarian begins to realize his own responsibility for the human suffering around him. His shame and guilt after passively observing an old woman being robbed by a younger one increase his growing awareness that by doing nothing he allows such victimization of the weak by the strong to continue:

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 (414).

But he does not translate this realization into moral action immediately. When the MP's arrest him for being AWOL and return him to the squadron, Cathcart and Korn offer him an "odious deal" which he accepts. In exchange for being sent home, Yossarian will end the discontent his rebellion has inspired by lying to the flyers about the reasons for his release: he will pose as a war hero and join forces with Cathcart and Korn, propagandizing in their and the military's behalf. As he leaves the office after making this deal, Nately's whore appears out of nowhere like an avenging fury and stabs him in the back, seriously wounding him and dramatizing his conscience's guilt over his betrayal of the other men for his own physical survival. While in the hospital for this wound, he has a vision which further clarifies this spiritual betrayal of self and others through the reiterated phrase, "We've got your pal" (442). Yossarian's "pal" is his conscience as
well as all his "pals" in the squadron who have disappeared or died by this time: Kraft, Clevinger, Orr, Dunbar, Halford, Dobbs, Nately, Hungry Joe. "We've got your pal" succinctly expresses that the odious deal has captured Yossarian's conscience.

During this convalescence he also re-experiences Snowden's death scene, a vivid memory whose recurrence throughout the narrative (and thus in Yossarian's mind) points to its growing significance for Yossarian. Its last appearance becomes a full encounter with death, as if in precisely recalling every detail surrounding Snowden's mortal wound Yossarian has penetrated death's mystery. But his crucial realization here is that "The spirit gone, man is garbage" (450). While death's finality makes his own life intensely valuable, physical survival that betrays his spiritual loyalty to his "pals" is worthless. After this experience he frees his conscience by refusing the "odious deal," a liberation which coincides with his final separation from the military bureaucracy: he decides to desert, inspired not only by his confrontation with death, but also by the sudden news of Orr's arrival in Sweden. By refusing to join or be manipulated by a corrupt system, Yossarian makes a step toward breaking the "lousy chain" of victimization. When he deserts instead of accepting the "odious deal," Yossarian saves his conscience, provides an example which may inspire the other men to rebel, and has a chance, however slim, to save his life as Orr did. And the corollary of this moral decision is that if everyone refused to be victimized, corrupt systems like those of Cathcart and Milo could not continue their exploitation unchallenged and unchecked.
At the heart of Yossarian's struggle to save himself morally and physically are the missions themselves, which serve a threefold purpose in the novel's structure: they are dramatic, psychological, and thematic centers. They are the main external events of the war in Catch-22's dramatic structure, as well as internalized events in Yossarian's memory, making them catalysts in the mental process leading to his final moral choice. And because of their dual role as external and internal forces, the missions also become key points in pulling together the novel's main theme.

As external events the missions threaten Yossarian's physical survival, and the discernible progression in Yossarian's actions is a response to the "Catch-22" rule forcing him to fly them. To summarize these steps, Yossarian first becomes adept at evasive action during the bomb runs as he struggles to complete the required number so he can go home. But evasive action does not guarantee his safety, and finishing the missions proves impossible. He tries delaying tactics, but these only postpone the inevitable flights. Next he tries to evade the missions themselves by periodically going to the hospital, and by seeking help from others in the system. As these methods prove useless, he simply refuses to fly any more missions, goes AWOL to Rome, and finally decides to escape altogether from the system requiring the insane and dangerous missions.

Missions also provide an external index to the power structure of Yossarian's world: men having enough rank or power don't fly them, whereas those without power must fly them. For Yossarian and the other ordinary soldiers, the missions embody the war in a double sense—the
war with the German forces and the war within the American system itself. The flyers' struggle to finish their missions before Colonel Cathcart raises the requirement represents the real war in Catch-22, and it is an endlessly escalating one which the men seemed doomed to lose:

Maybe sixty missions were too many for the men to fly, Colonel Cathcart reasoned, if Yossarian objected to flying them, but he then remembered that forcing his men to fly more missions than everyone else was the most tangible achievement he had going for him. . . . Certainly none of the generals seemed to object to what he was doing, although as far as he could detect they weren't particularly impressed either, which made him suspect that perhaps sixty combat missions were not nearly enough and that he ought to increase the number at once to seventy, eighty, a hundred, or even two hundred, three hundred, or six thousand! (219)

Colonel Cathcart's orders are a linguistic "flak" as dangerous as the enemy's, for, as Yossarian tells the idealistic Clevinger, "The enemy. . . .is anybody who's going to get you killed, no matter which side he's on, and that includes Colonel Cathcart" (127). Thus flying missions and avoiding flak become symbolic of surviving not only the war but the political and bureaucratic system sending men to fight it.

And because Colonel Cathcart's orders keep raising the requirement, missions provide an index to the chronology of events in the novel—i.e., the number required at the time of a given episode helps establish an approximate sequence. On the other hand, missions make conventional measurements of time strangely irrelevant; what matters for Yossarian and his friends is not the hour, day, week, month, or even season of the year, but how many more missions they have to fly in order to be sent home. Missions measure and thereby symbolize time
in *Catch-22*. They *usurp* time as well, since each flight potentially carries the end to personal time, death. Dunbar's theory expresses this idea, implying that by entering the world of war and "*Catch-22,*" one enters a bizarre time-warp: "You're inches away from death every time you go on a mission. How much older can you be at your age?" (40).

Missions ultimately come to represent the human condition: for Yossarian "Each day he faced was another dangerous mission against mortality" (180), a chance to evade once more the enemy Death, who has more forms of flak than Yossarian can ever name:

There were lymph glands that might do him in. There were kidneys, nerve sheaths and corpuscles. There were tumors of the brain. There was Hodgkin's disease, leukemia, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. There were fertile red meadows of epithelial tissue to catch and coddle a cancer cell. There were diseases of the skin, diseases of the bone, diseases of the lung, diseases of the stomach, diseases of the heart, blood and arteries. . . . There were billions of conscientious body cells oxidating away day and night like dumb animals at their complicated job of keeping him alive and healthy, and every one was a potential traitor and foe (177).

Yossarian perceives that death is the "*Catch-22*" of being born. But it is an end he fervently hopes to evade as long as possible.

Yossarian also has more fear of this end than the other men: in his intense, obsessive, vivid, active, personal fear of death he stands out from the others, and it is this fear that makes him "the best man in the group at evasive action" (51). But he likewise distinguishes himself by his greater awareness of death's reality, which he develops during the course of three crucial missions: Ferrara, Bologna, and Avignon. Through his experience of these three missions as dramatic
events, Yossarian moves from fearing death to facing it in Snowden. These three missions become internal events as they recur in Yossarian's memory and in the narrative; Snowden's death scene, for example, recurs six times, each one with some additional details, until Yossarian comprehends the full meaning of his own and Snowden's death. This encounter intensifies Yossarian's desire to preserve his moral and physical integrity. Through their cumulative effect on Yossarian, the Ferrara, Bologna, and Avignon missions unite the external dramatic action of the narrative with the internal, psychological and moral development of its hero. The author himself emphasizes their structural importance in the novel, explaining that

nine-tenths of Catch-22 is organized around three combat missions: the mission to Avignon, the mission to Bologna, and the mission to Ferrara. The first mission [Avignon] is the main one. The whole novel is a series of events that either deal with the missions or are outgrowths of events that happened on the mission. . . . The three missions have occurred before the time of the opening chapter, and they keep recurring. 20

The first of these missions affecting Yossarian's behavior and awareness is Ferrara, on which he is lead bombardier. Because Aarfy's confusion prevents them from dropping their bombs the first time, Yossarian conscientiously leads his formation over the target again. As a result, the ground forces are well prepared and his friend Kraft and another man Coombs (who was just visiting the squadron to see what combat was like) perish when flak causes their engine to explode. The second time this incident recurs in his memory, Yossarian blames himself and his "bravery" for the deaths:

the bridge was not demolished until the tenth mission on the seventh day, when Yossarian killed Kraft and his crew
by taking his flight of six planes in over the target a
second time. Yossarian came in carefully on his second
bomb run because he was brave then (141).

The narrative goes on to describe the burning, plummeting plane,
followed by the scene in which Cathcart decides to cover up the
debacle of losing a plane by giving Yossarian a medal for "going
around twice." Such juxtaposition contrasts the horror of sudden
death with Cathcart's trivial response to it: the cause of
Yossarian's guilt is for Cathcart simply a bureaucratic embarrassment,
a "black eye" which might blemish his chances for promotion: "I don't
give a damn about the men or the airplane. It's just that it looks
so lousy on the report. How am I going to cover up something like
this in the report?" (142). At his assistant Korn's suggestion,
Cathcart gives Yossarian a medal and a promotion to boldly camouflage
the event, an action foreshadowing the later "odious deal" they offer
Yossarian to cover up and end his rebellion.

The Ferrara medal marks a turning point in Yossarian's attitude
toward his role in the war; on the one hand, it does represent his
former bravery and sense of duty in going back to the target a second
time; on the other, it represents his sense of responsibility for
Kraft's death, which he views as the result of his brave conscientious-
ness. Because Kraft is the first of his friends in the squadron to
die, the Ferrara mission and medal also signify his first personal en-
counter with death.

The Ferrara mission ends Yossarian's military bravery and in-
tensifies his fear by bringing death closer through the loss of his
friend; the dreaded Bologna mission fully dramatizes this fear, not
only in Yossarian but the other men as well. Rumors of heavy flak and delays caused by rain increase the feeling of dread, until everything seems tainted with mortality:

Each day's delay deepened the awareness and deepened the gloom. The clinging, overpowering conviction of death spread steadily with the continuing rainfall, soaking mordantly into each man's ailing countenance like the corrosive blot of some crawling disease. Everyone smelled of formaldehyde (112).

In this oppressive atmosphere of dread and delay, all seem paralyzed but Yossarian, who will try anything that might postpone or cancel the mission, such as moving the bomb line. Yet a clear day for the bomb run arrives with the inevitability of death, and because of his education over Ferrara, "Yossarian was brave enough not to go around over the target even once" (144), so he pulls out the plane's intercom wires and orders the pilot to turn back because the intercom is broken. Consequently, he must lead a second run to Bologna the next day, where he faces the intense flak everyone feared the first time, which turned out to be a "milk run" (no flak at all).

Bologna dramatizes the effect of Yossarian's increased knowledge of death through his change from passive obedience to active resistance. But the Avignon mission completes Yossarian's education. As Snowden dies beside him in the plane, he confirms Yossarian's intimations of his own mortality, which began with witnessing Kraft's more distant death in another plane. With "Snowden smeared abundantly all over his bare heels and toes, knees, arms and fingers" (267), Yossarian comes as close to death as possible without experiencing it himself. Full recognition of the meaning of this encounter, however, dawns only gradually as he recalls the event repeatedly. Such
repetition points to the Avignon mission as the most important internalized episode of the novel, for its reiteration slowly confronts the hero with his own mortality and at the same time leads him to re-evaluate his initial goal of physical survival at any cost (allusions to Ferrara and Bologna also recur, but less often).

Snowden's recurring death becomes the catalyst in Yossarian's progression from fear of death to knowledge of death, and from conscientious obedience to open, defiant rebellion and escape from all systems demanding such deaths. As a symbol of the human cost of organizations which elevate their own internal interests above the value of human life, Snowden's sacrifice exposes the disparity between human values and the institutional systems purportedly founded to preserve and protect such values. And freedom, like Snowden, is also a casualty in Catch-22. The belief in individual liberty, an essential part of the American dream, has become so entangled in the deadly, inhuman bureaucracy of Yossarian's world that it scarcely exists except as an idea in his mind. Therefore flying, which was once a romantic symbol of human freedom, has become in Catch-22 a dangerous form of entrapment, as Yossarian discovers in his constricted cell in the nose of the plane, his escape route blocked by Aarfy, who exemplifies the brutal insensitivity produced by a system evil in its unresponsiveness to human reality. The only flight left which sustains the hope of human freedom in Catch-22 is Yossarian's flight at the end (and thus Orr's, too)—from a world ruled by "Catch-22" clauses, where Yossarian "was jeopardizing his traditional rights of freedom and independence by daring to exercise them" (414).
FOOTNOTES

1 All page numbers in the text refer to Catch-22 (New York: Dell, 1962).

2 "Flak" is the word for the exploding shells fired at enemy aircraft from cannons on the ground.


11 Ibid., p. 357.

12 Merrill, p. 61.

13 Barnard, p. 296.

14 Merrill, p. 60.
15 Barnard, p. 296.


17 Merrill, p. 61.

18 Ibid., p. 64.

19 Barnard, p. 296.

Chapter III

SOMETHING HAPPENED

In a 1963 essay treating postwar American novelists, Norman Mailer described a book that was yet to be written, one exploring "the anguish...that wars enable one to forget" and the frustration of man "as he becomes deadened before his death." "It is that other death," Mailer continued, "where one dies by a failure of nerve, which opens the bloodiest vents of Hell." With uncanny prescience his words foretell Heller's second novel, published eleven years later. *Something Happened*'s protagonist is an unhappy, successful corporate executive, whose monologue takes the reader into his private hell of fears, frustrations, and failures. Bob Slocum does indeed seem to be dying the death Mailer describes, a death not only from anguish and failure of nerve but from emptiness. In spite of his apparent "success," Slocum has little sense of who he is, which makes him feel, at times, that he is losing his mind.

Everything that happens in the narrative occurs within Slocum's inner monologue as he replays past, recent, and imagined experiences to determine what has "happened" to make himself and his family so unhappy. This introspective focus marks a radical change from Yossarian's broad field of absurdities to the circumscribed, claustrophobic interior world of Slocum's anguish and despair. A more pessimistic, brooding tone accompanies this shift, replacing Yossarian's rebellious stance and its implicit optimism that he can at least escape the conditions he protests, with Slocum's paralyzing assumption
that he cannot effect anything: "My act of rebellion would be absorbed like rain on an ocean and leave no trace. . . . I can no longer change my environment or even disturb it seriously" (15). Whereas the dangers of Yossarian's world were obvious external threats to his physical and moral well-being, the forces threatening Slocum's identity and sanity come from within and from without, being so subtly entangled that they are as difficult for Slocum to define as they are to combat. Summarizing the difference between this world and Yossarian's, Heller said, "I put everything I knew about the external world into Catch-22 and everything I knew about the interior world into Something Happened."  

For both novels Heller knew the environment firsthand: the military base in Catch-22, the corporate milieu in Something Happened. He once worked as a casualty-insurance filing clerk, like the young Slocum, and spent ten years as a "lower-middle executive" writing advertising promotions at the large magazine corporations of Time, Look and McCall's. Yet he carefully points out that he enjoyed this work, and that his "experience in the office [didn't] coincide with the experience" in Something Happened. Nevertheless, he was thinking about quitting his job at McCall's during the summer of 1963 when the following lines came to him: "In the office in which I work, there are four people of whom I am afraid. Each of these four people is afraid of five people." Within an hour Heller knew how his second novel would begin and end, what would happen during the narrative, and what kind of person the protagonist would be. He didn't start writing it, however, until two years later, and another ten elapsed—during this
time he worked on his play, *We Bombed in New Haven*—before *Something Happened* appeared in October 1974 (although he did publish a version of the first chapter in *Esquire*, September 1966).  

It became an immediate bestseller, attesting to Heller's large readership after *Catch-22* as well as the novel's own merits. Although some reviewers were disappointed at not finding in *Something Happened* a reincarnated Yossarian, John Aldridge called it "the most important novel to appear in this country in at least a decade," while Kurt Vonnegut praised its daring in treating "unrelieved misery at novel length."  

As Slocum analyzes his unhappiness, his monologue focuses primarily upon his executive job at a large corporation where he competes with other executives for promotion, and his home life, where he feels dismayed by his wife's drift towards alcoholism, his son's and daughter's signs of conformity, his brain-damaged son's very existence, and what seems to be everyone's unhappiness. Having already given up on helping his wife or daughter, he hopes to protect his son from conforming to the brutal, competitive world he blames for his own unhappiness. At work he hopes to be promoted and have the opportunity to make a three-minute speech at the next annual convention. But as he achieves his executive aims he simultaneously loses his son by "accidentally" smothering him, as if his boy's death is both the price of his corporate success and the result of his suffocating overprotectiveness.

Of course the exact circumstances of his son's death cannot be determined objectively because everything is presented from Slocum's
point of view and from within his mind, so that the line between actual and imagined experience is frequently blurred. In other words, Heller establishes no narrative perspective outside his protagonist's monologue against which to check Slocum's reliability. This novel's affinities with certain works of Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka further clarify its narrative perspective as well as the factors that isolate Slocum, particularly his introspective focus bordering on solipsism and his deadening environment from which he would like to withdraw. In his endless speculation on and anatomizing of his melancholy, combined with his uncertainty about his knowledge and identity, Slocum resembles Beckett's solipsistic personae, particularly those of Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable. Midway through the writing of Something Happened, in fact, Heller read these novels and was astonished at their similarity to his own novel in view and technique. With Beckett's characters Slocum shares a flat, repetitive voice that echoes the terrible, meaningless monotony of his existence and contributes further, through its compulsive circling of its own perceptions, to his state of anomie and isolation. Language fails to convince any of these characters of the reality of their existence and identity. Moreover, Slocum has a similar obsession with physical decay; the passages detailing his mother's decline exhibit the same strangely detached yet appalled tone, mixed with flashes of grotesque humor, that appears in Beckett's works. And although Slocum's social environment is more recognizable, it is as empty of meaning and value as Beckett's terrain: according to Heller, Slocum "might just as well be in the void that Beckett's people are in."
But the "void" Slocum inhabits owes as much to Heller's Kafkaesque vision of society as it does to the solipsism and anomie that characterize Beckett's world. In an interview Heller said he wanted *Something Happened* to reflect contemporary American society through Kafka's lens: "I'm trying to get the same sense of imprisonment, of intimidation, of psychological paralysis and enslavement, but without using any symbolism other than the society being a symbol of itself." Both Slocum and the protagonist of *The Trial*, Joseph K, share a paralyzing fear of an environment that is somehow beyond their control (even in small daily matters), as well as a feeling of their own insignificance in such a world. But the confined quality of Slocum's existence, unlike that of Joseph K's, comes not from an absurd situation (his unexplainable arrest and impending trial) thrust suddenly upon him by mysterious bureaucratic forces, but from his passive acceptance of a deadening and dehumanizing way of life, which includes working within a large bureaucracy.

This conformity is the key to Slocum's unhappiness. His acceptance of the ideals and expectations of his society, particularly its definition of "success," has caused his malaise, for his conformity to achieve success has divided him against himself. At work he enacts his role as an ambitious, successful corporate executive, but within a very different self resists and disturbs this role with thoughts and feelings inappropriate to his executive image. This self-division threatens his identity and sanity because both, by definition, require an inner unity: "identity" a unified self and "sanity" a wholeness of mind. Moreover, this split threatens his identity
because his corporate role appears to be usurping his inner self, the source of his individuality and conscience. And increasingly strained by this conflict of role and self, as well as his inability to reconcile his ambition to succeed with the opposed feelings of his inner self, Slocum feels he is losing his mind, like the person he imagines "in every company today" who is "going crazy slowly" (16–17).

His monologue can be seen as a result of this mental stress: it is an attempt not only to understand his unhappy conflict but to resolve it and salvage some shreds of his identity and sanity. At the end, Slocum fails, however, by capitulating to the company-defined role that his inner self resisted. When he suffocates his son he symbolically smothers his own individuality which didn't "fit in" with his ambition to succeed. Of course by exacting such a price, his conformity turns out to be the real "insanity" underlying Something Happened.

Slocum's "success" thus turns into failure. His pursuit of it brings not happiness but conformity, loss of identity, insanity, death. As he sorts out the steps that led to his conformity, Slocum locates a beginning in the desire to be a part of his surroundings, and he sees it already at work on his teenage daughter:

She wants to become a part too, I guess, of what she sees is her environment, and she is, I fear, already merging with, dissolving into, her surroundings right before my eyes. . . . Something happened to her, too, although I don't know what or when. . . . Her uniqueness is fading (66).
Slocum's own individuality has likewise been undermined by his desire to fit in, and he often wonders if he even has an identity—"I don't know who or what I really am," he mourns (65)—apart from the characteristics he has acquired from other people. For example, he began biting his nails because his friends asked him to, he copied his handwriting from a fellow employee, and he dresses like the other executives around him, even using their words: "I...frequently find myself trapped. . .inside their smaller vocabularies like a hamster in a cage. Their language becomes my language" (66). His hold on his identity is so tenuous, in fact, that he imitates whomever happens to be with him; if the person limps or stammers, Slocum automatically does the same: "his nature will be my nature until I come up against the next person who has more powerful personality traits than any of my own" (64). His recurring feeling that his personality and behavior do not belong to him in any real sense alienates him from himself and from the people around him because his actions derive from a superficial, adopted "identity" he sees as false (in that the role he enacts doesn't reflect the thoughts and feelings of his inner self) and at the same time as necessary to his success within the corporation, which demands conformity to a particular image and role.

But Slocum's impulse to "belong," which is essentially a desire for human relationships and acceptance within a community, leads not only to his adopting the style and behavior of those around him, but to molding his ambitions to those ideals commonly held by his society as well. And the society he portrays values money, social prestige, power, and the competitive system that will presumably distribute
these fairly among the happy deserving. Slocum fulfills these ideals, realizing the "American Dream" of success. Thus he possesses all the tangible symbols of his "arrival" at this state of perfection: a "gorgeous two-story wood colonial house" on a "choice country acre" in a "Class A suburb in Connecticut" (334), a high salary, membership in the right clubs, and a job in the upper management level of a large corporation. And he hates every bit of it.

Unfortunately, the achievement of his ambitions has not ushered in the good life, personal liberty, and the promised happiness but ennui, enslavement, and misery. The monotony and dreariness of his daily round bores and oppresses him (except for his relationship with his son), he feels trapped within a role and social pattern he secretly despises but somehow cannot reject, and persistent depression plagues him. He mistakenly assumed that the achievement of his society's definition of success guaranteed happiness, and his bitter realization of quite different results is reflected in his fantasy of a Thanksgiving tableau that encapsulates his imprisonment in the American Dream of success. He and his family are frozen in arrested motion around the Thanksgiving table:

We cannot move. I stand over my turkey; they sit rigid. And I feel weirdly in that arrested dumb show in which we are all momentarily statues that even if I'd never had them . . . I would have had them with me anyway. . . . I'm in control, but there's not much I can do (376).

Heller uses Thanksgiving ironically here and in Catch-22 to implicitly contrast America's founding ideals with those that actually seem to control its society and institutions (such as money, prestige, and power). Slocum's fantasy implies that his paralysis was
preordained—i.e., that the American pattern of success has frozen him and his family into a rigid conformity (necessary to achieve that success, as well as its result) which they were doomed to fulfill because no other pattern was offered. Their being "frozen" is not unlike Snowden's "freezing" in *Catch-22,* in that both images represent the death of man's spirit or inner self, a reification that transforms "man" into "matter." Slocum's Thanksgiving tableau thus expresses his ironic evaluation of everything he has to be "thankful" for: his success, his conformity to achieve it, and its results—his unhappy "frozen" family. Yet although he sees his society's ideals as empty and destructive, he nevertheless passes them on to his children, telling them, for example, that money is "everything" (440).

Slocum's ambitions define one kind of conformity; his means of achieving them another. By taking the corporate executive route to success, Slocum must mold himself to a bureaucratic, competitive world that divides him against himself and others, and eventually destroys his identity. How the corporate pattern gradually usurps his identity is best approached, however, by first defining the term "identity."

As I use it, "identity" is a person's individuality in relation to society; it is not individuality alone but in relationship to other people. Thus it is the interface between the inner self (individuality) and society. Identity also harmonizes the inner self with one's social roles so that words and actions correspond, for the most part, to thoughts and feelings. In these terms, part of Slocum's problem is that he is at odds with his inner self because his success at the corporation requires conformity to a role and image that negates
his individuality.

Slocum's monologue reveals that his company doesn't even recognize individuality, much less see it as a positive human value. The company, he notes "exists to sell" (23); its profit is its end and value, with everything structured around this goal. Individuals, therefore, must fit into the pattern that promotes the company's well-being, no matter how rigid or dehumanizing. All the standardization of people's roles and functions within its organization, the imposed, monotonous routines in the name of order and efficiency, the reduction of individuals to non-human terms—all these flow from the same bureaucratic inversion that Heller attacked in Catch-22, a reversal of priorities that puts an institution's system of order and material values above human needs and values.

Slocum's introduction of his office world in the second chapter repeatedly points out the conformity that turns employees into non-human parts of the bureaucracy—files, machines, ball bearings. For example, when the typist who is on the verge of a nervous breakdown "finally goes crazy," she will be "filed away" and forgotten (15). Another person who "broke down," Slocum notes, "wasn't fixed too well . . . and will probably break down again soon" (17). His description of how employees are expected to relate to each other is so couched in mechanical terms: "we are encouraged to revolve around each other eight hours a day like self-lubricating ball bearings, careful not to jar or scrape" (36). Sorting people into divisions and standardized mechanical functions that impose a monotonous routine, the bureaucracy effectively annihilates individuality by discounting it.
The monotony and triviality of Slocum's work also undermine the value of individual ability or effort. Slocum's remarks suggest that it hardly matters who does it:

'It's a real problem to decide whether it's more boring to do something boring than to pass along everything boring that comes in to somebody else and then have nothing to do at all (28).

The apparent meaninglessness of his work makes him feel disconnected from it as well as personally unimportant, a state resembling Marx's concept of "alienated labor," in which the employee feels no personal involvement in or loyalty to his job because the work does not belong to or reflect him but instead belongs to an organization whose meaning and purpose are beyond him. Thus Slocum has no sense of how he or his work matters to the corporation.

Even the promotion he is about to receive appears less related to his individual effort than his conformity to the right image—to the fact that he "fits in" with the style of upper-level managers whom he will soon join by replacing Andy Kagle as head of the Sales Department. Kagle has "ability and experience" but the wrong style: he dresses terribly (unlike the other managers) and has awkward manners (41-42). So when Slocum is promoted, he finds small satisfaction in an "upward mobility" that has no significant connection with his individual merit or work.

His hope of ending this discontinuity between his work and individual worth is the reason Slocum wants so desperately to give his three-minute speech at the annual convention; it would let him publicly and personally take credit for the projects he designed and carried out over the past year. The speech would be an "act of recognition"
(51) establishing his individuality, rather than his conformity, as the basis of his promotion and success. Yet even here he is disappointed: he makes the speech, but nothing "happens" in response to make him feel recognized for his contribution. Lost among all the other speeches, his words fall on dull ears; "Nobody," Slocum learns, "remembers shortly afterward what it was even about" (526).

Lacking this vital connection between work and individual worth, and doing routine work that seems meaningless in the first place, Slocum can only conclude what the company does—that his individuality is worth no more, and possibly even less, than his trivial paperwork. Moreover, what he is valued for—his perfect conformity to the right image—has little to do with his inner self. But the most pernicious and devastating result of the bureaucracy's devaluation of individuality is that Slocum begins to discount it too, widening the split between his executive role and inner self and giving his conformity more power to usurp his devalued individuality.

In addition, Slocum reveals that the corporate pattern destroys the community that is the other component of identity, the network of positive and supportive human relationships that give individuality significance. Slocum's corporation is organized around fear and power, as his description of the hierarchy in his office illustrates:

In the office in which I work there are five people of whom I am afraid. Each of these five people is afraid of four people (excluding overlaps), for a total of twenty (9).

It is a world where managers depend for their power on the insecurity of their subordinates: Slocum's boss, Green, trusts only to intimidation, wanting "inferior people with superior minds who feel in their
bones their lives would be over if they lost their jobs with me" (388). And since power within this hierarchy is valued more than positive human relationships in the struggle to avoid being exploited, everyone competes for more of it. Such competition destroys community and cooperation because it turns everyone into adversaries, as well as communication because no one trusts anyone else for fear of being beaten in the rivalry to ascend the ladder. Thus rumor and paranoia replace the honest exchange of information in an atmosphere where fear, suspicion, mistrust, envy, and exploitation replace trust, loyalty, friendship, cooperation and love. The competitive ethos turns person against person and isolates people in their own defenses. Slocum's remarks show that even sex has become an extension of the hierarchical formula rather than an expression of love: "I've learned from experience that it's always better, and safer, and more effective, to preserve the distinction between executive and subordinate, employer and employee, even in bed (Especially in bed.)" (37).

Sexual relationships in *Something Happened* also exemplify how the corporate pattern invades even the most private domain with its control and regulation. Slocum spells out in some detail the company's "policy about getting laid": "The company is in favor of getting laid if it is done with a dash of élan, humor, vulgarity, and skill, without emotion...or any of the other serious complications of romance" (60). This subtle but rigid control is an example of how Slocum's corporation destroys human relationships by replacing spontaneity with a prescribed pattern of behavior, and by substituting control for compassion, understanding, and flexibility. Moreover, by invading the
employees' control over their private lives, the company undermines all the personal relationships of its employees.

By creating an atmosphere of intimidation and regulation that isolates and rigidly controls people, the corporation's competitive hierarchy destroys community as surely as the required conformity to this structure annihilates individuality. Slocum's identity hardly has a chance in this war of attrition, eroding his individuality on one hand by discounting it and community on the other by making it impossible to establish relationships based on trust.

Yet as much as he says he despises this world, he serves as its emissary, creating a similar atmosphere within his family:

In the family in which I live there are four people of whom I am afraid. Three of these four people are afraid of me, and each of these three is also afraid of the other two. Only one member of the family is not afraid of any of the others, and that one is an idiot (333).

He carries home the same competitive one-upsmanship, petty revenge, and intimidation he receives from his supervisor Green at the office. For example, he can't resist the urge to win every argument with his wife or daughter, even if that means attacked their vulnerabilities in cruel ways so that he "wins" by wounding and forcing them to retreat. He refuses to tell his wife he loves her because he knows that would make her feel good. But worst of all, his defensiveness, which prevents him from sharing his feelings and thoughts with his family, perpetuates the same isolation that he feels at work. Mistrust and doubt of each other often prevail, making authentic communication impossible because each fears being hurt by the others. No one feels loved. Even on those rare occasions when they seem on the verge of
sharing their feelings with each other, someone's defenses intervene and the potential communication and trust evaporate. This situation also recreates the same insecurity that rules the hierarchy at work, in that no one knows quite where they stand with him: "No one must feel secure. Everyone must be kept in suspense about new decisions ... in which I am now a participant" (515).

One of the reasons Slocum creates, however, unconsciously, the same atmosphere at home that he experiences at work is that he has internalised the corporate pattern and attitudes. He imposes the same rigidity and control on his inner self that the corporate structure imposes on its employees. And he likewise carries over the same mistrust towards his inner self that the company has towards those who don't conform. Thus Slocum often sees this part of himself as the corporation does—as something to be suppressed or ignored. His terminology sometimes reveals this negative attitude: he calls what is within him a "crawling animal," sees it as ugly and destructive, and is therefore obsessed with the idea of controlling and suppressing it:

There is this crawling animal flourishing somewhere inside me that I try to keep hidden and that strives to get out, and I don't know what it is or whom it wishes to destroy. I know it is covered with warts (102).

Of course because Slocum has internalised the corporate pattern of conformity, the part of himself that does the suppressing is his executive role, the false "identity" he has adopted in order to "fit in" and succeed. Slocum tries to reconcile the opposition between this role and his inner self by stifling the voice of his inner self. But the more he tries, the "noisier" it becomes, filling Slocum with
seething anger and hostility that he can't express openly because such feelings don't fit in with his executive image and role. So he turns his anger—the rage of his inner self at being suppressed and neglected—against himself and, in his fantasies, others.

Towards others he often feels what he considers horrifying and unaccountable impulses to injure (his desire to kick Kagle in his limping leg) or allow his family to be hurt:

It horrifies me; it is something like watching them back fatally toward an open window or the edge of a cliff and offering no warning to save them from injury or death. It is perverse and I try to overcome it (102).

This desire to strike out at others also comes out in numerous small revenges, which consist mainly of withholding love, affection, or helpful information from others (such as deliberately not telling his wife he loves her, even when he feels he does).

In turning this anger towards himself, the result is depression (his persistent melancholy) and, ironically, an intensified dislike of his inner self. Lacking anything in his adult surroundings to validate this self, Slocum often fills the void by believing it is "bad," thus hating himself and hoping that he never lives to see the "real me come out" (229). What he thinks he hears as his mother's last words—"You're no good" (510)—merely reflects his own opinion of himself. And when he says "I've got to get rid of him" (470), ostensibly referring to his brain-damaged son, Derek, he also alludes to the self he must annihilate if he wants to continue his ascent up the corporate hierarchy.

But just as this success has led to a split between role and
self, Slocum's view of this self is also divided. Although he sometimes describes it as an "animal," he also speaks of it as a "little boy"—himself before he grew up and conformed to his surroundings. Slocum's mourning of this "little boy" is the central theme running throughout his monologue as he tries to figure out how he lost himself: "What happened to the lovely little me that once was?" (190), and "Lost: one child, age unknown, goes by the name of me. And I can't keep looking back for sight of him to ask him hopefully where did you go and what did you mean" (286). But Slocum does keep looking back for this part of himself that he associates with his inner self, individuality, conscience and identity, and in the process confuses his lost self with his own "little boy"—his son—and with tragic results.

In many ways Slocum's relationship to his son is the heart of the novel, the field where Slocum plays out the struggle between his inner self and his desire to conform and succeed. This relationship leads eventually and inevitably to his son's death as the novel's climax, occurring almost simultaneously with Slocum's executive promotion. For on a symbolic level this death—Slocum literally smothers his son to death after he is hit (but not seriously injured) by a car that jumped the curb—represents Slocum's final smothering of his own individuality as he ascends the corporate hierarchy. On the literal, narrative level of the novel's action, of course, Slocum did not intend to kill his son. When he sees his son lying cut and bleeding from the accident and screaming in pain, he assumes that he is about to die and hugs him tightly in order, it seems, to end his suffering sooner,
unaware that the injuries are only minor. On this level the son's death is not an inevitable part of Slocum's success, but on the novel's symbolic level it is the logical outcome of how Slocum views and relates to his son.

Slocum makes his son into the symbol of all he has lost by growing up and entering the world, thus confusing himself as a "little boy" with his own son: "hiding, inside of me somewhere, I know. . . is a timid little boy just like my son" (213). His son not only represents innocence, but the uniqueness Slocum feels everyone somehow loses as they mature. And what comprises his son's uniqueness are the very qualities Slocum sees as lacking in himself, his corporate environment, and his society. His son's behavior exhibits a natural goodness and spontaneous generosity that make him stand out from the other children. He gives his money away to any child who asks for it and prefers cooperation to competition; he would rather lose a race so that his opponent won't feel bad, and he can't understand why everyone can't "win" at the same time. As his gym teacher tells Slocum, he lacks the "competitive spirit" (200). As a result, he doesn't always fit in with his peers, who sometimes scorn him (when he deliberately loses a relay race, for example). His individuality and his promotion of good relationships among his fellows make him a symbol of the identity Slocum feels he is losing in the competitive scramble at work.

Because Slocum sees him as a symbol of his lost identity and values (kindness, generosity, cooperation, friendship, etc.), Slocum wants to preserve these attributes in his son (and himself) by protecting him from the world. As a result, he overwhelms him with an
obsessive solicitude whose symbolic culmination is his son's suffocation. Moreover, because he sees his son as representative of a kind of perfect spontaneous goodness because he is a child, the only way to preserve such goodness would be to prevent him from growing up altogether. For Slocum sees maturing as an inevitable drift into the conformity at the root of his misery. Ironically, his solicitude harms his son more than the world Slocum feared, represented by the car that jumped the curb. His recurring fantasy of his son not living to adulthood suggests that Slocum is unconsciously aware of the inevitable outcome of his views.

In making his son into a symbol, Slocum also imposes on him the static nature of a symbol. Thus when he does change by becoming more independent, Slocum is shattered, for in addition to an impossible and inhuman goodness, he has projected upon his son the burden of all human relationships he lacks; his relationship to his son seems to him the only one still unspoiled by the pressures of the external world. His boy thus being his only lifeline to community, Slocum sees in his son's new independence the threat of his own utter isolation.

Last, by making his son into a symbol he dehumanizes him, placing upon him the impossible burden of compensating for his unhappiness. He forgets he is just a little boy and makes him into a kind of absolute rather than a human being: Slocum notes, "I Pledge my Allegiance to him" (284), and "I believe he pulls us together as a family and keeps us together" (152). Of course the only way his son could uphold the static perfection Slocum projects would be to freeze, motionless, in time, like Slocum's death-in-life vision of his family around the
Thanksgiving table.

Death, then, is the logical outcome of Slocum's vision of his son. He represents the goodness and individual uniqueness that Slocum feels can only be preserved by not growing up; i.e., the unhappy conformity that "happened" to Slocum is inevitable. His son exemplifies the human values and identity that Slocum must destroy in order to succeed at work. Last, Slocum "kills" him by making him into a symbol, period, for he thereby imposes on him a non-human stasis that is the equivalent of death. Of course his death can also be seen as a result of Slocum's self-fulfilling negative expectations: he is so worried that something terrible is going to happen to his son that he automatically assumes the worst (that his son is dying) at the scene of the accident and thereby smothers him to put him out of his misery. In this context, the death illustrates how Slocum's fears of the world exceed their cause; he, not the brutal world, becomes his son's executioner.

In his attempt to analyze not only what happened but also how it happened, Slocum deliberately overlooks the fact that he chose to conform to his society's ideals and the common means of pursuing them. One reason he ignores this is that seeing conformity as a choice would imply that there were other alternatives. His monologue never entertains the possibility of a different, less materialistic or "successful," way of life. Instead he prefers to see conformity as an inevitable process, like entropy or growing up, which he can do nothing to stop. For example, he feels it is already too late to save his daughter from it:
She is already . . . well on her way to being what she is destined to become, good and/or bad, and I don't think there is any longer a single thing I or anyone else can do at present to help her or change her . . . . I cannot fight and nullify a whole culture, an environment, an epoch, a past . . . it is only a matter of time (166-67).

This view is an evasion, enabling him to remain passive and avoid confronting his own responsibility for contributing to the process. For by expecting his daughter to become like the other unhappy women he knows, he doesn't encourage her to do anything different from the rest; he gives her no sense of an alternative, instead seeing her "as though at an open coffin or grave in which her future is lying dead already" (153).

Moreover, he further avoids seeing his own role and responsibility by persistently selecting images that emphasize his passivity, reinforcing his rationalization that the causes of conformity and unhappiness remain beyond his control. His most frequent images, therefore, portray him as being shut in (trapped, suffocated by his job), shut out (his fear of closed doors), paralyzed (his Thanksgiving tableau and the feeling that he has been "standing still" all his life, p. 399), or invaded (his mind as a metropolis being entered by destructive creatures he cannot repel). His recurring phrase, "something happened," succinctly expresses his desire to see himself as the trapped, helpless victim of mysterious forces ("something") he could not control--they simply "happened."

But in spite of Slocum's evasions, the question of why he chose conformity still remains. Part of the answer lies in his own imaginative failure--his inability to envision any alternative to his
society's ideals and formula for success. The other part, however, is that while his own choice is blameworthy, it is also understandable, because Slocum's society does not seem to offer any positive alternatives to the ideals of money, status and power, or to the brutal competition he must endure to achieve them. Thus his society's values in combination with his own inability to imagine different ones make his conformity and loss of self at the end inevitable.

Moreover, his conformity makes the possibility of altering his way of life, even though he despises it, remote, because by its very nature conformity breeds fear of any change that would deviate from it; conformity is the "something" of Slocum's early remark that

Something did happen to me somewhere that robbed me of confidence and courage and left me with a fear of discovery and change and a positive dread of everything unknown that may occur (6).

Thus behind what appears to be Slocum's obsessive fear of almost everything and everyone around him is his basic dread of anything that might lead away from his socially prescribed pattern of living. From this dread it is but a small step to fear of all change, which helps explain Slocum's blindness to alternatives and accounts for the paralysis he feels. Not surprisingly, then, he equates change with disaster, a view that, taken to its extreme, means that his son can't grow up (an inevitable change) without meeting calamity. Thus his fear of change also underlies his recurring worry that his son will die before reaching maturity:

Something terribly tragic is going to happen to my little boy. . . . When I look ahead, he isn't there . . . . He doesn't pass nine. He stops there. . . . Either he has no future or my ability to imagine him present in mine is blunted (365).
Slocum's inability to imagine his son present in his future is part of his inability to reconcile his inner self with his conforming role; both son and inner self represent values such as kindness, generosity, trust, and friendship that don't fit into his society's competitive formula for achieving success. So at the end Slocum resolves the conflict of role and self by taking control and disposing of his inner self. He accepts his promotion, fires his friend Kagle, and takes charge, at the end, as a typist has the nervous breakdown he's been expecting all along. In handling this situation as "suavely" as a "ballet master" (529), Slocum embodies the perfect external control that is his solution to his conflict, a control that reduces everything human to a prescribed order or procedure. Likewise, the list he makes to put his affairs "in order" reduces human needs to materialistic formulae: it includes buying a new house to fill his wife's empty hours and a new car to boost his daughter's self-esteem (527). And Slocum becomes "sane" by conforming totally to his executive role. But by allowing himself to be absorbed by a system that subordinates human reality to its own rigid patterns, Slocum commits spiritual suicide, giving up that part of himself that makes the difference between "man" and "matter."

A "sanity" achieved by the death of the self is "insanity," the reason that Slocum's success feels to him like failure. His taking charge of the typist's breakdown is thus an ironic reversal, indicating the madness of his own conformity. For at the end he belongs to the corporate bureaucracy completely. And by smoothly getting rid of someone who doesn't "fit in," he symbolically eliminates the last
reflection of his inner resistance to conformity.

Slocum's death of self, like Yossarian's struggle in Catch-22, dramatizes Heller's concern with the individual's quest to survive amid social and institutional forces that have turned destructive. But whereas Yossarian's battle to save his skin and spirit ends with some hope, Slocum's struggle to preserve his sanity and identity ends in failure as he yields to the pressures that effectively annihilate his individuality. What emerges from this failure is a theme that underlies Catch-22 as well—the equation of a particular "order" with "chaos." Slocum's corporation, like the military bureaucracy in Catch-22, creates human "chaos," Heller's term for the dehumanization that includes the destruction of life, identity, and human values. In these terms, when institutions designed to promote order and well-being in society do just the opposite, promoting their own order by dehumanizing the people within their ranks—whether by taking their lives or by destroying their identities—such institutions produce human chaos. In Catch-22 and Something Happened, respectively, Heller reveals how both the military and corporate bureaucracies have created a disastrous kind of order.

Something Happened develops the theme of the corporate bureaucracy as a destructive order not only through what happens to Slocum but also through the implicit contrast of this corporate pattern with the aesthetic pattern of the novel itself. To expose the corporate structure, Heller shows Slocum using linguistic patterns that typify the bureaucracy's attributes—its reduction of human reality to mechanical formulae, its rigidity, its emptiness. For example, one of Slocum's
most noticeable stylistic mannerisms is his use of parallelism: chapters three and four have parallel titles ("My wife is unhappy," p. 63; "My daughter's unhappy," p. 117), and his description of his family structure ("In the family in which I live there are four people of whom I am afraid," p. 333) is parallel to the introduction of his office ("In the office in which I work there are five people of whom I am afraid," p. 9). In the latter example the parallelism not only points to the similar atmospheres of home and office but also to the idea that Slocum internalizes the corporate pattern and imposes it on his family. But parallelism, as a structural device, also imitates one of the bureaucracy's primary methods of organization--its filing and sorting of information and people into parallel categories and divisions. Files impose regularity on diverse human data through grouping it according to categories, and at Slocum's company, people are sorted into divisions also parallel in that each has the same internal hierarchical power structure. And implicit in the parallelism Slocum uses to describe both corporation and family is the idea that people can be reduced to numbers as well as similar groupings.

Whether used to organize people or file facts, this means of order is part of the bureaucratic structure that standardizes functions and procedures and in the process reduces human beings to the same terms as those employed for non-human material and paperwork.

Because Slocum conforms to the bureaucracy, his choice of words as well as his style reflects its reductive processes. He often describes people as if they are indistinguishable from his paperwork. In this vocabulary, to give up one's expectations of someone is to
"write him off" (as his office might write off a business expense),
to forget someone is to "file him away," and to die is to be "filed
away" in the "dead record" department. A corollary of this equation
of people with things is that, as in Catch-22, the means of or-
ganization—the files, charts, documents and other papers—become more
real and therefore more valued than the people who make them, so that
values are reversed: things take precedence over people.

This reductive process infects Slocum in other ways as well, such
as his pastime of making charts arranging the employees into various
patterns. He constructs "Happiness Charts," a color wheel (arranging
people with colors for last names), and works on other private and
whimsical "tables of organization," "dividing, subdividing, and
classifying people in the company on the basis of envy, hope, fear,
ambition, frustration, rivalry, hatred, or disappointment" (29).
These parody the bureaucratic structure while at the same time reveal-
ing Slocum's obsessive inability to escape its pattern. His Happiness
Charts, for instance, mimic the bureaucratic hierarchy by reversing
it: at the top are the youngest employees who are least attached to
the company, as well as those, like himself, who have lost all their
expectations and therefore cannot be disappointed. Of course the
irony is that being near the top means not "happiness" but having the
least hopes of getting it from the company. By including himself in
what turns out to be an "unhappiness" chart (since "happiness" equals
no hope of happiness), Slocum adumbrates the bars of his prison and
implies the impossibility of his escape. His compulsion to construct
such tables suggests, like his vocabulary, that one reason he can't
escape is that he has internalized the imprisoning structure he despises and parodies. Moreover, by fixing others into rigid patterns over which they have no control and which have a private meaning only to himself, he represents his own feelings of helplessness and insignificance in a structure where his work has no meaning to him. His charts thus come to symbolize the bureaucracy's emptiness, or absence of meaning, to those who work there. To fill this void, the hierarchical system itself becomes the only "meaning," in that every employee's purpose is "upward mobility"—scaling the corporate and social ladder towards "success," even though this goal, as Slocum discovers, is empty as well.

Moreover, because "success" is an amorphous, ever-receding goal (i.e., unless one is at the top of the hierarchy, there is always someone higher than oneself), short-term and often trivial goals become near-absolutes along with moving up. Thus the speech Slocum hopes to make at the next convention assumes an overwhelming importance in his mind, even taking on the burden of his hope that he will at last prove his worth to himself and the company and thereby establish his significance and purpose in its structure. But, as noted earlier, the speech has just the opposite effect—no one seems to notice it—and therefore it only confirms Slocum's feeling of insignificance within a hyper-organized void. His fear of "echolalia"—of lapsing into a silly repetition of what others say—is part of his dread of being so thoroughly absorbed by the organization that he can only repeat its empty patterns, echoing mere noise.
Opposing even as it reveals the emptiness, rigidity, and divisiveness of Slocum's office world is the aesthetic structuring of the novel as a whole. Through a musical form that employs flexibility rather than fixity to define itself, the novel implicitly criticizes the corporate world and its values as a chief cause of Slocum's unhappiness. Unhappiness is, in fact, the theme around which the novel weaves its musical form, beginning with Slocum's but going on to examine the unhappiness of his wife, daughter, son, and office associates—from his supervisor Green who is eaten up with envy and office politics, to the typist who is starting to talk to herself. It would not be inappropriate to describe *Something Happened* as a fugue on Thoreau's observation that the "mass of men" lead lives of "quiet desperation." Like a complex musical composition, *Something Happened* develops this theme in several parts, building to a climax at the end (his son's death) which reveals the terrible result and resolution of Slocum's desperation.

Heller's methods of developing this theme within each section can also be described by the musical term of counterpoint, which interweaves and juxtaposes the various people, places, and thoughts that wander through Slocum's mind as he sifts his desperation. This technique allows great freedom of movement in the narrative; Slocum can range freely from past memories to fantasies of the future. The resulting juxtapositions of people, events and time periods lead the reader to make speculative connections as to the causes of his unhappiness, which are implied or suggested by the counterpoint but not directly stated. Slocum often returns to a young woman named Virginia,
for example, juxtaposing his spontaneous, youthful flirtation with her
against his later sexual liaisons, most of which bore him. This
counterpoint does not fix Virginia as a symbol of lost love (he was
afraid to possess her sexually) so much as it allows her to remain a
fluid and moving symbol of something Slocum thinks he has lost but
cannot quite define. And therefore he keeps coming back to her,
hovering about her memory as if it holds the key to some mystery. Her
elusiveness in some ways embodies his uncertainty about the nature of
"happiness" altogether: Slocum knows he is unhappy, but he is not sure
that he ever possessed real happiness in the past.

Virginia illustrates how Heller's method suggests rather than
states, leaving the reader to search for the answers simultaneously
with Slocum. This counterpoint creates a flexible ordering of signifi-
cance in that the text is open to the reader's interpretation of what
the various juxtapositions suggest about Slocum's unhappiness. Heller
interweaves numerous subthemes relating to Slocum's melancholy as well,
such as Slocum's rumination on the teachers, schools and other social
forces that begin early to implant the "competitive spirit" in his son,
a "will to win" he associates with his own executive success and upward
mobility. Another example is his persistent hovering about his "idiot"
son, Derek, which suggests some of his fears and desires: his dread
of going insane and thus becoming an "idiot" himself, his fear of
deviating from the expected image at work and thus being considered an
"idiot" by his associates, and his desire to be as free of the
competitive system as Derek, shut out by his own blameless ignorance.
The narrative fluidity and flexibility that Heller's musical form and technique make possible stand in direct opposition to the rigidity and fixity of the corporate pattern to which Slocum conforms. The narrative's ability to move freely in time and space contrasts with Slocum's feeling of entrapment—that the only acceptable way he can move, within the company, unless he dies or drops out, is "up" towards his own mental destruction: "I ascend like a condor, while falling to pieces" (493). Likewise, the novel's interpretive openness implicitly counters the closed and regulated system that the company imposes on its employees through demanding a conformity that penetrates even to the details of their sexual behavior. Last, the connective function of Heller's contrapuntal technique contrasts sharply with the bureaucracy's use of parallelism to divide and sort people and papers as well as the hierarchical structure that divides men against each other because of the competitive ethos it imposes.

Because language is what communicates the patterns in both cases, the difference in the way each system of order—Heller's art and Slocum's corporate bureaucracy—uses words also says something about what "happened" to Slocum, about his unhappiness and failure to preserve his identity.

At the office in which Slocum works, words are employed to dehumanize, divide, and dominate. As Slocum's bureaucratic idiom shows, terms describing paperwork have become descriptive of human beings as well, a process reflecting the bureaucracy's reduction of human reality to its own impersonal order. By leveling persons to the non-human status of paperwork, this language dehumanizes. Moreover, it divides
Slocum and his coworkers in two ways: from themselves (their individuality) by imposing conformity and from each other by establishing a hierarchy of fear and power. Within this hierarchy, language becomes a key to power, a weapon in the competition for upward mobility. Words are used to dominate, intimidate, exploit—any way that will establish power over another. Lies, rumors, insults, call reports—all subvert language in order to "get the whammy" on someone else, Slocum's slang for domination through fear.

Heller's art, on the other hand, employs language to connect and communicate. Through exposing in detail Slocum's unhappy conformity, it suggests a connection between Slocum's misery and his regimentation, without, however, imposing this connection on the reader by stating or explaining it directly. Heller's aim is to make the reader see the relationships by presenting them through counterpoint. Above all the linguistic goal of the novel is to communicate rather than control, to create a close relationship between Slocum and the reader rather than dominate, so that through the interaction of reader and protagonist the novel's "significance" emerges. And by making this living relationship more important than the imposition of a particular pattern of meaning, Heller offers an alternative to the corporate system that imposes the same pattern of conformity on everyone.

One of the reasons Slocum succumbs to conformity at the end and thus fails to preserve his identity is that he can't escape the dehumanizing bureaucratic idiom. This idiom—designed for the filing and processing of data in an orderly and efficient manner—is a bare, abstract language that deletes all traces of individuality and quirky
human eccentricity that do not fit in with the system's need for standardization. The problem, however, is that Slocum "sees" with this language; his perception of others is determined by the words that shape his consciousness, and since this bureaucratic idiom is purged of human individuality, Slocum cannot see even the members of his own family as complex human individuals. Thus instead of given names for people in his family (with the exception of Derek, the idiot), he uses words that indicate possession and role in relation to himself: my wife, my daughter, my little boy. All remain relatively one-dimensional people without names or faces (he never describes their physical appearances in any detail) or very definite personalities, so that they fade into the roles Slocum assigns them: bored and lonely wife, spiteful teenage daughter, weak and helpless little boy who needs protection. But to strip others of their uniqueness is to strip them of their humanity, and therefore Slocum's bureaucratic idiom is partly responsible for his dehumanization of others as well as of himself. But the essence of Slocum's dehumanization is his conformity to the corporate system that subverts language and human values alike.
FOOTNOTES


2. Sam Merrill, "Playboy Interview: Joseph Heller," Playboy, June 1975, p. 73.


6. Heller explained that the reason he published the opening section when he did was that he accidentally left the manuscript of it in a store. Afraid that someone might find it and publish it under another name, he told his agent to "submit a carbon somewhere quick" to establish his copyright. See Robert Alan Aurther, "Hanging Out," Esquire, September 1974, p. 54.


10. Shapiro, p. 8.

Chapter IV

GOOD AS GOLD

At a reading he gave in April 1975, someone asked Heller why he had never written about the American Jewish experience. On the train home, he began making notes in response to this question, and four years later Good as Gold appeared, a novel satirizing American political, social, and literary life through the eyes of Bruce Gold, a cynical Jewish professor of English who has been asked to write on the American Jewish experience. But first he has to figure out what it is.

Gold's pursuit of happiness defines this experience, which is primarily his attempt to escape his Jewish family and identity. He blames them for his feelings of alienation in a society where anti-Semitism still seems to determine who has access to money, political power, and social prestige. The major narrative action, in fact, turns upon Gold's identity as an "outsider," which he would like to change for that of an "insider"—i.e., he would like to belong to the Protestant-dominated power elite running Washington, D.C., and thereby end his alienation. But his ambition to join this inner circle involves him in a complex and comic quest for wealth, power, and status as well, perquisites he hopes will come with a promised appointment to a high government post in Washington.

In his desire to penetrate and find acceptance in a Gentile culture that he has idealized as superior to his own Jewish heritage,
Gold becomes a comic, more down-to-earth version of the Jamesian parvenu entering an alien society and finding himself caught between two different worlds, outlooks, and sets of values. And Ralph Newsome, as emissary and guide to the society Gold seeks, represents the kind of American Gold would like to be at the outset: a tall, fair, elegant, and politically empowered white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (hereafter "WASP"), totally at ease in his Washington surroundings. What Gold doesn't realize until later, however, is that his wish to be other than himself—which would mean abandoning his "Jewish" identity and family, according to Newsome—is essentially a fantasy of escaping the human condition altogether, with its attendant problems and responsibilities. Unconsciously Gold would like to cast off the mundane world of family, time, and decay and enter a perfect, immutable realm. In Washington Gold imagines the fulfillment of this fantasy of a world immune to entropy.

No such world beckons to him at the outset, however: when the novel opens, Gold finds himself mired in the mundane. To pay for his three children's expensive private schools, Gold accepts two commissions to write on the American Jewish experience. One editor, Lieberman, wants a spicy bestseller with plenty of sex between Jews and Gentiles; the other, Pomeroy, wants a more scholarly work emphasizing psychology and sociology. Gold never writes this book during the narrative, however, because of a call from Newsome, who has become a Presidential aide. As a result of Gold's favorable review of the President's book, *My Year in the White House*, Newsome invites Gold to Washington with the promise of a high government post, possibly
Secretary of State. Gold jumps at the chance to become an insider and flies to Washington ready, even eager, to prostitute his verbal and intellectual skills and to dump his Jewish wife and family if his patriotic duty so demands.

He soon finds that getting the promised job depends less upon his intellectual performance than his skills as a suitor: Newsome explains that in order to "fit in" he must increase his "stature" by persuading Andrea Conover, the tall blonde daughter of a powerful Gentile millionaire, to marry him. Then Conover will use his influence to get him the post, even though he despises Gold as a Jew and takes every opportunity to insult and humiliate him. Worse still, Gold finds himself in a "Catch-22" dilemma: Andrea won't marry him until he has the post, and Conover won't get it for him until he is married to his daughter. Numerous trips to Washington to court Andrea and the political and social establishment bring him no closer to his goals until finally—spurred in part by the family crisis of his older brother Sid's death—he gives up his ambitions. At the end he returns to his family responsibilities, including the book he must write on the Jewish experience in America.

And this book, the reader realizes, is the one he has just read, which traces Gold's individual experience as writer, teacher, suitor, husband, father, member of a large family, and sometimes—particularly when Gentiles remind him—as a Jew. It contains the sex and satire of Gold's fling with the predominantly WASP power structure of his nation, as well as a more conventionally realistic portrayal of his extended Jewish family and their relationships to each other and their society—
material from which ample social and psychological insights could be drawn for Pomeroy's more academic text.

In partially fulfilling both scholarly and popular criteria, Gold's novel/memoir, which he calls his "abstract autobiography" (313), reveals the doubleness that pervades theme and structure. The foundation of this duality is the two worlds between which Gold alternates: that of his New York Jewish family on one hand, and on the other the Protestant political-social establishment of Washington, D.C. The differences between these worlds, particularly in their values, outlook, and problems, provide the novel's thematic opposition of man vs. matter, or human reality vs. the materialistic and ultimately dehumanizing forces Gold seeks to join. Plot, style, and imagery all reinforce the thematic opposition behind the two worlds.

The title, Good as Gold, suggests this thematic and structural duality with its play on the word "gold," which names both the hero and the symbol of his quest. For gold represents not merely material wealth but the "glittering new social circles awaiting him" (275) in Washington, so that it comes to symbolize the totality of Gold's ambitions—the combination of riches, power, and prestige that he thinks will cure his alienation and other problems. By balancing Gold and gold, man and matter, against the word "good," the title also poses questions about human values and priorities in Gold's materialistic surroundings. Will Gold's quest for "gold" outweigh other human values, such as family responsibility and loyalty? Will shared human values prevail over the non-human world of acquisitions that lead people to create inhuman forms of exclusion, such as the
virulent anti-Semitism Gold encounters among the political, social, and financial elite?

How Gold holds up in this conflict of human vs. non-human "goods" is neither exemplary nor base: he yields to temptation but eventually returns to his responsibilities. His mixture of ambition, weakness against temptation, and resignation following discouragement make him seem human indeed—a kind of Everyman who, if he never rises much above his baser instincts for private gain, neither totally abandons himself to pure self-interest in the end. Thus in response to the question of moral character and identity implicit in the title—i.e., how good is Gold?—one must conclude that the "Gold standard" of conduct represents the norm. "You're no worse than the rest," a traditional moralist tells him, "but certainly no better" (423). The title questions not only Gold's character but also the nature of his world by implicitly asking, "How good is gold?" How important are the things Gold seeks in the world where Gold seeks them? Considering that nearly everyone he meets in Washington likewise pursues money, power, and status, then such things seem very crucial indeed, perhaps even the primary values of the Protestant elite in Good as Gold, since they possess such things in greater abundance than any other cultural group or class. Against this backdrop, Gold's self-interested ambitions appear as normal and American as a Thanksgiving Day parade.

Gold is not always very clear, however, about what constitutes his own best interests—like most people he seems to act with muddled ambivalence. And this self-dividing ambivalence determines the double plot structure. The "family" plot focuses on the problems within his
extended Jewish family; the "political" plot around the Gentile power structure of the nation's capital. Gold has internalized both worlds and their values as a conflict: he can't decide which group to belong to permanently. Thus the center of the novel is Gold's divided self, dramatized as his ambivalent shuttling between New York and Washington, between the locus of his responsibilities and the focus of his desires, between the painfully realistic world of family problems and the more fantastic, political realm of Washington, a seeming paradise where permanent bliss may be plucked from a government appointment.

As Gold vacillates, the family and political plots develop the opposition of man vs. matter, or people vs. things, which is another version of Catch-22's theme: that without the spirit, identity, and values that make him a human being, man is garbage, mere matter. The differences between the two plots gradually define the values of each world, so that Gold's family comes to represent traditional shared values that promote human life and community, whereas the Washington WASP elite upholds a destructive code of self-interest that fragments society into competing groups of "haves" and "have-nots"—especially those who have most of the "gold" (wealth, power, and prestige) and those who don't. Style and imagery elaborate further the opposing values dramatized by the two plots.

The focus of the family plot is Gold's aging, irascible, domineering father, Julius, and his eccentric second wife, Gussie. Because of his temperamental, often obnoxious behavior—he delights in tormenting Gold—neither Gold nor his brothers and sisters want their father and stepmother living nearby. The family scenes are devoted to dinners
where the children try to convince the couple to move to a Florida condominium, attempts Julius resists with the fury of a Jehovah angered by His children's disobedience. What to do with these aging parents being the main problem, there are nevertheless other difficulties as well, also revealed at the dinner gatherings: wayward children, adultery, divorce, and drinking. Everyone looks to Sid, the oldest son, to resolve these problems: "Let Sid handle it" (288) is Gold's response to every awkward family situation. Unfortunately Sid dies unexpectedly, leaving Gold in charge and adding death to the difficulties Gold must handle. Most of these problems relate to time and its casualties, and, ironically, most run counter to what Gold considers stereotypical of the Jewish family: "Heavy drinking, adultery, and divorce were...alien cultural peccadilloes" (263).

Gold's response to these "peccadilloes" and problems shows that what he wants to leave behind in his family is not merely the "Jewishness" that he considers an obstacle to his ambitions ("Every instinct instructed him he could never introduce a single one...to Andrea or the glittering new social circles awaiting him in Georgetown") (275). What he really wants to escape are the inevitable problems of living in a mutable, human world. Although he doesn't appear aware of this assumption when he first goes to Washington, he envisions there not only the achievement of his desires but an escape from entropy into a world immune to the ravages of time.

Thus at the beginning of the political plot, Gold's first view of Washington shows him imposing on it a vision of paradise, where no one ages, gains weight, or has problems:
He glanced out the window at official Washington and caught a glimpse of heaven. Through the doorway, the view of the open office space was a soothing pastoral, with vistas of modular desks dozing tranquilly under indirect fluorescent lighting that never flickered; there were shoulder-high partitions of translucent glass, other offices across the way as imposing as Ralph's, and the dreamlike stirrings of contented people at work who were in every respect impeccable. The women all were sunny and chic—not a single one was overweight—the men wore jackets and ties, and every trouser leg was properly creased. If there was a worm at the core of this Garden of Eden, it escaped the cynical inspection of Gold, who could find detritus and incipient decay everywhere (121-22).

In this "Eden" untouched by physical decay, Gold can even give up his obsessive concern with his own health (his compulsive dieting and jogging), while all his dreams of success will magically come true if he can just pluck the golden apple from this garden—the promised government post. But the pastoral imagery undermines Gold's vision even while expressing it. The artificiality associated with the pastoral form (a poetic convention which portrayed sophisticated nobles disguised as innocent shepherds in an idealized rustic landscape) suggests both the falseness of Gold's vision and of Washington's myth of immunity to human conditions (physical entropy, problems, laws, etc.) that it seeks to project about itself, a myth that is the root of Gold's illusion.

In this artificial world of the political plot, even the problems Gold must solve take on an unreal, fairy-tale hue. To enter this paradise, for example, Gold must marry the fair princess (Andrea) and win over the "dragon" at the gates (Andrea's father), who will then use his "magical" power to get Gold the promised prize. Moreover, the "Catch-22" dilemma blocking his ascent (Conover won't get him the post
until he marries Andrea, and Andrea won't marry him until he has the post) adds a touch of comic absurdity to Gold's adult fairy tale.

Such difficulties at the gates of paradise are a far cry from the dilemma of what to do with his aging father, and the difference in problems says something about the nature of the two worlds. In the family sphere, Gold's problems are realistic, ordinary, and human, revolving around the struggle with time and decay; whereas in the political realm where Gold imagines an exit from entropy and mundane realities, the problems are fantastic and seem to promise, if solved, a blissful and permanent state of perfection that includes all the riches, power, and prestige he could ever desire.

But the self-defeating circularity of the "Catch-22" impasse hindering Gold, as well as the fantastical nature of the problems and goals in the political plot, point not only to Gold's unrealistic expectations but also to the rigid inhumanity of the political and social world Gold seeks to enter. The Washington establishment is "inhuman" because it surrounds itself with a myth of its own perfection, superiority, and immunity to ordinary human reality, which turns its leaders into gods or kings; it is also inhuman because those who believe in this myth use it to dehumanize others or themselves (the Texas Senator "owns" people; Gold must give up his "Jewish" identity). Last, the Washington elite is inhuman because it uses its power to establish its immunity to laws and restraints.

What underlies Washington's myth is the justification of power by those who have it—the power elite's assumption that "might" makes "right." The elite justify their power by asserting their superiority
to others, a claim they prove by pointing to their power. This equation's circularity represents the closed, insulated circle Gold wants to join, and thus it is not surprising that his attempts to do so involve him in the circular dilemma of Andrea and her father. Thus the problems Gold encounters in the political sphere all boil down to one kind of "paradise": that of getting enough power to forcibly establish one's immunity and superiority to ordinary people, like the members of Gold's family, and to their everyday problems.

That Gold's Washington represents a "non-human" as opposed to the "human" reality of his family can also be seen in the characters themselves and the ways in which Gold presents them. All the characters Gold meets in Washington--Conover, Andrea, the Texas Senator, Harris Rosenblatt, to name but a few--resemble Dickensian grotesques in that all have only one or two defining traits which Gold exaggerates to make them illustrate a particular point of his political satire. Conover's stinging viciousness and hauteur make him the quintessential WASP; Andrea's physical perfection comes to symbolize the blandness and emptiness of a particular ideal of beauty; the looming Texas Senator's phrase, "I've got his pecker in my pocket," defines his crude manipulations for power; and Rosenblatt's transformation from a short Jewish boy into a tall, cadaverous WASP exemplifies the violation of human identity required of him for membership in the Washington establishment. These are caricatures rather than human characters, presented in a style that could be called "irrealism"--they are not realistic in their cartoonlike flatness, or in their words and actions, which often violate human logic or feasibility in
order to express a satirical point.

But in shifting from political satire to his family, Gold changes from satirical caricature to a style of comic realism. Characters become more three-dimensional, a mixture of attractive and less-than-admirable traits that give them human complexity. This comic realism is at its best in the dinner scenes, where family conversations about down-to-earth matters, such as burial plots, become hilariously insane, revealing the absurdity that underlies the ordinary. These people, with their absurdities and flaws, resemble the "realistic" characters of the 19th-century European novel (appropriate because of Gold's European immigrant roots), whereas the broadly outlined and simplified caricatures of Washington could have stepped out of a political cartoon or comic strip.

This double style of comic realism and satirical "irrealism" is also an integral part of the novel's central theme of human vs. non-human realities. The realistic characters are clearly embedded in a recognizably imperfect human world, while the satirical caricatures reinforce the idea that Gold's image of Washington is based not upon a realistic appraisal of what it is, but upon a mythical version of Washington that denies human reality altogether. Yet Gold can hardly be blamed for his intoxicated expectations, for he has merely imbibed the myth that Washington promotes about itself: that of a perfect world, where those who have power possess it not because they grabbed or inherited it, but by virtue of natural superiority. This myth denies human reality by elevating the power elite's status until they believe in their immunity to the problems and conditions that plague
other human beings.

But what makes kings must also make serfs, and this the myth does by demeaning (through anti-Semitism and ethnic stereotypes, for example), those who do not have the political power, wealth, and prestige that the elite essentially control, and by blaming this lack on an absence of special qualities. But when these "qualities" of the elite turn out to be not intelligence, talent, and hard work but crude power, inherited wealth, and a tenacious adherence to privilege in order to exclude others, as Gold discovers, then the myth stands revealed for what it is: a means of justifying the power of a few by dehumanizing the many. Furthermore, this myth deliberately overlooks the means to power, particularly the fact that being born into the privileged class of prosperous WASP's makes access to more wealth, prestige, and power much easier than it is for someone born outside of this group.

By basing the notion of their "superiority" on the assumed inferiority of everyone outside their racial group, the empowered elite makes it easy and even "right" to victimize those they have already reduced to less-than-human status through ethnic stereotypes and other means of dehumanization. Newsome's remark, "Let's build some death camps" (122), grimly crystallizes this perception by alluding to the Nazi's extermination of the Jews in concentration camps during World War II. But to rob others of their humanity is to become inhuman oneself, and it is this loss of their own humanity that the empty Washington caricatures exhibit: the absence of "realism" in their portrayal also reflects their lack of humanity. Gold's satirization
of the Protestant "aristocracy" makes another point, too: since these caricatures are based on stereotypes of the WASP class, they prove that all stereotypes dehumanize the individuals on whom they are imposed. Gold's satirical irrealism turns the tables, doing to the Gentiles what he sees them doing to Jews: to be "reminded" by a Gentile that one is a "Jew" is to be reduced to a stereotype and made, thereby, less than human.6

But while the double style of comic realism and satirical irrealism portrays a human world on one hand and the forces that seek to dehumanize it on the other, two opposing patterns of imagery establish, through indirection and implication, the antithetical values of the worlds between which Gold wavers. Such an indirect, metaphorical method of establishing values is especially appropriate in Good as Gold because, as Gold's confused behavior reveals, values are often hidden assumptions, shaping behavior without one being fully aware of exactly what these assumptions are. Gold does not know what he truly values until almost the end of the novel, when he chooses family and individual responsibility over political opportunism.

The imagery most frequently associated with Gold's family and their values is something essential to human life: food. Gastronomical details abound in almost every family scene like food at a Thanksgiving dinner; in fact, almost every family scene is a dinner gathering. Food's close association with Gold's family suggests that they and their values represent something important and basic to human life, while it also reminds us of the physical processes of growth and decay to which they are bound. The pattern of imagery
associated with Washington, however, has at its center something static, permanent, and non-essential to human life, representing its myth of immunity to human conditions. What better symbol to represent the allure of this static Eden than gold, with its glitter, permanence, and high valuation in the world Gold seeks to enter?

In contrast to gold's immunity to entropy, food in Good as Gold is associated with the birth-to-death cycle of all life. This connection becomes apparent at one of the dinners, when the conversation turns to burial plots and evokes Julius's enraged suggestion that they bury him "In the kitchen under the table!" (272). An argument escalates over who will be buried with whom, causing Gold to reflect, "In other families relatives quarreled over cash and bibelots; here they bickered over burial plots" (275). Besides connecting food and mortality, the dinner conversation implies that this family cares less about material goods than such down-to-earth things as death and burial.

Moreover, just as food sustains life, the family in Good as Gold seems to be the only remaining source of stability and human values in a society whose larger political and social institutions are fast decaying. In a society that, as Gold concludes, is "not worth its salt," only the family remains to uphold such values as loyalty and caring for one another, and to sustain its members from birth to death. Gold eventually learns that, however unglamorous, tedious, and troublesome the individual personalities, his family is the only real community he knows that supports human individuality, just as Sid supports his eccentric father and stepmother.

But for Gold, food must provide more than mere sustenance; it
must have flavor or "salt." And salt is to food what Gold's family is to Good as Gold. Their flawed, eccentric, and sometimes outrageous personalities, expressed through dinner conversations that often become deliciously absurd (see their discussion of ice, pp. 106-7), make them the "salt" of the earth and the novel. Without the interest, vitality, and gritty human authenticity they provide, the novel would float up into the stratosphere of abstract formulations like the Washington caricatures. Thus "salt" comes to mean the individuality that is essential to human identity. Good as Gold upholds the integrity of the individual as a crucial value against the political and institutional forces that would eradicate it. In spite of its internal conflicts, Gold's family sustains this individuality, without which its members would be ciphers like the Washington caricatures—empty stereotypes, matter without spirit. By reminding us that respect for the individual is the cornerstone of all human values, Gold attacks the forces that would remake everyone in the same image by making only one image desirable: that of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Moreover, stripped of their individual identities, human beings would become interchangeable objects and therefore expendable: things could be exterminated; individual persons could not. This violation of humanity is implicit in Harris Rosenblatt's metamorphosis into a WASP: he has discarded his human identity to become an automaton distinguished by flinty rigidity and a repetition of the phrase, "balance the budget." He has become a non-human thing.

By associating food and salt with human life and identity, Gold implies that in wanting to escape his Jewish family he is rejecting
himself—his values and his own identity. But salt can be seen not only as the individuality Gold almost loses, but also as the values held by a community because they promote human life and the common good. Gold defines "salt" in this way when explaining to Lieberman the title of his article, "We Are Not a Society or We Are Not Worth Our Salt." "Worth our salt" is a play on words, he explains, because in addition to any "idiomatic value," salt is "one of those basic, shared commodities that give that kind of cohesion to an aggregate of families in a given area that we commonly call a society" (339). In other words, salt signifies the shared values that hold a community together—such as respect for individuality, loyalty, caring for others, and sharing responsibility. Without such cohesive values, Gold points out, a "society," by definition, doesn't exist; and if a community professes such values but does not practice them, then that society is "not worth its salt" because it does not live up to what made it a society in the first place. Thus "salt" in Good as Gold refers to not only the quirky individuality of the family characters but also to the values they uphold and represent as a family—values which ultimately transcend the animosity, rivalry, and personality conflicts that threaten family unity. Confronted with the crisis of his brother's death, Gold returns to his responsibilities, realizing that his family and their values are a part of himself that he doesn't want to reject after all. Of course this awareness doesn't come to Gold until almost the end of the novel, when he tells Newsome unconditionally that he no longer wants the government post. Gold discovers that he was more attached to "salt" than he realized.
But while food and salt represent the family and the traditional values that Gold initially plans to leave behind in his self-interested pursuit of happiness in Washington, gold and the things associated with it (jewelry, glitter, permanence, great value) represent the "false" values that lead him to Washington—the money, political power, and social prestige which he thinks will make him happy by permanently establishing his worth and self-esteem. In fact the phrase, "good as gold," can be seen in thematic opposition to "worth our salt"; both are idiomatic expressions of worth and as such they define the two sets of values which pull Gold first one way, then the other. In contrast to the shared human values associated with "worth our salt," the phrase "good as gold" in the novel often means easy money—i.e., it is used to describe a sure-fire and easy way of making a fast buck. When the novel opens, for instance, Gold thinks that writing a book on the Jewish experience will be the easiest $20,000 he ever earned: "He could toss that one off swiftly once he had his material. Jews were a cinch. It was good as gold" (16). But as Gold learns that Jews aren't such a "cinch" after all, "good as gold" comes to mean not only the material and other worldly "goods" he pursues, but also his confusion of values, particularly his confusion of human and material worth. By seeing "gold" and the false values it stands for as his "good," Gold participates in his own de-humanization.

This process of dehumanization and its origin in Gold's confusion of values becomes clear in his childhood fantasy of being someone else with a "better heritage" and nobler family than his own
Jewish one. He becomes "Van Cleef and Arpels," a "stunning sparkling jewelry store," where the "wealthiest people come from everywhere to shop" (256). Quite literally, he mixes Gold with "gold," his own worth with that of material things. Transforming himself into an inanimate object, Gold carries out his own dehumanization, pathetically assuming that he will only be valued in American society if he becomes what he is not, which means willingly violating and abandoning his own human identity. Thus at the climax of his vision he is "not... even a Jew" (257). This fantasy dramatizes the fact that Gold has so completely internalized the values and assumptions through which the dominant Protestant culture has established its "superiority" that he emulates this elite's devaluation of himself and his Jewish immigrant heritage, without even questioning the assumptions that have led to the self-hatred and alienation so visible in the fantasy. Only later does he see its irony: that a society where acceptance and self-esteem depend on destroying one's identity is "not worth its salt." To lose one's "salt," as Gold almost does, is to become a non-human thing, like Rosenblatt, who represents the fulfillment of Gold's Van Cleef and Arpels fantasy.

That Gold envisions himself as a jewelry store also makes another point about the values of the two worlds. Whereas "salt" is part of the imagery of sustenance, suggesting that the values Gold associates with his family and Jewish heritage are essential to human survival as individuals and as a society, jewelry and gold have primarily a decorative and symbolic function in human society, playing no vital role in nourishing human life. In fact they are used—as the Van
Cleef and Arpels fantasy implies—to create the appearance of personal worth through their display, and especially to fortify the assumption that one particular class is intrinsically superior to all others. Jewelry's and gold's non-essentialness suggests that the values associated with them in the novel—wealth, power, and prestige—are "false" in the sense that they do not contribute to human survival as a community. These values reflect the self-interest of the class that possesses these things in greatest abundance as well as controls, for the most part, who has access to the wealth, power, and prestige. In Gold's Washington, the pursuit of happiness has become the pursuit of pure self-interest, untouched by any larger concern for other people or the general welfare. Thus the elite's values, based as they are on such self-interest, cannot provide a basis for community. Instead "gold" contributes to the fragmentation of society and its institutions into special-interest groups having little concern for the common good.

Gold also associates gold with the permanence—or freedom from entropy—that he imagines in Washington. This, too, is as false as the values gold represents. What Washington projects as immunity to time and human realities is a paradisal myth that masks the moral stasis and decay underlying the behavior and values of the Washington elite. Only gradually does Gold learn, however, that what he takes for paradise is really quite the opposite. In fact, Gold's penetration of the Washington establishment and its values can be seen as a moral fable which ends with a readjustment of Gold's values. Gold begins with the myth of Washington as Eden and ends with his disillusion,
having penetrated to the "worm at the core of this Garden" (122). Newsome, Andrea, and Conover all initiate Gold into a garden that turns out to be a mental and moral wasteland.  

As the President's emissary who lures Gold to Washington with the promise of political preferment, Ralph Newsome plays the role of Satanic tempter and guide to the false paradise. It is he who gives Gold his first "glimpse of heaven," the essence of which is the physical perfection and order of his office. Gold first thinks this perfection indicates a world without entropy, but later it becomes symbolic of the moral stagnation underlying the flawless veneer: Newsome turns out to be as morally sensitive as the "modular desks dozing tranquilly" in his office (122). His conversations with Gold as he advises him in his quest define the Washington elite's morality. His ethic is one of pure self-interest that reduces other people to disposable items: when he tires of one wife, he gets another. His definition of a government policy that does "no harm" is one that doesn't harm him (347). And in response to Gold's comment on the "cynicism and selfishness" of this outlook, Newsome tells him breezily, "I know that feeling of good conscience, Bruce, . . . and I assure you it will fade without a trace when you've been working here a minute or two" (347).

But the full implications of his ethic appear in his comment, "Let's build some death camps" (122). That this remark occurs right after Gold's "glimpse of heaven" reveals not only the potential depths of moral decay in this "Eden" but the "worm at the core"--the anti-Semitism that permeates the Washington elite, from Newsome to the
Texas Senator, who tells Gold that "every successful American should own a Jew" (431). Newsome's manner of speaking also echoes the moral emptiness of Washington, as well as the stupidity that reigns there. He speaks a language of negation consisting of words and phrases that cancel each other out, such as "we want...independent men of integrity who will agree with all our decisions" (53). Ralph makes language meaningless and thereby contributes further to the moral decay by using words to obscure truth rather than reveal it.

Newsome's smooth and slippery way with words is, in fact, his chief characteristic, appropriate in one who plays the role of tempter. And after bringing Gold into Eden, Newsome uses his doubletalk to point the way to Eve. Gold should marry someone taller than he is, Newsome explains, because "You would make her look taller. And that would add more to your stature and make her look smaller. Andrea Conover would be perfect" (120). Andrea's character, personality, and mind prove as empty as Newsome's doubletalk, and she becomes the epitome of all that first attracts and later repels Gold in Washington. Initially the means to his ambitions, she eventually becomes the focus of Gold's growing disillusion.

But at first he is enchanted by this Eve:

She was easily the most beautiful woman he had ever been with, the richest, his first society girl. Her hair was blond. She had blue eyes, a small straight nose, a broad forehead. Her complexion was light, her skin unmarred (125).

She is everything Gold is not: tall, rich, Gentile and a member of the social elite. As his potential fiancée, Andrea promises to be a rich entrée into the nation's social-political aristocracy. Her
culinary incompetence and pedestrian palate, however, give Gold second thoughts. All thumbs in the kitchen, she can't even tell the difference between an ordinary supermarket jam and Gold's gourmet favorite, "Tiptree Little Scarlet Strawberry Preserves" (395). Worse still, to Gold, are her ideas about marriage. She throws out "old fashioned" notions about fidelity as nonchalantly as she threw out Gold's special black bread--because she thought it was too hard. The "open, truthful marriage" she envisions would be a series of interesting extramarital affairs that she and Gold would dutifully discuss as a man and wife (393). Although Gold himself is guilty of philandering, he finds Andrea's cavalier attitude toward sex ("Why can't he have my body if he wants it?" p. 230) revolting:

Not for this, he told himself, was he leaving his wife, provoking the enmity of his children, offending his family, and forsaking for the time all other erotic relationships, but for money, beauty, social position, political preference, and a stupendous magnification of sexual prestige . . ." (230).

Andrea's casual mores offend his sense of individual integrity and seem at one with the moral and intellectual void he finds in Washington.

As time passes, even Andrea's physical perfection pales, making her bland. In contrast to the members of Gold's family, she lacks individual character or "salt"; more and more she resembles a vapid ideal of feminine beauty defined by the Protestant aristocracy. This perception begins to dawn on Gold in a scene that recalls his first vision of Washington as Eden, only this time the paradisal gleam has tarnished. Like Adam after he ate the apple, Gold "hid with his face in his hands in a corner of the garden until Andrea had returned,"
and, looking up, he finds her "once more feminine, familiar, gorgeous, and dull" (371). Gold's vision of Andrea and Washington has "fallen" from its original Edenic idealism, and finding Andrea "dull," he can no longer lose himself in the pretense that he loves her. The enchantment is over, and Adam/Gold once again falls back into the alienation he had hoped to escape.

What contributes to Gold's dwindling enthusiasm for Andrea--her culinary ineptitude and her "dullness"--is part of the imagery of food and gold as symbols of value. Her obtuseness in the kitchen corresponds to her moral and mental emptiness (her lack of values and her bland character), whereas Gold's later vision of her as "dull" denotes his dawning awareness that the worldly values associated with gold may not be worth pursuing; i.e., what glitters--especially the "glittering social circles" that Andrea represents--turns out to be his own false valuation of Andrea and her world. And the gold turns to lead when he learns that throughout his courtship of her, she was having an affair with Newsome.

In spite of this betrayal, Andrea represents a passive principle of evil, an absence of the good. Her essence is her emptiness, her lack of everything but the qualities that make up Gold's image of the WASP stereotype of beauty. Her father also fulfills Gold's image of the typical WASP patriarch and millionaire, with his vast estate, tweedy elegance, and drinking habits. But his viciousness, prejudice, sadism, cynicism and utter indifference to everything but his own self-serving interests make him the active principle of evil in the Washington world, the Satanic figure at the heart of Gold's Eden.
Conover embodies the full implications of the elite's valuation of riches, power, and prestige, as well as the foundation of self-interest, greed, and opportunism on which these values rest.

Gold has several interviews with this gleefully anti-Semitic old man in his quest to marry Andrea and get the government post, interviews which rapidly turn Eden into a hell of humiliation. During these ordeals, Conover delights in calling Gold by the wrong name (Goldberg, Goldfarb, Goldfine, etc.) and throws at him every insult and jibe he can exhume from his whiskey-besotted brain, such as "A middle-age Jew is better than a nigger, I guess, and not much worse than a wop or a mick" (238). As Gold endures such torment, Conover cynically reminds him that he does have to tolerate his nasty wit if he wants to get anything (366). His cynicism and corruption also appear in his comment that "The difference between crime and public service, my good Goodgold, is often mainly more a matter of station than substance" (373). He is proud of the fact that he has lied seventeen times in public under oath and "never lost even a modicum of respect among my peers for doing so or a single friend" (373). Furthermore, his favorite sport of gelding colts suggests a sadism bordering on violence. But the trait that epitomizes Conover's evil is his cynical indifference to the rest of humanity and therefore to all values that support human life. The real reason he hates Gold, he tells him, is that he is human: "Mankind stinks, Hymie, and Western mankind stinks no less fouly than all the rest" (368). His "values" amount to self-promotion at the expense of the rest of humanity.

What makes this attitude more horrifying is that Conover's wealth
and social prestige place him, like a poisonous spider, at the center of the Washington web of power so that his personal animus and prejudices spread throughout the institutional system. Thus it is not surprising, as Gold discovers, that anti-Semitism still thrives at the highest levels of government. What permits such evil to flourish within a system founded upon such Democratic ideals as equality and fairness are the institutions themselves, which in *Good as Gold* have become indifferent and unresponsive to individual and common good alike. Such indifference to the ideals upon which the institutions were founded—the real void at the heart of Washington—creates a moral and intellectual vacuum that prepares the way for opportunists like Conover, who turn the pursuit of happiness into grasping, unenlightened self-interest. The President exemplifies this institutional indifference and abdication of ideals intended to control opportunism and greed: he participates in the same self-promotion by spending his first year in office writing a book on his first year in office, a circularity that also signifies the closed system of power Washington has become, as well as its moral and intellectual stagnation.

As a result of the decay at the core of the nation's capital in *Good as Gold*, all social and political institutions are declining, victims of neglect and indifference. As Gold notes of this trend,

> Neighborhoods, parks, beaches, streets, were falling deeper into ruin and whole cities sinking into rot . . . . It was Shoot the Chutes into darkness and dissolution, the plunging roller coaster into disintegration and squalor. Someone should do something. Nobody could. No society worth its salt would watch itself perishing without some serious attempt to avert its own destruction (326).
Washington's rot has become epidemic. The self-serving behavior of the President, Conover, Newsome and other Washington figures of power and authority demonstrates that the presumed forces of social "order" have become agents of destruction and fragmentation; their organized irresponsibility contributes to the social and moral malaise. Their implicit denial of democratic ideals and human values (such as equality, individual freedom, and respect for the common good) embodies what Gold describes as "the most advanced and penultimate stage of a civilization... when chaos masqueraded as order" (325).

Confronted with the void that Washington veils with its myth of immunity, Gold begins to see that family and individual responsibility are the only remaining stays against such spiritual, moral, and intellectual bankruptcy. As Gold readjusts his vision by seeing "Eden" for what it really is—a hell of opportunism made possible by institutional indifference and an entrenched elite intent on keeping the system closed to outsiders (and thereby monopolizing most of the wealth, power, and prestige) like Gold—he readjusts his values.

He sees that the alienation he felt because he was a "Jew from a poor immigrant family" (155) stemmed from his own internalization of the Protestant elite's attitude toward Jews. After penetrating to the crude source of this anti-Semitism in Conover, he realizes that being "outside" the inner circle of Washington is acceptable after all, for that society has proved unworthy. Belonging to it would have meant giving up his identity and humanity to join those who dehumanize the many for the few—i.e., to protect the interests of a small, powerful elite. Thus Gold abandons his quest to end his alienation by becoming
a Washington insider and returns to his family, realizing that they
and their values are an essential part of his identity.

After accepting himself as an "outsider" in a society "not worth
its salt," Gold sorts out other causes of his feeling alienated and
isolated. He realizes that being the youngest male in a large Jewish
family (he has five sisters and one brother) gave him a special,
immune place in the group: he received extra attention and
educational advantages which the older children did not because they
had to work. Such work, in fact, paid for Gold's college education.
But instead of acknowledging that his position as college professor
and writer owes much to his family's financial support and encourage-
ment, Gold has preferred to believe that his success was his own in-
dependent creation, the inevitable result of his superiority to the
other children. Gold thereby has made his own worth dependent on his
separation from the rest of his family. By not recognizing their
contribution to his intellectual development, he has avoided both
diminishing his achievements and owing any support and loyalty in re-
turn. Such thinking has made alienation an essential part of his
identity—a deliberate, self-imposed means of believing in his
specialness, which in turn exempts him from the hardships that others
must bear.

Gold's sleight-of-mind has turned his youthful exemption from
economic necessity into an assumed right to immunity to human con-
ditions. Ironically, his illusion of natural superiority, in its
denial of what his family has done in creating his special position,
is not unlike the power elite's claim to superiority, which also
overlooks what the network of inherited wealth and social prestige
has done in creating their privileged position and power. But in
writing his "abstract autobiography," Gold parodies his inflated
assumptions by revealing their contradictions:

   Everything I received I earned for myself, except what I
got from my father, my mother, and my brother, and from
all four of my older sisters. I had nothing going for
me but my brains, which I believe I inherited from people
other than those persons purporting to be my parents
(167).

   Besides acknowledging the self-imposed alienation that derives
from his desire to be superior to his family, Gold also comes to see
that even as a child he was something of an outsider by nature. When
he talks to Spotty Weinrock and other childhood acquaintances, he
learns that they never considered him a part of their group—and not,
as he thinks, because they thought he was smarter, but because they
thought he was a "schmuck":

   You were an outsider, don't you remember? That's
probably why you got so smart in school. You wouldn't
play ball and you had no personality . . . . You did a
lot of boasting and sometimes you'd go out of your way
to make yourself a pain in the ass (2:3).

After this confrontation with his childhood peers, Gold can no longer
blame his alienation solely on being a Jew (Spotty and the gang are
Jewish), or even ascribe it to natural superiority, which more and
more comes to seem an egotistical delusion that grew out of his being
a loner instead of causing his alienation (i.e., he got "smart" in
school because he didn't have many friends to distract him).

   It becomes increasingly evident that a fundamental source of
Gold's alienation is his own self-consciousness, which makes him feel
separate and different from others, maintains his illusion of
superiority, and makes him feel inadequate unless he feels superior to others. It prevents him from merging himself with a group (to maintain his notion of independent and self-created worth), and at the same time this consciousness feels the sting of alienation, making him wish he did belong to a group.

Gold finally realizes that he can't escape his natural or self-imposed alienation any more than he can get rid of the self-consciousness that is their source. Nor can he eradicate overnight the ugly anti-Semitism at the root of his social alienation. And at the end of the novel he comes to terms with a fourth kind of alienation. When he visits his mother's grave he confronts and accepts his own mortality and humanness, thereby accepting his "existential" alienation—the inevitable isolation of the human condition. Alone, Gold must confront his own responsibilities, choices, and death. Thus Washington doesn't cure his alienation as he had initially hoped. At the end of his unfinished quest he still feels like an outsider, but he understands why and feels different about this identity, no longer wanting to escape it. The social alienation he might have ended by joining Washington he has decided to accept, whereas the other three kinds—self-imposed, natural, and existential—he sees as part of himself and the human condition, so that becoming an "insider" would not have altered those anyway. Moreover, he realizes that alienation may be an advantage for a writer: being "outside" the political establishment and his family group gives him the distance he needs in order to write about them in his book on the Jewish experience in America.

Gold's writing and his role as writer, in fact, are what unify
the novel's doubleness. First, Gold's writing joins the two worlds of
family and politics: his review of the President's autobiography is
the first link in the chain that pulls him to Washington, thus
initiating his zig-zag odyssey between two worlds. Second, Gold's
writing circumscribes the novel as a whole: at its close he still has
his book to write on the Jewish experience, which brings the reader
back full circle to the first chapter, "The Jewish Experience"—imply-
ing that the novel is Gold's commissioned book. By making the hero
the putative author of the novel as well, Heller focuses on the act of
writing itself, which is part of Good as Gold's concern with language,
literature, and writers.

Through Gold's eyes the novel satirizes the state of language and
literature in Gold's world. Because of the self-interested pursuit of
"gold," another more valuable means of human exchange—language—has
been debased. The numerous autobiographical scribblers peopling the
narrative in Good as Gold care less about the truth or literary
quality of their work than self-promotion and easy money. The Presi-
dent, statesmen (Henry Kissinger), movie stars, fashion models—all
are writing their autobiographies or memoirs in Good as Gold because
they know that current fame and (better still) notoriety can be
turned into cash at the marketplace. 8 That such works, often of little
historical or literary merit, do sell adds popular taste to the decay
of language and literature Gold sees infecting his world. And in
connecting this decline with the pursuit of narrow self-interest
(whether the object is money, fame, or self-justification), Gold links
this form of linguistic entropy to the moral and spiritual entropy he
finds in Washington.

Yet Gold himself participates in this decline with his willingness to put his verbal skills at the service of the President in exchange for a government post. Thus he quite readily debases both himself and language by writing a committee report exactly as the Texas Senator instructs him, using meaningless jargon to obscure the truth that the committee did nothing. Of course the "Gold standard" of linguistic opportunism finds ample company in the above-mentioned scribblers of memoirs and in those like Newsome who use words to distort or hide the truth, which contributes to Washington's moral decline by veiling it in meaningless contradictions or inflated rhetoric.

Gold's words sometimes strike truth, however; the "Gold standard" can also be seen as the joking cynicism that unintentionally exposes the mindlessness and moral vacuity behind Washington's veneer. For example, Gold flippantly remarks that America should exchange its poor people for Russia's rich people because Russia is a "good place for people who are poor and a terrible one for those who are well off, while this country is just the reverse" (428). Overwhelmed by this "perfect solution" (429), Newsome promises Gold anything, even the Nobel Prize. That he takes Gold's whimsical suggestion seriously not only attests to Washington's intellectual and moral bankruptcy but also hints at the grave implications of this sorry state, for Newsome's phrase "the perfect solution," alludes to Hitler's extermination of the Jews, which he saw as the solution to Germany's problems. Gold's cynical witticisms thus become a standard of truth in Washington:

"How close, as Ralph had discerned, Gold often came by whim, jealousy,
and blind intuition to the fundamental truths of his world" (199)—
the most fundamental of these being Gold's vision of entropy—
physical, moral, spiritual, and intellectual.

Although Gold participates in Washington's moral and linguistic
entropy by prostituting his verbal skills, he eventually redeems him-
self by accepting his family responsibilities and by writing his book,
which presents himself and his struggles with his desires and am-
bitions in a critical and unflattering light. And by trying to write
an honest book about his experience with his family and Washington's
elite, he turns his old standard of opportunism into one of truth.
It is not scientifically "objective" truth, however, but rather Gold's
attempt to present reality as honestly as possible by exposing his own
personal biases and shortcomings as part of that reality. Thus his
Yiddish slang portrait of Henry Kissinger says less about its object
than it does about Gold's inflated egotism. He undermines his ex-
pressed contempt for Kissinger by showing that it is based on personal
jealousy: Kissinger had possessed the power and position that Gold
coveted. And because Kissinger, like Gold, was an intellectual and
college professor before he gained political power, Gold himself—in
his toadying eagerness to sell his intellect to an inane administra-
tion—becomes a parody of the man he hates. In other words, Gold
presents his earlier self in his book as a parody of his conception of
Kissinger, a conception based in part on Gold's own envy, egotism,
and lust for power. At the same time, his personal animus does not
mean that what he says is not true; it merely puts it in the context
of his motivations.
Gold also presents Washington through this double perspective of earlier and later visions: as he first perceived it through its own myth and as he later saw the reality. Thus Gold's two views of Washington, as Eden and as moral wasteland, correspond to the novel's double narrative perspective of Gold as the naive hero who experiences what happens in the narrative and Gold as author, who organizes and retells what he experienced with the advantage of hindsight: he can give his earlier experience aesthetic shape and moral resonance, bring out ironies, even make fun of himself, much in the manner of Pip's dual narrative perspective in *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Gold achieves irony, for example, by undermining his Edenic view of Washington with glimpses of its underlying reality, as he does by following his "glimpse of heaven" with Newsome's remark about "death camps" (122). Shape and resonance he achieves through presenting his inner conflicts as a moral tale whose narrative alternates between worlds of antithetical values, with individuality and responsibility on the family side, and the self-indulgent pursuit of personal gain above all else on the political side. By imposing this scheme on his experience, Gold transforms his life into literature, or what he calls his "abstract autobiography"—his personal experience reorganized around an "abstract" aesthetic and moral pattern that makes the experience significant by defining its underlying values and assumptions.

Heller once described *Good as Gold* as "a Catch-22 without the morbid texture."9 Though Gold's struggle, like Yossarian's, is with the institutionalized forces of power, his conflict is more complex
because it is more ambiguous: Gold has internalized many of the values and assumptions of the political and social establishment that dehumanizes him, including the anti-Semitism that makes him despise himself and want to escape his identity and family. Thus while Yossarian struggled to save his life and Slocum his sanity, Gold must fight to hang onto his humanity (his identity and human values) against a formidable array of external and internal forces. In this struggle against his own ambitions and moral entropy, against being turned from "man" into "matter" like Rosenblatt, Gold's family and his writing play a crucial role in defining the values that save Gold.
FOOTNOTES

1Rita Christopher, "On the Train from Wilmington," Macleans, 16 April 1979, p. 46. Heller told Ms. Christopher, "With *Good as Gold*, I was giving a reading in Wilmington, Delaware, and a woman asked me why I'd never written about the American Jewish experience. I told her it had taken me 18 years just to write two novels and I'd never really thought of it before. . . . Anyway, I had a three-hour train ride back from Wilmington with nothing to do. I took out a pencil and some cards and that's how it started."

2All page numbers in the text refer to *Good as Gold* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).


5In "Writing under the Influence," *Writers Digest*, August 1979, p. 15, Heller explains that for *Good as Gold* he "intentionally read English comic writers—Austen, Dickens, Wodehouse, and Waugh. I was looking for certain kinds of 'literary cliches', and I needed to find the right kind of language, the right kind of cadence and pacing for my book."

6Leonard Michaels makes a similar point in his review, noting that Andrea and Conover, "comic Protestants of Gold's imagination, play the same roles Jews once played in the Protestant imagination." Conover and the other Protestant characters, he says, are the "product of Gold's fears and self-hate" (p. 24).

Gold's dismay reflects Heller's, who told an interviewer that he was "getting very envious . . . of seeing other writers get huge sums of money for not very good books. . . . It's now so profitable to get a book out of public office that few can resist." See Maria Lenhart, "Wielding Humor's Two-Edged Sword," Christian Science Monitor, 9 April 1979, p. B3. Good as Gold reportedly sold to Simon and Schuster for a $2 million advance, which at the time (1977) was the "biggest advance for a novel in history." During this period it was rumored that Henry Kissinger's memoirs were being offered for about the same figure. See "Stellar Sum for Heller Novel," New York, 7 February 1977, p. 60.

Chapter V

WE BOMBED IN NEW HAVEN

From the curtain's "premature" rising upon an unfinished military set (7) to the captain's closing insistence that it is only a "show" in a "theater" (218), *We Bombed in New Haven* calls attention to itself as a play-within-a-play.¹ The soldiers arranging the props of the Air Force briefing room must fly bombing missions to Constantinople in the first act and Minnesota in the second because "it says so" (12)—"it" being the manuscript that the Major carries and works on occasionally, which turns out to be the script of the play. As author and officer the Major controls the men and the war to which Captain Starkey summons them. Persistently reminding themselves, however, that they are merely actors playing the parts of soldiers, the men don't believe that anyone will really die. But when Corporal Sinclair, scheduled to die on the Constantinople mission, disappears after the mission and can't be found anywhere on the set, Sergeant Henderson begins to wonder if their roles are as safe as they had assumed. And when he learns that the script decrees his own death on the Minnesota mission, he decides to flee. But Captain Starkey persuades him to confront the Major with his decision to leave, and as a result, the Major has him shot. When Henderson and the other airmen complained in the first act that they deserved larger, more important roles, they didn't think their parts would include real death.
In dramatizing the men's denial of war and death, this play-within-a-play reflected a current situation: American participation in an undeclared and therefore unacknowledged war. That Heller invited three political leaders—New York City John Lindsay, Senator Eugene McCarthy, and Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau—to the Broadway opening (October 16, 1968) of We Bombed in New Haven says much about this topical theme: its opposition to American involvement in the war in Vietnam, a protest shared and voiced by all three politicians.² This gesture likewise captures the play's historical milieu. In 1968 the student movement against the Vietnam War reached a new intensity, expressed not only in the peace marches in Washington, D.C. and on college campuses, but in the large antiwar demonstrations in Chicago during the Democratic Convention that summer. The feeling that the United States should withdraw its troops from the undeclared war was spreading among political leaders and others besides college students. Perhaps a sign of this growing opposition to the war was the audience's response to the play's ending: instead of applause, silence reigned, suggesting that Heller had indeed achieved one of his avowed objectives: "to make every woman cry and every man feel guilty when he has to go home and face his sons."³ Heller saw the Vietnam conflict as a senseless and illegal war against things, a view echoed by the rebellious character Henderson, who declares: "But this war beats them all. There's no enemy in this one. There are just things, and we go out and destroy them, just because they're things" (127).⁴ The author registered his opposition not only by writing the play, but also by participating in peace marches, speaking out publicly against the war,
and supporting Senator McCarthy, the first presidential candidate in 1968 to make ending the war his primary issue. 5

Yet however firmly rooted in the antiwar ferment of the late 1960's, We Bombed in New Haven transcends its topical frame of reference by focusing less explicitly upon the Vietnam War itself (it contains no direct references to this war or to the movement protesting it) than upon the fictions that help make war possible, particularly the notion that war and death are themselves just "fictions." As a result, Heller constructs We Bombed in New Haven around the play-within-a-play motif, in which the actors frequently explain that they are merely performing in a fictional play, rather than participating in a real war. Early in Act I, for example, Henderson brags to his fellow soldier Sinclair that he's not afraid because "It's only a play . . . this soldier I'm pretending to be never even lived, so how could I get killed? He's fictitious, a figment of somebody's imagination" (40). Such denials dramatize the feeling of unreality that facilitates the killing of war: no one believes that death is really occurring. From his own World War II experience Heller describes this perceptual groundwork of the play:

There is the feeling that you're not doing what you're really doing. When I used to drop bombs on things, I always felt that I wasn't really doing this, that nobody was really getting hurt . . . . And then the converse of that is I never believed I could get killed. . . . Until one day I almost got killed and then I realized I could get killed and then I didn't want any more of it. 6

And when Henderson, like Heller, begins to see through this primary fiction (the belief that war and death are fictions) because he can't find Sinclair, he decides to quit the war and the play. His
betrayal and death in Act 2 complete the main dramatic action of the plot (which began with Sinclair's disappearance in Act 1), though the symbolic moral consequences of Starkey's role in Henderson's death become the drama's ending: Starkey must send his own son to war and death, 19 years later, as a replacement for Henderson.

Starkey's son issues from the subplot, centering around Starkey and Ruth, the Red Cross girl he marries upon learning that she is pregnant. But besides providing this son, the subplot's importance lies in Ruth, who becomes the play's touchstone in that she seems more aware than the others (except the Major) that something more dangerous than "acting" is going on. It is she who first suspects Sinclair's death, she who tries to hide Henderson when he decides to quit, and she who warns Starkey not to come home if he lets anything happen to Henderson. Her part is small but pivotal: her doubts trigger Henderson's search for Sinclair. And in her frustration with her minor role and frequent reiteration of the dramatic lines she'd rather play, Ruth exemplifies the motif, echoed by the other actors, of wanting bigger and better roles. Unfortunately, this desire not only reinforces the delusion of being in a play instead of a war; it also fuels the airmen-actors' petty ambitions to advance within the fictional hierarchy. Corporal Bailey is so eager to replace Sergeant Henderson after he "dies" on the Minnesota mission that he doesn't care what really happens to him.7 Ruth, however, is more in touch with human values as well as with what is going on; her sense of responsibility does not atrophy because of her thespian ambitions. She tries to save Henderson, but fails.
Sinclair, Henderson, and Starkey all discover too late the danger of seeing war and death as fictions in which they are merely playing roles. In dramatizing this primary fiction, the forms it takes, and how it is used by the soldiers as well as those in authority over them, Heller shows that because of the human tendency to create and employ "fictions" (false assumptions, rationalizations, pretenses, untruths) to block or distort reality, the writer must create new "fictions" (literature, art) to point out such distortions and renew man's awareness of his circumstances. As a fiction We Bombed in New Haven exposes the destructive fictions that allow the Vietnam War—or any war—to continue. Because the characters think of themselves as actors just "playing" a war, most of them go on performing their roles without trying to change the situation; they do not believe that any mortal consequences will follow. But such assumptions, in We Bombed in New Haven, prove fatal.

Moreover, by constructing his play around the actors' denial of war and death, Heller obliquely attacks what he sees as his country's denial of the Vietnam War: Americans were dying in a conflict unacknowledged by the government as a real war because no Act of War had been declared by the Congress, which in turn made many people feel that the military draft for Vietnam was illegal. Not surprisingly, in an interview Heller related his play to "the pretexts we erect for ourselves" and "the lies we are told by our government."

We Bombed in New Haven shows how the actors' pretexts about their situation are part of the fictions promoted by the military. For example, the characters' denial of war and death serves the interests
of the bureaucratic authorities running the war. By encouraging the fiction of war as a play or game, the officers help insure that the soldiers continue fighting, forgetful of their own mortality and any desire to rebel against such an end. Therefore when Henderson asks Starkey about Sinclair's mysterious disappearance, Starkey uses the "play-fiction" (the pretext of being in a play, not a war) to deny the reality of Sinclair's death:

Starkey: There was no Sinclair.

Henderson: Then how can he be dead and buried?

Starkey: He wasn't real. I'm not real. I'm pretending, and I'm sure that . . . all of you out there, have seen me act many, many times before. . . (94).

Although this explanation doesn't satisfy Henderson, the other men accept it, for the most part fulfilling their obedient, soldierly roles.

But it is the Major himself who most fully exemplifies this exploitation of the play-fiction to keep the men in line. When the play opens, he is shown working on the script of the play, which he uses to remind the others of their roles and to enforce his orders. Thus when the men ask why they must bomb the non-existent Constantinople, his answer seems to indicate the script: "Because it says so" (47). But when asked about "it" he grows more vague: "It? It is it. It is the thing we have to do, and it is the thing that makes us do it" (47). His deliberately confusing evasion hides his crude power: he, as the author of the script, has the power to make the airmen do whatever he chooses. He sidesteps this point, however, instead using the script to create an illusion of some greater, more impersonal authority behind his commands, which makes them harder to question and lets him
shift responsibility for them to another vague source, the hypothetical "it." Yet Major and manuscript represent more than the officers' exploitation of the men's belief in the play-fiction. By making him author of the script that controls all actions, Heller suggests not only that the actors may have no free will, but also that the fictions (beliefs and assumptions) of the people holding power and authority in society will be the fictions that determine how that society is governed and in whose interests. Thus if one of these assumptions, like the Major's, is that his power gives him the right to destroy whoever questions it, then there's little that those without such power can do: i.e., no one can stop the Major from killing Henderson since the Major controls the script.

Not that the authorities usually need to employ such crude tactics, however, particularly when popular culture and even literature become their accomplices in promoting the play-fiction among the men. For example, when Starkey first announces to his men that they are ordered to a war, they immediately start horsing around, burlesqueing the popular cliches and songs from previous wars: "One imitates a cavalry bugle call while another springs forward off his chair brandishing an invisible saber" (22-23). They perform attacks on "Japs" and Nazis and imitate the famous Iwo Jima photograph of World War II while singing "From the halls of Montezuma" (24). Seeing the war in terms of its popular imagery and stereotypes, the soldiers keep war at a distance, in a fictional realm that allows them to treat it as a non-threatening joke or a scene from an old movie.

But if popular culture in We Bombed in New Haven turns war into
vaudeville burlesque, "high" culture—as excerpts from the great literature of Western Civilization—may turn it into a grand heroic adventure. More than once Starkey and others repeat the famous lines from Shakespeare's Henry V (III, i, 1-2):

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; Or close the wall up with our English dead (43).

When repeating these lines, the soldiers reinforce their belief in the play-fiction, even while ironically calling attention to their ambition to act in a somewhat more heroic drama than We Bombed in New Haven. Whereas Starkey uses the lines to manipulate the men into a zealous acceptance of their soldierly roles by making them feel heroic. For instance, in telling Henderson to play his part, he again quotes from Henry V (III, i, 3-6):

In peace there's nothing so becomes a man As modest stillness and humility; But when the blast of war blows in our ears, Then imitate the actions of the tiger! (143)

Throughout the play, references to literary works and popular stereotypes "remind" the men that they are just acting. Such allusions distance the real war and death by creating a comforting fictional framework around them, thereby forestalling the critical thinking and questioning that might expose the play-fiction and its deliberate use by Starkey and the Major. Why question, after all, the notions that make them feel safe? Of course another reason the soldiers believe so readily in the play-fiction can be found in man's instinctive avoidance of painful realities. Relying on this fiction to save them from war and death, however, turns out to be a deadly mistake.

But while Starkey calls on literary fictions to make the men obey
their roles, he tries to gloss over the point Henderson raises, which
is that some roles are better than others. Again Starkey employs
literature to justify his orders, this time quoting from the writings
of Roman emperor Augustus Caesar:

Remember, . . . that you are an actor in a play, the
character of which is determined by the Playwright. . . .
if He wishes you to play the part of a beggar, remember to
act even this role adroitly . . . . For this is your
business, to play admirably the role assigned you—
(143-44).

This fatalistic view lets Starkey avoid responsibility for others
(much as the Major shifts blame to the script) and ignore the fact
that his role is indeed better than Henderson's because it does not
include dying on a mission. Furthermore, Starkey knows that "nothing
bad" will happen to him as long as he sticks to his role as captain
and administrator, for the Major tells him so: "You'll always be safe,
because you do your job and you don't take chances, . . . Nothing bad
ever happens to you" (54). And when doing his job means sending men
like Sinclair and Henderson to their deaths on missions, he clings
adamantly to the play-fiction to avoid responsibility, just in case
their deaths turn out to be real. Although he sometimes appears
genuinely confused about whether he is acting in a real war or a
fictional one, he resorts to the play-fiction whenever it suits his
purposes of command or self-justification. With fatherly joviality he
tells Henderson, when he protests going on the mission where he's
scheduled to die, "The play's the thing, and the play must go on. So
pitch in now with the others--" (148).

Starkey likes to complain that his role is too confining for an
actor of his stature and a man of his principles. But in spite of the
"very deep convictions" he claims as a "very decent and respectable and sensitive human being" (171), he lacks the courage to deviate from his fictional role as captain, not only because he knows it protects him from personal danger, but also because he fears authority, a cowardice exposed when the Major threatens him with his fist (169). This fear has conditioned Starkey to automatically fulfill his role, with the result that it has become more real to him than the deaths of Sinclair and Henderson. Too late he learns the consequences of adhering to his "safe" part of following orders. The play-fiction he so readily exploited when persuading others to carry out these orders breaks down when he must send his own son to die on a mission. His denial of death and war at the play's end becomes a futile attempt to convince himself that his son's death is just an event in a play:

Now, none of this, of course, is really happening. It's a show, a play in a theater, and I'm not really a captain. I'm an actor . . . It's only . . . make-believe . . . . Nobody has ever been killed (218-19).

Here the play-fiction stands exposed for what it is to Starkey: a means of evading responsibility. And by adhering to the play-fiction after he knows beyond a doubt that it is a fiction, the captain reveals what he is: a moral coward who does what he is told and chooses not to see the consequences. But his son's implicit death no longer allows him to see his actions as merely fictional and inconsequential, and it forces him to face the fact that by sticking to his role he saved his own skin and inflicted real death on other real human beings.

While the actors' notion of the war as a staged drama provides the play's controlling framework, We Bombed in New Haven also dramatizes how the idea of war as "play"—as a game, a sport, a contest—
is exploited by the officers to heighten the unreality of war and death. The gradual transformation of the Hunter and Golfer from jovial sportsmen into machinelike military police—and the ease with which they shift from sports to military maneuvers, using hunting rifle and golf club as weapons—establishes a connection between war and games which the original title of the play made explicit: "Let's Play Soldier: A Game of War in Three Acts." The key scene, however, that symbolizes how the "game-fiction" (the idea that war is a game) operates on the men occurs at the end of Act I, where Starkey brings out the "secret weapons" designed to win men's "minds and souls" (98). These include a baseball bat, basketballs, a football, and a game called "Time Bomb," as well as children's toys and infant pacifiers. At first skeptical about such silliness, the men soon form teams and begin a football match, becoming increasingly hostile and aggressive until their play disintegrates into a "brutal free-for-all" (101). Once Starkey has induced this regression to a childish state of fierce rivalry, a few more steps backwards—playing with building blocks, then rattles, and finally pacifiers—reduce the men to infants: "The men put the nipples in their mouths and begin slowly to relax and lie down in positions that suggest a complete reversion to infancy" (103). Last he introduces the game "Time Bomb," in which the men play hot-potato with a ticking wind-up toy (whoever holds the toy when the bell goes off is the loser). During the second round of the game, however, the toy explodes right after Starkey yells at the men to throw it far away. Therefore when the third round begins with a new toy, the soldiers are terrified but powerless to reject the command to play, as
if the entire game sequence has hypnotically transformed them into childlike, obedient automatons.

And that is the point. The game sequence demonstrates the psychological manipulation underlying certain types of military training. By adopting the familiar ritual and language of childhood sports and games, the military in We Bombed in New Haven turns men into boys: fiercely aggressive towards the enemy "team," yet obedient to and dependent on their own captain. The Time Bomb game further increases this dependency by confusing the men's sense of reality; their uncertainty about the "toy" or "bomb" frightens them into reflexively following the game rules and relying on the captain to tell them what to do. As a result, they equate obedience with protection. This formula, however, which makes the officer into a protective team captain and father-figure, eventually proves to be another false assumption promoted by the notion of war as a game. Henderson, for example, makes the mistake of believing it when he lets Starkey's fatherly pose persuade him to confront the Major. By instilling automatic dependence on such false fathers, the game-fiction prevents the thinking, questioning, and testing of reality that could expose the erroneous assumption of protection. Moreover, in its dramatizing of the men's reversion to childish behavior, the game sequence also hints that war itself may be a form of human regression, a reversion to an immature but deadly method of solving problems.

But the most important effect of making the men see war as a game or sport is that, like the play-fiction, it makes death unreal—a penalty lifted once the game ends. And distracted by the ideas of
teamwork, competition, and the importance of winning, the men forget about their own personal mortality in the fervor of the sport. The game-fiction, then, is one of the "secret weapons" used by the officers to make soldiers participate more readily in war. After repeating deceptively simple routines and rituals that enforce the notion of war as a game with rules that must be obeyed at all times, the men learn to behave automatically in situations far more deadly than sports.

Through symbolic actions like the game sequence, We Bombed in New Haven reveals how the management of war relies on the soldiers' perception of war and death as fictions. The play goes a step further, however, to address audience participation in these fictions. Just as Starkey's denial of responsibility for what occurs in the war ("I don't kill anybody," he tells a young soldier, p. 149) eventually turns on him when he must send his own son as a replacement for Henderson, We Bombed in New Haven suggests that by allowing the government to continue sending men to fight and die in an undeclared and therefore "illegal" war, the audience is passively condoning the war and at the same time participating in the fiction that it doesn't exist. Direct references to the audience's passivity point to its responsibility for the war through doing nothing to stop it, such as Starkey's response to the Major's plan to kill Henderson: "Oh, no. They won't let you. They won't just sit there and let you kill him" (166). But they do.

Nor can the audience avoid the implications of the two missions. In the first act, the men complain about being sent to bomb the non-
existent "Constantinople" (now Istanbul). Whereas the current war was just the reverse: men were being sent to a real place to fight a war that didn't "officially" exist. But in both cases something "fictional" causes real death: a non-existent place, an unacknowledged war. When the mission target becomes Minnesota in Act 2, however, Heller implies that the denial or "fictionizing" of the distant war (Constantinople/Vietnam) lets it not only continue but spread, since the denials prevent the action that would stop it. The Minnesota mission brings the war "home" to the audience, just as Starkey's responsibility for his actions within the chain of command finally comes home to him when he must send his own son to his death in the war.

Not all the fictions presented in We Bombed in New Haven are so destructive, however, nor does the play establish a wholly negative view of man's fiction-making. Some, like the play itself, point out reality rather than obscure it. Quotations from other literary fictions provide ironic commentary to elucidate the play's focus. For example, when Ruth quotes from Our Town because she wants to say "something simple and beautiful and true" (153) about their situation, the point is the jarring contrast: the war and death in We Bombed in New Haven are not "simple and beautiful" but truly ugly realities that the characters prefer to think of as fictions. This ironic use of literary allusions—to Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, Yeats, Housman, Pirandello, Wilder, and others—serves Heller's examination of fictions in another sense, too. By focusing on the discrepancy between the poetry of Shakespeare, for example, and the drab reality in which the characters find themselves embedded, Heller underscores the problem.
faced by all makers of literary fictions—that of finding the appropriate fictional forms for the vision they seek to present. And if that vision is the evasion of truth as a result of certain fictions, what better form than one that calls attention to itself as a fiction through the play-within-a-play motif? Those reviewers who faulted *We Bombed in New Haven* for being derivative of Pirandello have missed the unique appropriateness of this self-conscious device to Heller's presentation of the relationship between fictions and war.

Heller was thinking about war and the military draft and perhaps his own nine-year-old son when the idea for the play came to him: he had reached the part in writing *Something Happened* where the young son asks his father if he will ever have to join the army.13 That he outlined his initial conception as a television play was not unusual, for he had already written one television script for the first "McHale's Navy."14 Moreover, a television production would reach more people than a live stage version of the play that registered Heller's opposition to American intervention in the Vietnam conflict. But the many revisions Heller made between its inception and the final edition suggest that he was never quite satisfied with the play.15

Heller sent his initial 18-page outline to the television networks with no success.16 But in 1966, when he submitted a draft of the play to Robert Brustein, then dean of the Yale School of Drama, Brustein enthusiastically invited Heller to come to Yale University as playwright-in-residence while they produced it.17 Heller accepted and after numerous revisions (deleting many of the literary allusions, for example), *We Bombed in New Haven*, directed by Larry Arrick and with
the lead (Starkey) played by Stacey Keach, premiered at the Yale Theater on December 4, 1967. After this production ended, Heller made extensive changes in preparing the play for its Broadway debut in October 1968. This revised Yale script, submitted for the Broadway production, became the basis of the hardcover edition published by Knopf in 1968 (the Delta paperback based on this edition appeared in 1969).

For the Broadway production, Heller added a lot of comic material that he had dropped from an earlier draft which preceded the Yale script. When We Bombed in New Haven finished its run at the Ambassador Theater (directed by John Hirsch and starring Jason Robards), Heller altered the play again, establishing the revised Broadway script as the final version for all future productions. Another paperback edition, apparently based on this last script, was published by Dell in 1970 as the final library edition, and it varies considerably from the 1968 Knopf edition. The Dell text omits, for example, some of the longer literary allusions as well as the vaudeville antics in the early part of Act 2: a bowling ball rolling across the stage, the players streaming in with various toys from the last scene of Act 1, the Major entering in a bowling team outfit with a bowling ball. From the original outline to the final edition, We Bombed in New Haven underwent over a dozen versions.

More than likely We Bombed in New Haven will remain Heller's only original play; in interviews he has emphasized that he considers himself a novelist, not a playwright, and that he does not plan to write another play. Yet this play is not the anomaly in his career
that it first seems, for a closer look at Heller's life and work reveals a steady interest in drama. The Pulitzer Prize-winning plays formed the subject of his M. A. thesis in American Literature at Columbia University, and he has taught courses in dramatic writing. Nor was We Bombed in New Haven his first effort: he collaborated with George Mandel on two dramatic works (these never materialized as productions), wrote the "McHale's Navy" script, and helped rewrite the screenplays of several movies. He also completed a stage version of Catch-22 and published the one-act play, Clevinger's Trial. Moreover, one of Heller's great strengths as a novelist is dialogue, where he excels in dramatic timing to achieve comic, ironic or absurd effects. Thus We Bombed in New Haven can be seen as a natural outgrowth of Heller's talent and interests, instead of merely an experiment provoked by the Vietnam War.

It can also be viewed as a continuation of certain themes and techniques that concerned him in Catch-22, and later in Something Happened. For example, in Catch-22 and We Bombed in New Haven the discovery of death leads to a crucial action in the plot: after a fellow airman dies on a bombing mission, both Yossarian and Henderson decide to flee. In both works the bombing missions are the primary cause of death and partake of similar betrayals: Milo accepts a mission from the Germans to bomb his own squadron, while the soldiers in the play must bomb the home territory of Minnesota. Last, both works employ increasingly grim humor to underscore serious issues: actions that initially provoke laughter, such as the Sportsmen's clumsy attempts to learn a military drill, may later evoke horror--
at the machinelike brutality of the Sportsmen-turned-MP's, for example. With *Something Happened* as well as *Catch-22, We Bombed in New Haven* shares an exploration of "personal relationships to bureaucratic authority." Captain Starkey's ambivalent, fearful attitude towards the Major is not unlike Slocum's towards his boss, and all three works expose how competition and fear come to dominate human relationships within a bureaucratic hierarchy, whether military or corporate.

But Heller was particularly concerned in his play with the social and psychological manipulation employed by bureaucratic authority to make people participate more readily in war. His symbolic portrayal, through dramatizing the play-fiction and game-fiction, of these manipulative tactics, carries a message and a warning for other seasons, too. *We Bombed in New Haven* should outlast its original political context as a minor achievement by a major American novelist.
FOOTNOTES

1 All page numbers in the text refer to We Bombed in New Haven (New York: Dell, 1970).


6 "Joseph Heller's We Bombed in New Haven: A Collection of Thoughts," Yale/Theatre, 1 (Spring 1968), 106. This same perception underlies Yossarian's discovery of death through Snowden in Catch-22.


8 Heller told Gonzales, p. 218, "He's [President Nixon] never sought a declaration of war for the Vietnam war and so consequently it's an illegal war. It's a moot point as to whether the Selective Service Act can be enforced and the government has carefully avoided any court case which would bring the legality of the war into question." Heller once said that the Vietnam conflict was "the ridiculous war I felt lurking in the future when I wrote [Catch-22]." See Josh Greenfeld, "22 Was Funnier than 14," New York Times Book Review, 3 March 1968, p. 51, rpt. in A 'Catch-22' Casebook, eds. Frederick Kiley and Walter McDonald (New York: Crowell, 1973), p. 253.

9 Murry Frymer, "He Adds Another Catch to List," Newsday, 14 October 1968, p. 40A.
10. Heller remarked that the script the Major carries makes the audience ask questions about free will. See Shenker, "Did Heller Bomb...?" p. D1.

11. The title given to the typed revision of the original 18-page outline, included among Joseph Heller's papers on We Bombed in New Haven at the library of Brandeis University, item #1 (hereafter cited as Brandeis WB Papers).

12. In a letter to Robert Brustein about the play (22 August 1967), Heller made it clear that he considered the on-stage action symbolic rather than traditionally realistic. He described his play as a "dramatization of the symbolic in a tone of realism, moving from the abstruse to the specific." Brandeis WB Papers, item #2b.


14. Heller's original television script, entitled "PT 73 Where Are You?" was rewritten by another writer without his knowledge or consent. Heller asked the producers to remove his name from the re-written script, but he appears in the credits as a collaborator.


16. Brandeis WB Papers, items #1 and #2a.

17. Braudy, p. 44.

18. Brandeis WB Papers, item #4 (13 March 1967 script) contains many of the literary allusions Heller deleted.

19. Brandeis WB Papers, item #6c (8 September 1967 script). He deleted, for example, an explanation of the Idiots as a "mute Greek chorus." Braudy, p. 45, notes that the Broadway production was originally scheduled for April 1968, but that "a combination of factors including a lukewarm review from Times critic Clive Barnes convinced him to delay the opening of the play and re-work parts of it." For Barnes' reviews of both Yale and Broadway productions, see "Theater: We Bombed in New Haven," New York Times, 7 December 1967, p. 58 and "Theater: Heller's We Bombed in New Haven Opens," New York Times, 17 October 1968, p. 51.

20. Brandeis WB Papers, item #8 (8 January 1968 scripts).
21 Brandeis WB Papers, item #9a (11 June 1968 script). This script includes much comic material dropped from the 13 March 1967 script. This material was interpolated just before the Broadway rehearsals began.

22 We Bombed in New Haven previewed at the Ambassador Theater from October 3rd to the 15th, and ran from October 16th to December 29th (1968). It was subsidized by the Theater Development Fund, which bought $10,000 worth of tickets and sold them at a discount to students, teachers, and others. See Sam Zolotow, "Financial Aid Due for Heller Play," New York Times, 7 August 1968, p. 38.

23 Brandeis WB Papers, item #13 (final scripts). The "final production version" is dated 6 January 1969.

24 C. E. Reilly and Carol Villei, "An Interview with Joseph Heller," Delaware Literary Review, Spring 1975, p. 21. Heller told his interviewers, "I don't think of anything other than novel-writing as serious work for me. It's demanding, it's work, but to me, that's my writing." When recently asked if he plans to write any more plays, Heller said no (17 July 1980, response to questions sent by M. Young).

25 For manuscripts pertaining to the Mandel collaboration, see Brandeis Miscellaneous Papers of Joseph Heller, items #15z-2 ("The Bird in the Feverbloom Suit") and #15z-3 ("The Breakwater"). The Brandeis collection also includes the script and other papers pertaining to the "McHale's Navy" script (1962). Heller helped rewrite the following movie screenplays: Sex and the Single Girl (wrote the final version, 1963), Casino Royale (about two weeks' work, revising, 1967), and Dirty Dingus Magee (about four weeks' work, revising, 1970).

26 Shenker, "Joseph Heller Draws Dead Bead...," p. 49.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

At first glance Heller's novels may strike one as so different from each other that they hardly seem to be written by the same pen. The protagonists—a rebellious soldier, a depressed corporate executive, a cynical college professor—could hardly be less alike in personality, role, or milieux. Yet a closer examination of Heller's novels and play together reveals that all spring from a unified world view, one that looks critically at American institutions and values and satirizes what it sees: a society in which the institutional forces of order create chaos, destroying human lives, liberty, identity, and values.

One way of getting at the underlying unity of Heller's satirical vision is through a book Heller himself read, The Power Elite by C. Wright Mills.\(^1\) Published in 1956, this sociological work was an important book to the intellectuals of the 1950's. Although Mills' book may have directly influenced Heller's own thinking on the issue of power in American society, I see the correspondences in their focus simply as evidence of concerns shared by persons of similar intellectual and political sympathies: both belong to the liberal, political left that is highly critical of practices within the established and conservative repositories of American power (although Heller claims to have become more "conservative" with time). Thus Heller's views do not necessarily derive from Mills' work; he could
have arrived at the same conclusions independently. Seeing Heller's themes in terms of Mills' analysis merely helps clarify the unifying ideas of Heller's vision by putting them in a broader sociological perspective.

Taking as his focus the problem and nature of the power structure in America, Mills defines a "power elite" composed of those occupying the "command posts" (16) in the three institutions in which all major national power is concentrated: the political order centralized in the executive establishment of Washington, D.C., the economic order dominated by a network of giant corporations, and the military. These large and centralized bureaucracies of state, corporation, and army constitute the means of both acquiring and exercising power in America, and the people filling the top positions in their formal hierarchies comprise an interdependent and interlocking "directorate" of overlapping cliques whose decisions, says Mills, "affect more people than ever before in the history of mankind" (28). Moreover, Mills observes that, as a rule, the members of this elite "have the most of what there is to have" (of what he sees as valued in American society)—i.e., money, power, and prestige—because their institutional posts provide not only access but considerable control over access to these things as well. And the effect of this concentration of national power in an interlocking directorate at the top of these three institutional hierarchies (each one alone having grown increasingly centralized and powerful) is to destroy the balance of power and other safeguards that insure a democratic society. This trend, as Mills sees it, is towards still more consolidation of power by the elite which in turn makes the
public powerless and fragmented, without a voice in the decisions affecting their daily lives:

The top of modern American society is increasingly unified, and often seems willfully co-ordinated: at the top there has emerged an elite of power. The middle levels are a drifting set of stalemated, balancing forces: the middle does not link the bottom with the top. The bottom of this society is politically fragmented, and even as a passive fact, increasingly powerless: at the bottom there is emerging a mass society (324).

Heller's work dramatizes and satirizes this trend. Heller shares Mills' moral concern over the power of this elite; in fact his major theme of the "order" that produces "chaos" focuses upon the three branches of national power that Mills describes: in Catch-22, Heller satirizes the military and economic orders (and through Milo Minderbinder exposes their interconnection); in We Bombed in New Haven, he again examines the army bureaucracy; in Something Happened, he scrutinizes the corporate milieu; and in Good as Gold, he satirically attacks the political establishment of the nation's capital. In each work his satirical thrust is not merely the exposure of the power elite but of its effects as well on individual, community, and the shared values that support human life. Heller's deepest concern is the preserving of human values in a society where the powerful few seem bent on destroying them by substituting their own private interests for those of the general welfare. Thus the corollary of Heller's thematic equation of the power elite's "order" with "chaos" is what defines this chaos: the attempt to turn "man" into "matter" by destroying something essential to his humanity, such as life, liberty, conscience, identity, sanity, or the values that support these. In short, Heller
examines this dehumanization caused, ironically, by the organizations founded presumably for the betterment of individual and society.

Resisting such chaos in each work is an individual entangled in one of these institutional systems: Yossarian (Catch-22) and Henderson (We Bombed in New Haven) struggle to save their lives from the military bureaucracy; Slocum (Something Happened) tries, for a time, to salvage his identity and sanity from the corporate conformity that fragments them; and Gold (Good as Gold) must struggle to save his humanity from the political-social establishment and his own ambition to join their inner circles. This conflict of individual and institutionalized authority is the heart of Heller's satirical vision, a conflict that grows more complex and subtle in Something Happened and Good as Gold because the protagonists have internalised many of the values and assumptions of the establishment that dehumanizes them: both Slocum and Gold have ambitions and self-images shaped by the powers that exploit them.

Like Mills, Heller locates the root of this elite's destructiveness in its subversion of values—the substitution of the private values, interests, and idiosyncracies of the powerful for shared human values such as life, liberty, and justice. In Heller's fictional world the empowered few no longer represent the interests of the many but instead exploit them. In Catch-22, Colonel Cathcart's reduction of everything to "Feathers in My Cap!!! !!!!" or "Black Eyes!!!" (217) that will improve or impede his chances for promotion exemplifies this subversion of values because it symbolizes his pursuit of self-interest at any human cost, his bid for preferment being the reason he
keeps raising the number of missions which in turn sends men to their
deaths. ² Cathcart, the "Major" who controls the script of the play *We
Bombed in New Haven*, and the powerful millionaire Conover (*Good as
Gold*) could all be cited as satirical dramatizations of, in Mills'
words, "men of decision [who] enforce their often crackpot definitions
upon world reality" (360).

Heller's novels demonstrate that from this basic subversion of
values flows the destruction of life, identity, and community. Snow-
den's death (*Catch-22*), Slocum's impending insanity, and the decay of
the city that Gold observes around him all represent the physical,
personal, and social fragmentation that follows when the power elite's
self-interest replaces all other values.

One result of this subversion is what Mills calls the conversion
of the public into a powerless, manipulated "mass." The community is
no longer an informed, decision-making body because, in the interests
of keeping power within its small circles, the elite has shut off the
sources of information about itself and its activities, creating a
closed power structure that then manipulates the society instead of
informing it. Thus alienated from an understanding of the structure
they inhabit, people lose their sense of community, which depends upon
a structural grasp of the social and political environment.

Slocum within his corporate bureaucratic environment especially
exemplifies this "loss of a sense of structure and the submergence into
powerless milieux" that Mills cites as the "cardinal fact" (321) of
the transformation of the public into a mass society. His feeling of
confinement and isolation in a bureaucratic role and milieu that he
can neither fully comprehend nor escape dramatizes the results of this transformation, and his monotonous daily round bears out Mills' assessment of the quality of life in mass society:

Sunk in their routines, they do not transcend, even by discussion, much less by action, their more or less narrow lives . . . . Each is trapped in his confining circle . . . members of a mass exist in milieux and cannot get out of them, either by mind or activity. . . (320-21).

In Heller's terms, this transformation from an informed, democratic public to a fragmented, manipulated mass is the conversion of man into "matter," into the powerless conforming automaton that Slocum senses he is fast becoming.

Another result of the power elite's control and subversion of values that Heller examines is the moral emptiness and mindlessness that reign. Catch-22 satirizes such moral and mental idiocy through characters like Schiesskopf, who would impose his "crackpot definition" of reality-as-a-parade upon the troops by wiring them together in a perfect marching formation. Good as Gold portrays a similar void within the political sphere by making the President and his associates into mental midgets who devote their zeal to self-promotion rather than the public weal. This novel and Catch-22 in particular illustrate, through their portrayal of the powerful, what Mills calls "the higher ignorance" (350) and the "organized irresponsibility" at the highest levels of the American system: "The mindlessness of the powerful is the true higher immorality of our time" (342). An incident that epitomizes the vicious stupidity and immorality that such "organized irresponsibility" permits and even promotes is Cathcart's order of the bombing of an undefended mountain village so that the aerial photograph
of the "tighter bomb pattern" (197) will impress the General and thus improve his chances for promotion.

In addition, Good as Gold illustrates a point related to this "higher ignorance" among the ruling elite: Gold's final rejection of the Washington political-social circles and the fact that he doesn't "fit in" their milieu implicitly illustrate Mills' observation that "Knowledge and power are not truly united inside the ruling circles; and when men of knowledge do come to a point of contact with the circles of powerful men, they come not as peers but as hired men"(351). Gold is this hired "man of knowledge," who soon discovers that his intellectual abilities have no place in the power structure of Washington.

The mental and moral vacuum Gold finds at the nation's capital belongs not only to the elite's subversion of values but to the "structural immorality" Mills discusses as well: the institutional structures themselves facilitate such subversion. Their size and their concentration of power in a small circle at their pinnacle, Mills points out, undermines private conscience and contributes to impersonal relationships within the structure, for its members do not feel a great deal of responsibility towards each other. Heller's works also criticize such "structural immorality" by relating it to the hierarchical organization of the institutional structures as well as by showing how the concentrated power at the top of the pyramid becomes the "right" to be irresponsible and get away with it. The military bureaucracy and Milo's cartel in Catch-22, the Major in We Bombed in New Haven who can kill anyone he wants because he controls the script, the corporate hierarchy in Something Happened, and the political-social
elite of Washington in Good as Gold—all of these demonstrate power used in an irresponsible and destructive way because, in part, the nature of the hierarchy itself permits and even stimulates it by insulating the elite and thus breeding in them a thoroughgoing indifference to the effects of their actions on others. Thus Milo can, with clear conscience, make men "pay as much as they had to for the things they needed in order to survive" (377).

These four works also dramatize another characteristic of the formal hierarchies they portray: the fact that such structures impose a destructive competitive ethos on their members. For example, in We Bombed in New Haven, Corporal Bailey doesn't worry about Sergeant Henderson's impending death because he is eager to be promoted to his position. In each work Heller portrays similar situations—men who care little or nothing about others because their chief goal is scaling the particular hierarchy they inhabit. Heller also makes the human costs of such "structural immorality" plain; in We Bombed in New Haven and Something Happened, for instance, the death of the protagonist's son at the end is implicitly related to the protagonist's role in a hierarchical bureaucratic structure from which he cannot or will not free himself.

The elite's position in these hierarchies facilitates not only their subversion of values but the accumulation of advantages in acquiring what American society values most, according to Mills: wealth, power, and prestige. But of those things that the power elite regard most highly, pursue with intense devotion, and possess in largest measure, the greatest of these is money. Money, observes
Mills, is the chief and sovereign value in American society, and without it, it is impossible to get power. And where money rules, prestige follows in its glittering wake; the powerful rich therefore define status, which in turn gives them another more subtle control (besides the outright exercise of power and influence) over who has access to wealth.

Heller's novels bear out this critical assessment of American values, for money is a key factor in his exposure of the power elite. For example, Milo, who re-enacts the Horatio Alger myth by building up an international corporate empire from his position as mess hall officer, eventually becomes the most powerful figure in Catch-22, making use of the military to advance his financial designs. His worldwide influence and acclaim testifies to the power and value of money, whereas the fact that his economic empire grew and flourished amid the conditions of war illustrates what Mills describes as the shift, during World War II, of American capitalism to a "permanent war economy" (215). By this he means that American military and corporate industrial complexes have become increasingly interdependent since World War II, supporting each other's aims, advising each other, and appointing directors of one as directors of the other. Milo's use of the military to increase his profits and his hiring its members to work for him thus exemplify a portion of the "interlocking directorate" Mills speaks of, as well as the merging of corporate and military interests in what he calls "military capitalism":

American capitalism is now in considerable part a military capitalism, and the most important relation of the big corporation to the state rests on the
coincidence of interests between military and corporate needs, as defined by warlords and corporate rich (276).

Heller's chapter title, "Milo the Militant" (Chapter 35), reflects this insight as well as Milo's actions do.

In Catch-22, Milo proves that money is power; in Something Happened money is less obtrusive at first but just as pervasive as Milo's wealth; it is the value underlying Slocum's inability to give up his pursuit of corporate success and a materialistic mode of living. Moreover, the fact that he doesn't talk about it much says something about the pretensions of his upper class Protestant milieu: their desire to forget that wealth is the source of their status and to base it instead upon some notion of aristocratic, intrinsic, or moral superiority. But all roads lead to Rome: money eventually emerges clearly as an outspoken value as Slocum edges towards total conformity to the corporate image: he tells his children that money is "everything" and his teenage daughter brags that she loves money "more than anything else in the world" (440). But the unhappiness of Slocum and his family suggests that in Something Happened Heller sets out to destroy the American mythology that equates wealth and happiness. Something Happened's satirical critique of the terms of American success answers, in fact, what Mills says (with much irony) about the American rich:

we must remember that the American rich are the winners within a society in which money and money-values are the supreme stakes. If the rich are not happy . . . then the very terms of success in America, the very aspirations of all sound men, lead to ashes rather than fruit (164).
But while Slocum's misery turns gold to ashes, Good as Gold's millionaire Conover becomes money's most evil spokesman. Viciously anti-Semitic, cruelly sadistic, and proudly corrupt, Conover exemplifies the power of the enriched to buy immunity, accumulate more wealth, and control access to it. The attainment and keeping of wealth and power such as Conover's is the fundamental reason behind the closed circles created by the power elite in Heller's fictional world, for in the exclusion of others lies the path to plenty.

Sometime after he finished Good as Gold, Heller told a reporter that "satire is what allows me to be an author. I couldn't write a novel without using comedy or some type of distortion." His satirical "distortions" combine humor, parody, exaggeration, caricature, and absurdity in exposing the follies and vices of the power elite that Mills defines. But perhaps Heller's satirical method can be most succinctly described as darkening humor: he begins with light humor that points up some of the absurdities of the particular system of order under attack and then proceeds to the implications and results—death, insanity, dehumanization—of such systems, exposing through a progressively darker, grimmer humor the human chaos wrought by the power elite's subversion of human values. And while Good as Gold and Something Happened succeed as satirical novels, Catch-22 still remains Heller's greatest achievement, as well as an American masterpiece, in its combination of brilliant, biting humor with an innovative narrative style designed to simulate the "chaos" that he exposes. In his experience of war and its required flight missions, Heller found the perfect metaphors to express his perception of an absurd and destructively organized society.
FOOTNOTES


2 *Catch-22* (New York: Dell, 1962). All page numbers referring to *Catch-22* are from this edition.


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Note: The Special Collections Room at Brandeis University Library contains the original manuscript of Catch-22 and many of Heller's notes, working papers, and data on that novel, as well as drafts of his play, We Bombed in New Haven, his script for McMahon's Navy, and numerous letters and other papers pertaining to Heller's writings. Heller still owns the manuscripts of Something Happened and Good as Gold.

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