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# The Past Informs the Future: War Representations and Their Influence on Future Soldiers

Danielle Rhodes  
*Georgia State University*

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THE PAST INFORMS THE FUTURE: PAST WARS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON  
FUTURE SOLDIERS

by

DANIELLE RHODES

Under the Direction of Chris Kocela, PhD

ABSTRACT

Scholars of the postmodern war narrative have examined the connections between past war representations, which rely heavily on myths of the “ideal soldier,” and their effects on the following generation’s perception of war. It is clear that these depictions inadequately prepare a new soldier due to the fact that each war fought since World War I has differed significantly. My dissertation examines the link between past war representations and soldier expectations, and expands on this phenomenon. I argue that because soldiers are ill prepared, they must quickly create methods to cope with their actual reality, which as I show are also effects of past media.

Each war’s literature has presented its own unique method that characters use to create spaces of agency. Their control over the situation is temporary, and they do not truly gain

complete agency, because the characters create coping strategies as a reaction to those same representations that prepared them for the wrong war. Examining novels by Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Tim O'Brien, Denis Johnson, David Abrams, and Ben Fountain, I trace the media's influence and consequences through World War II, Vietnam, and the second Iraq War and will map how the novels from each war period share similarities. It is not only these common coping mechanisms the protagonists share, but also at the end of each novels the men never truly gain control over their experiences, due to the fact that the previous representations and perpetuated myths still influence and control their behaviors.

INDEX WORDS: World War II, Vietnam War, Iraq War, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Tim O'Brien, Denis Johnson, David Abrams, Ben Fountain, War Narrative

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FUTURE SOLDIERS

by

DANIELLE RHODES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

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2018

THE PAST INFORMS THE FUTURE: PAST WARS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON  
FUTURE SOLDIERS

by

DANIELLE RHODES

Committee Chair: Chris Kocela

Committee: Audrey Goodman

Matthew Roudané

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2018

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, who inspired me to be the best I can be and showed me that I can always grow and improve. Every single accomplishment throughout my past and my future is an homage to you. Without your love, support, and some criticism, I would never have become the person I am today. I miss you more with each passing moment and carry you with me always.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

War is ubiquitous. Since the beginning of recorded human history, war of varying degrees has existed and just as war has existed, so has the urge to tell the story of war. Even before the concept of organized writing, the desire to depict battles was strong. As Kathleen McLoughlin notes, the war narrative is “12,000 years old, dating from at least the Mesolithic period (10,000-5,000 BCE) in the form of rock paintings of battle scenes found in the Spanish Levant. The modes by and media in which armed conflict has been recorded over the thousands of years since are multifarious” (7). Moreover, there have been portrayals of war through some of humankind’s most celebrated works—ancient Egyptian tombs contain reliefs illustrating the pharaohs’ various military victories; the works of Homer and Virgil focus heavily on war; and canonical English literature from *Beowulf* to the Arthurian Legends to the plays of Shakespeare feature the experiences and hardships of warfare. Why is there an enduring human compulsion to tell the story of combat and what makes war stories, even those written thousands of years ago, so compelling today? One possible reason is that representations of warfare reach across historical, cultural, and racial differences to establish a sense of commonality and even empathy among readers. The twenty-first century American may not be able to relate to an ancient Egyptian or a European living during the crusades, but the fear of fighting, being conquered, or dying at the hands of an enemy is almost universally understandable. The reasons why civilizations go to war and the way in which those wars are fought may change considerably, but the experiences of those at war remain remarkably consistent across time and space.

The most consistent aspect of experiencing battle is that each war is influenced by the previous war’s representations. Soldiers involved in the next war consume past representations and use this knowledge to construct images of what their own experiences will be. Evelyn

Cobley and Laurel Brett connect World War I literature to the myths of honor, the ideological implications these texts perpetuate, and the effects they have on various literary characters' understanding of war. Katherine Kinney, Richard Slotkin, Michael Andregg, Tobey C. Herzog, Jacqueline E. Lawson, and Lawrence Suid examine the myth of the "Good War" as portrayed in World War II movies, such as *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) featuring John Wayne or Audie Murphy's *To Hell and Back* (1949) and how these pieces of popular culture affected soldiers during Vietnam. Jenna Pitchford, Steve Niva, Peter C. Kunze, David Kieran, and Matthew Ross highlight the effects that Vietnam War representations, such as Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1976), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986), and *Rambo* (1982), have had on soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan from the 1990s to the present. As shown, numerous scholars examine how previous representations of war influence the current generation of soldiers' approach to war, but I will argue that these previous representations affect not only soldiers' expectations, but also how they cope with and adjust upon realizing that their knowledge from these earlier texts has inadequately prepared them for their own war.

This trend can be seen in many war narratives, but I will focus on *Catch-22* (1961), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), *Going After Cacciato* (1978), *Tree of Smoke* (1961), *Fobbit* (2012), and *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2012). I specifically chose these novels for each war period because they tell stories of characters who have vastly different experiences of and approaches to war; however, each period's collection of novels includes protagonists coping within common frameworks. World War II narratives disrupt the gender binary and myths of bravery by flouting the norms of language and time, while characters within Vietnam narratives move inward and attempt to find a space where they are in control and useful through fantasy missions. The Iraq novel includes characters that tell stories and report progress through the

manipulation of language and omission of details, in order to show that the American military is markedly different from the one in Vietnam. Each character enters war with a set of expectations and quickly must adjust to circumstances specific to the current conflict. World War II soldiers must adjust their definitions of good and evil, Vietnam soldiers must adjust to their environment in Vietnam, and second Iraq War soldiers must adjust their performance as American soldiers for a civilian audience.

Many scholars have written about war myths and their preservation through previous representations. Copley focuses on how difficult it is for the World War I veteran to write his story: “[T]he writer expresses pity as well as resentment towards the dead he commemorates and towards himself as survivor... The narrator feels ashamed that he has survived when so many perished... This guilt is complicated by the survivor’s often subconscious subscription to the myth that honour requires soldiers to die on the battlefield” (9). The myth of honor is perpetuated when readers blindly or unknowingly absorb “the ideological inscriptions these modes of representation continue to carry” (Copley 16). This continual representation of what honor and heroism “should” be for the soldier is then passed on to the next generation of soldiers, who come to World War II looking to exhibit these same characteristics. They have romanticized the idea of war based off of the World War I representations, when in reality their war is not the same and is being fought for different reasons. World War II narratives, especially those written within a decade of the end of the war, reflect this shift. Philip K. Jason claims that many critics are “alert to the ways in which literature confronts the myths of American innocence, American invulnerability, and American righteousness” (xiii), and though he speaks of the Vietnam War, the same can be argued for the World War II literature as well.

The dissemination of the honor myth and its effects continues within the Vietnam War novels, the most notable of which is that associated with John Wayne. Katherine Kinney argues that “John Wayne is the model by which young American men learn to accept duty and responsibility. But... when faced with Vietnam the concept of duty and justice on which that vision rests are thrown into doubt” (Kinney 12). The soldiers cannot uphold the John Wayne myth because they are not fighting the same war. Kinney continues to say that “in scores, if not hundreds of novels, memoirs, poems, films, plays, and works of criticism about the Vietnam War, John Wayne is parodied, debunked, reviled, rejected, and metaphorically and sometimes literally shot dead” (Kinney 12). This John Wayne myth of the World War II soldier—warrior-hero and patriot—does not align with the experience of Vietnam, which leads authors to write characters who undermine these cultural beliefs. Philip Caputo and Larry Heinemann create narratives that “perform the death of the American warrior-hero, upsetting the ability of the American war machine to appeal, by way of American myth, to Americans’ attraction to radically individualist conceptions of the self and of masculinity more particularly” (Hawkins 24-25). Maria S. Bonn adds that “*Close Quarters* (1974), *Paco’s Story* (1987), and *Indian Country* (1987) each confront a United States in which the mythic imagination of familial and patriotic love is no longer adequate for defining and confronting the war experience” (Bonn 2). This pointed response to the myth of the soldier winning the “Good War” explains the anxiety and difficulty that many face when attempting to write about war. Lucas Carpenter states that the diverse collection of Vietnam War narratives “demonstrates an acute awareness that their texts will conjoin in intertextuality to constitute the metanarrative by which the Vietnam War will be understood by future generations” (48). Not only are the characters affected by previous representations, but the veteran authors are even aware that they will add to the overall depiction

of the Vietnam War, which explains why they “struggle over what the war meant, over how and why it was fought” and how “this literature has both reflected and contributed to the construction of recent historical memory” (Neilson 2). And when a Vietnam War novel references John Wayne and honor or the camaraderie and heroism displayed within World War II representations, this is a deliberate response to the myths that have affected the characters’ perception and can serve as an explanation for their decisions and thoughts.

Decades after the Vietnam War, the effects of representations continue to influence soldiers. Due to the popularity of the Vietnam War novel, it is clear that “Vietnam’s legacy has offered more than a convenient metaphor. It has also provided a set of discourses and memorial practices that cultural texts have negotiated as they have represented, remembered, and shaped debate over these wars” (Kieran 5). And because of Vietnam’s legacy and the myths that surround the war and the veteran, the literature that continues to emerge from the wars in the Middle East make clear that Vietnam “has yet to wane within US military circles. If anything, the parallels between the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the war in Vietnam have helped ensure Vietnam’s continued relevance, as soldiers in the Global War on Terror have looked to the culture of the Vietnam War in the hope that it would guide them in the struggle to define their own war” (Ross 342). Matthew Ross continues to say that authors such as Anthony Swofford, Nathaniel Fick, and Evan Wright “all entered Iraq expecting to take part in the war that would define his generation. Instead, each found it impossible to define their Iraq War in a way that was not overshadowed by the cultural aftershocks of Vietnam” (351). As the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars drag on, it becomes harder to define a war that becomes increasingly similar to the previous war. It is the fear of this comparison and the negativity that surrounded the Vietnam War that leads present day writers to depict characters that dispute this myth.

When battling cultural myths that define the ideal soldier, the characters within these novels, who must follow orders, attempt to carve a space for themselves to feel control over their experience in-country. When the perpetuated myths prove to be unrealistic, which will always be the case since each war is different in its own way, the characters in the war narrative must adjust. Each coping mechanism is an attempt to provide agency for the individual, when in reality he or she uses coping mechanisms that are still products of the war myths the characters have been exposed to as civilians. The protagonists I will discuss attempt to counter these myths, adjust their expectations, and find a space for control, but in reality there is no real possibility of full adjustment for characters within the war narrative, because once confronted with their reality, as I will show, previous representations shape their ability to adapt as well. This trend can be seen within each war period's novels regardless of plot points or publication date, demonstrating that even when veterans return home and try to take control of their lives, previous war representations and past ideologies continue to manipulate them.

From Shakespeare's *Henry VI* to Walt Whitman's *Drum Taps* to Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, writers have taken the experiences, emotions, and events they have witnessed during war and reimagined them so as to provide readers with an understanding of war crucially different from that gained in reading a history book or watching a documentary. While historical accounts of war provide access to important facts, an individual human perspective is often missing from these accounts. What becomes problematic when studying war through a purely historical or archival lens is that such accounts tend to present war as the result of large-scale, even monolithic causes that frequently obscure or downplay the effects of war on the many individuals who experience it. Literature, however, is able to show us singular, nuanced experiences that inspire the reader to see war through numerous perspectives at the same time,

often with direct access to the interior lives of the characters depicted. As readers follow fictional characters through their experiences, they are able to gain inside access to their emotions of fear, hate, self-loathing, and cowardice, many of which are emotions that real-world soldiers have been taught to suppress and are afraid to express. Since characters in a story can say and think taboo thoughts without fear of criticism, fictional narrative becomes an important way for veterans—both writers and readers—to work through their past experiences; such narratives also show civilian readers that the information portrayed by the media, historians, and the military comprises just one piece of the story of war, making it possible to bridge some of the gaps that inevitably arise between veterans' and civilians' understanding of war. As a safe place in which to relate the emotional and traumatic aspects of war, fictionalized war narrative encourages the reader to reflect on the more sanitized, objective, or propagandistic depictions of warfare that frequently circulate in other media. Yet although fictional war narrative has existed throughout recorded history and can serve very important purposes, this does not mean that the experience of war lends itself easily to narrative representation. In *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq*, McLoughlin examines the difficulties in depicting war in a variety of novels including those of Tolstoy, Edith Warton, Tim O'Brien, and Bao Ninh, each of whom illustrates the authorial anxiety that comes with representing war, because war itself is “a complex set of problematics relating now to authorial powers, now to the nature of the subject matter, now to the medium of representation, now to the reader's response—and now to other intangible variables. War, in other words, resists depiction” (6-7). She continues to state that even as war “resists representation, conflict demands it” (7). Authors continue to attempt to represent the experience:

The reasons that make war's representation imperative are as multitudinous as those which make it impossible: to impose discursive order on the chaos of conflict and so to render it more comprehensible; to keep the record for the self and others...; to give some meaning to the mass death; to memorialise; to inform civilians of the nature of battle so as to facilitate the reintegration of veterans into peacetime society; to provide cathartic relief; to warn; and even, through the warning, to promote peace. (7)

While McLoughlin focuses on the authors' anxiety about relaying a coherent version of their war and why it is so important to do so, my dissertation focuses on the anxiety produced by what war narratives teach the next generations of soldiers. Nick Mansfield argues that "it is a truism to say that each war redefines the nature of war itself, due to changes in arms technology, military, organization or geo-strategic history" (1); similarly, McLoughlin maintains that "'redefinition,' rather than rendering conflicts distinct, creates a kind of bellicose canon in which each war exerts an influence on its successor, insofar as it represents the current culmination of weapons design and military strategy (hence the notion that military forces prepare to fight the last war instead of the present war)" (15). But where both of these critics focus on the macro experience of war and the evolution of weapons and strategies, I will examine the micro-strategies—grounded in individual soldiers' experiences, dreams, and fantasies—that reveal how the influence of previous representations of warfare affects the individual soldier. What I hope to show is how twentieth and twenty-first century American war narratives respond to the central concern of the negative effects that the knowledge of past wars, mediated through previous representations, has on the soldiers of later wars.

While war is always difficult to represent for the reasons that McLoughlin identifies, I will argue that this difficulty is compounded, over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-

first century, by the fact that that each of the wars fought by American soldiers during this period is significantly different from those that preceded it in terms of technology, global strategy, national commitment, and location. As a result, veteran authors writing about warfare can rely little on the narratives that have come before—a difficulty they also depict as characteristic of the individual soldier’s experience of war as it happens. The shared difficulties of those who write about war, and those who struggle to survive it, create a confrontation between expectation and reality that forces the characters in American war fiction to either adjust or hold on more tightly to their previous ideas. As seen through the six novels discussed extensively in the main chapters of my dissertation, as well as several others mentioned in the remainder of this Introduction, common reactions, characterizations, and coping strategies emerge in response to the failure of the current war experience to live up to expectations created by previous narratives. These common reactions, characterizations, and coping strategies, I will argue, now constitute, in turn, defining features of postmodern and contemporary American war fiction.

### **1.1 World War I Narratives and “Evidencing Manhood” at the Turn of the Century**

Thomas Meyers argues that “art as a social and historical response to war in the United States became a serious endeavor after the Civil War” (13). He claims that before the Civil War, American novelists wrote a fairly romanticized representation of war, portraying “the would-be hero and would-be innocent overtaken by the nature of the modern military thinking and institutions” (15). In contrast to this approach, authors such as Stephen Crane and John William DeForest wrote novels that depict not only the soldier’s attempt to display great feats of heroism, but also the failure to do so, dramatizing a disconnect between the hero and innocent, struggling with his performance at war. While Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) depicts the mental anguish of war experienced by a soldier attempting to be courageous, DeForest’s *Miss*

*Ravenel's Conversion from Succession to Loyalty* (1867) depicts the traumatizing physical experience of war and the impossibility of living up to the chivalrous expectations in such a violent environment. Meyers explains how these characterizations of war “were in direct historical opposition to the chivalric hero and effectual frontiersman of national myth” (15) and were the first texts to illuminate the contradictions in these myths; in turn, Crane and DeForest laid the groundwork for the modernist war novel to explore the connection between expected heroism and masculinity in conjunction with the what Kathy J. Phillips, in *Manipulating Masculinity*, calls a “crisis of masculinity.”

According to Phillips, a crisis in masculinity becomes especially problematic in American culture around the turn of the century for a variety reasons, two of which were the first wave of American feminism and the Industrial Revolution. As feminism began to achieve its political, economic, and reproductive goals, essentially gaining more power, men felt threatened and sought to assert themselves through forms of masculine performance. Those performances, however, were curtailed in the late 1800s and early 1900s by the Industrial Revolution, which also threatened traditional masculinity and laid the foundation for a significant change in American society. As agriculture became specialized and rural employment opportunities in the country dwindled, families moved to the city in hopes of making a better living. The movement of families into urban environments was not the only shift that influenced masculine norms during the nineteenth century, but it was a crucial one. As literary critic Paul Lauter argues, men quickly went from “independent artisans, who sold their product for a price, who could take pride in the work their hands created, who worked at times and at rates of their own choosing, whose family income was supplemented by a garden plot and by fishing and hunting” to “the factory ‘hand,’ who had little or nothing to sell but his or her labor” (1566). In addition to the

shift in the conditions of physical labor brought about by factories and industrialization, men had to deal with the knowledge that their jobs could be, and in certain parts of the country were being done by not only women, but also children, rendering their work a far cry from the farmer or artisan's specialized manual labor.

Working the assembly line was not the only cultural change that affected masculinity, but the abundance of immigrants to the country around this time made competition for urban factory jobs even more fierce. Factory owners now had an influx of cheap immigrant labor and as a result, many urban men were poor and barely capable of supporting their families, leading to further emasculation. Gender historian Michael Kimmel explains that this new model of weakened manhood was “uncomfortably linked to the volatile marketplace,” which led to men feeling “chronically insecure” and desperate “to achieve a solid grounding for a masculine identity” (17). This insecurity became even more apparent as the women's rights movement continued to gain ground, making the right to vote no longer a male privilege. By the start of the first World War, the crisis of masculinity was deeply entrenched.

No longer able to rely on past gendered identity markers to exhibit masculinity, men looked for new avenues that would enable them to feel pride and to maintain their dominant status in society, allowing them to view fighting for and protecting their country as an alternative. As Phillips argues, this desire to go to war for one's society was not arrived at without ideological coercion; instead, the idea “that men love to fight and women hate to fight (or cannot fight), [. . .] can manipulate men to go to war, simply to verify that they are not women” (2). By this logic, going to war was not only a major way to prove one's manliness, but also to differentiate oneself from women. American men at this time were “placed in a constantly renewed insecurity about their status” and therefore had to “scramble to amass ‘proofs’ of

masculinity” (Phillips 2). When we consider these changing social and environmental factors, not many “proofs” existed for these young men. Due to this lack, men who once believed they embodied an innate desire to protect their family, community, and country, were actually manipulated by American society through the deeply ingrained polarization of gender, which led to the government using them in order to maintain global dominance. In other words, although they were encouraged to think that they were “born” with the desire to fight for their nation, in actuality they were shaped to think this way for someone else’s gain.

American novels about World War I repeatedly depict male characters caught up in this crisis of masculinity and the types of performances it engendered. War novelists of the 1920s and 1930s wrote about soldiers’ expectations prior to war: these characters view war as a rite of passage in which to display their courage. Authors such as Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Robert Graves, and Dalton Trumbo produced fictional narratives that examined various characters’ failure to achieve their expectations—failure which often leads them to resort to alternatives of masculine performance. As many critics point out, these novels resemble the traditional *Bildungsroman*. According to Jeffrey Walsh, the World War I soldier, as “a good and young American, volunteers or is drafted to war, he enters the combat zone... in uniform he learns what it is like to be born to drill and die; thus his experience parallels that of the hero of a *Bildungsroman*” (5). The comparison that Walsh makes to the *Bildungsroman* genre reinforces the idea that many young American men believed their experience would be a romantic adventure; however, these modernist war narratives do not end in the positive, hopeful light of social integration and acceptance. Instead, the men are left feeling disillusioned and defeated, unable to escape their experiences. As Graves makes clear in his autobiography *Goodbye to All*

*That* (1929), the war did not make him a man, but instead traumatized him and forever changed him in a way that made him incapable of fitting in with the rest of civilian society.

Similarly, novels such as *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *Three Soldiers* (1921) illustrate a soldier's original expectations and how they must be adjusted in the face of the actual experience of war. The way in which war is fought plays a large role in the literary depiction of these thwarted expectations: "the notion of the selfless military quest in a new age of mechanized warfare, however, was an impossible one to maintain aesthetically once the true horrors of prolonged trench warfare were manifested" (Meyers 18). In fact, the technological and tactical changes in World War I contradicted much of what these men had prepared for and forced them to realize that they could not use the nineteenth century wars as a touchstone, which simultaneously applied to the shift in writing technique from nineteenth century war narrative. The technology of World War I changed the experience of war such that, as a result, "mechanized warfare offer[ed] no rite of passage into manliness. Instead, it pushe[d] young males in the other direction, requiring them to become semi-mechanized infants" (Shaheen 165). Going to war to prove their masculinity, soldiers became slaves to mechanized warfare, echoing their struggle with emasculation as a result of working on the assembly line back home.

Due to a soldier's increased insecurity about his masculinity, he began to perform for those around him—especially other soldiers. And as one soldier performed, another felt the same urge or pressure to perform as well. It is through these relational performances that masculinity can be seen in Hemingway's novels in particular, according to Thomas Strychacz. Strychacz argues that masculinity is depicted by Hemingway's soldier characters as "temporary and subject to abrupt change rather than stable and permanent; as relational and contingent rather than self-determined; as the function of insubstantial codes and evaluating audiences rather than the sole

possession of code heroes; as negotiated and constructed rather than constitutive of an essential identity” (6). Strychacz stresses the connection of the World War I soldier’s performance of masculinity to his audience, and claims that Hemingway’s performance of his manhood is not merely the act as “self-contained and self-possessed,” but is motivated more by “Hemingway’s need for *evidencing* manhood” (5). Two ways in which these characters “evidence” their conflicted sense of masculinity are through their romantic relationships with women and their attempt to embody the attitude of the traditional, stoic soldier regardless of the situation. These acts are always in direct relation to “the presence of and by [one’s] awareness of an audience” (Strychacz 6); the performance is not scripted and then performed, but more of a communal activity, with recognition and understanding being the top priority for the soldier. Since Fredrick Henry, in *A Farewell to Arms*, struggles to “evidence” his masculinity, primarily because he is an ambulance driver, not a part of the American military, he must find another avenue for his gender performance, which leads to his whirlwind relationship with Catherine. He is able to assert his masculinity through their relationship even despite his potentially emasculating injury. In turn, Vernon argues that Hemingway’s characters mirror their author’s sense of conflicted masculine identity while at war: “for male soldiers and front-line volunteers, like Hemingway, who passively suffered the new technology, the war paradoxically made men of them and unmanned them” (Vernon 45), which forced them to resort to alternative ways to evidence their masculinity.

Dos Passos also creates main characters who resort to these avenues of masculinity when their actual experience of war fails to match their expectations. John Andrews and Private Fuselli, in *Three Soldiers* (1921), both enter the combat zone with expectations of exhibiting valor and heroism, and when they cannot perform in a traditionally heroic and masculine way,

due to the new tactics and technology of warfare, they are then forced to find other ways to manifest their masculinity. Private First Class Fuselli continually thinks about and plans for his move through the ranks. Before even going to war, he thinks about how his girlfriend back home will be proud of him and imagines how he will be treated by others as well: “Fellers’ll be sayin’ ‘All right, corporal,’ to me soon... he pictured Mabe writing Corporal Dan Fuselli” (20). He fantasizes about feats of heroic bravery that will garner well-deserved recognition: “Overseas, under fire, he’d have a chance to show what he was worth; and he pictured himself heroically carrying a wounded captain back to a dressing tent” (23). Women, his peers, and superiors will see him as special, and this desire preoccupies Fuselli.

Though he has high aspirations, however, Fuselli also has moments of weakness and doubt. When awakened and told to clean a lieutenant’s room, Fuselli is angry: “despair seized hold of him. He was so far from anyone who cared about him, so lost in the vast machine. He was telling himself he’d never get on, would never get up where he could show what he was good for. He felt as if he were on a treadmill. Day after day it would be like this,—the same routine, the same helplessness” (39). Yet mere moments later Fuselli watches the lieutenant put on a pair of gloves with an air of importance and his motivation is reignited: “He pictured himself drawing on a pair of gloves that way, importantly, finger by finger, with a little wave of self-satisfaction when the gesture was completed... He’d have to get that corporalship” (40). Fuselli here embodies how “*Three Soldiers* distills with terrific clarity just how much rites of passage had changed in accordance with a shift in the prevailing mode of American manhood” (Shaheen 164). It is not wanting to lead men in battle or help his country win that makes him rededicate himself to his plan, but the manner in which a man puts on a pair of gloves. This

moment shows a preoccupation with masculine performance and how to “evidence manhood” to others.

As literary depictions of warfare evolve in keeping with the nature of the conflicts they depict, soldier-characters’ approaches to masculine performance also shift in turn. If the World War I soldier looks to the Civil War as a model for what it means to be a soldier, he will quickly realize that his assumptions about the war experience are hopelessly outdated and misleading. Even the simple difference of using a bayonet for hand-to-hand combat during the Civil War seriously contradicts the World War I soldier’s experience of fighting in the trenches and being subject to mustard gas attacks. Similarly, a contemporary drone operator would find little in any previous literary depiction of warfare to lend a sense of heroism to the act of pressing a button and causing an explosion and death hundreds of miles away. As McLoughlin states: “modern weapons technology has fundamentally altered the locus of agency” (16). But it was as a result of this change, in part, that the performance of masculinity in the World War I novel evolved into a process of “evidencing” manhood that would later become its own set of masculine expectations for the soldiers in later wars. Concern with the opinions of peers and officers and the strong—but insecure—desire to appear brave and stoic in demeanor become a set of characteristics indicative of World War masculine performance as referenced in later American war narratives.

## **1.2 World War II and its Literary Aftermath**

If World War I literature provided veterans and readers the ability to question received narratives about warfare and traditional forms of masculine performance, the first wave of World War II novels challenged both previous narratives as well as the images of World War II as the “Good War” which began to circulate almost immediately following the war’s end. These novels

also encouraged a realization that the need to evidence manhood and be victorious was not always synonymous with being moral and good. Tom Engelhardt states that “those children of the 1950s grasped the pleasures of victory culture as an act of faith, and the horrors of nuclear culture as an act of faithless mockery, and held both the triumph and the mocking horror close without necessarily experiencing them as contraries” (9). Ty Hawkins states that “we may trace the beginnings of American myth’s unraveling to August 6, 1945, the day U.S. forces dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima” and that this “upset Americans’ ability to conflate power and goodness” (8). Authors like Norman Mailer, James Jones, John Hersey, Irwin Shaw, Joseph Heller, and Kurt Vonnegut, all of whom personally experienced World War II, witnessed the horrors and described them in their fiction. They among other writers of the time period depicted the soldier’s inability to have both power and goodness. The lines between good and evil appear to be blurred when evil must be done in order to prevail. In other words, winning does not necessarily represent peace and goodness, and those with firsthand experience attested, in their writing, to the cost of winning the war.

McLoughlin argues that each war has “its own poesis, its ‘natural way (or ways) of being represented” (10), and if this is the case, then a running theme in World War II novels is the breakdown of binary models of thinking. As writers publish World War II narratives in the later 1940s to early 1950s, they explicitly challenge the idealized notion of the “Good War” popularized at the time, laying the framework for later postmodern narratives. John M. Kinder goes so far as to call the popular “Good War” image of World War II a “well-maintained fiction, a constellation of images, narratives, memories, and sound bites... [T]he ‘Good War’ is less a deliberate falsehood than a gross simplification, an effort to deny World War II its ironies and

ethical complexity” (187-88). In contrast to this fictionalized positive interpretation of World War II, many novels published immediately afterward expose the negative sides of this war.

Kinder portrays Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) as a novel that does not shy away from the complexities and contradictions of the material it addresses. In Kinder’s view, Mailer does not “gloss over” the war’s “racial strife within the Allied forces, America’s rampant anti-Semitism, and class antagonisms between officers and enlisted men” (188).

Similarly, Irwin Shaw’s *The Young Lions* (1948), James Jones’ *From Here to Eternity* (1951), Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961), and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) do not depict the binary of “the peace-loving Allies and the forces of democracy” versus “the godless Axis Powers” (Kinder 188), but instead show the potential for good and evil amongst the American soldiers. These depictions force the reader to question society’s clear delineation of good and evil, and recognize the failures of this either/or construction when applied to events as complicated as those in a World War.

Good and evil is not the only binary questioned by these novels; rather, the reader is challenged to criticize dichotomized thinking from a variety of angles. The divides amongst officers and enlisted men, white Christian soldiers and nonwhite Christians, strong and weak, courageous and fearful, violent and passive all represent a lack of unity amongst the soldiers. *From Here to Eternity*, for example, depicts officers “as either bunglers, scoundrels or neo-fascists” (Walsh 144). Similarly, Mailer characterizes “the officer-class as antidemocratic, anti-American—even fascist” and the enlisted men are “reluctant to perform their duties” and “frequently question the purpose of the war itself” (Kinder 194). Irwin Shaw also writes of the divides amongst American soldiers in reference to rampant anti-Semitism within the unit of Noah Ackerman, who even after risking his life and leading the men is still looked down upon by

his peers, which in turn makes him “dissolve into a mere shell of himself, and with his spirit broken, his potential to be a great leader is undermined” (Garrett 81). It is not the sight of Dachau or the physical pain from fistfights with his peers that traumatizes him, but the notion that even after proving his worth multiple times, he is still not accepted. As a result, he thinks that “it is not the Germans that will kill him, but the Army itself” (Shaw 519). On one level, just as World War I novels reveal the incongruity between soldiers’ expectations and their experiences of war, these early World War II novels illustrate that serving in the army has drastically changed since World War I. Soldier performance is more complicated than just “evidencing masculinity”—in World War II novels, conflicts cannot be simplified to exhibitions of who is more “manly” or powerful among a group of men. Instead, novelists like Shaw and Mailer create main characters who work to maintain their masculinity but also reveal the severe consequences of this futile endeavor while at war, disrupting, as a result, any common conceptions of what a soldier/man should be.

In keeping with the work of Mailer and Shaw, writing a decade and half later, Heller and Vonnegut also disrupt gender binaries in their depiction of World War II as a conflict that does not conform to the image of the “Good War.” For Heller and Vonnegut, World War II did not prove that “mass violence can be used for moral ends, and that the world can be divided in Manichean terms—the righteous ‘us,’ the wicked ‘them.’” (Kinder 201). As I will argue in detail in Chapter One of my dissertation, these authors blur the idea of good versus evil by writing American characters—civilian and military—that complicate any simple oppositional relationship between men and women, soldier and civilian, or ally and enemy. In Heller’s novel, this breakdown of binary thinking is accomplished most directly through Yossarian’s repeated recognition of the arbitrariness of signs and the slippery relationship between signifiers and

signifieds whenever language or logic are used. Over the course of novel, the use of language and meaning-making becomes more and more nonsensical. This gradual decay of language and its meaning-making function serves, in Yossarian's eyes and for the reader, as a commentary on the ideals associated with the traditional, masculine World War I soldier. Those who fail to use language correctly display their outdated attempts to adhere to those traditional masculine norms and, in the process, are forced to ignore logic and the realities of the situations in which they find themselves. Recognizing the lengths to which his fellow soldiers go to try to stabilize their gender performances, Yossarian learns not to care about evidencing his masculinity, and strives to preserve his sanity instead.

Meanwhile, as Heller uses the slipperiness of language to challenge binary thinking and gender norms, Vonnegut challenges conventional notions of linear time in order to disturb the gender binary. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* Billy Pilgrim is a flawed but sympathetic protagonist who believes there is no concept of past, present, or future and has adopted a Tralfamadorian concept of time that denies the possibility of free will. The novel's structure mimics this belief as it is full of flashbacks and flash-forwards and leads the reader to see how Billy's past, present, and future coexist such that his past always informs and impinges upon his present. Billy takes solace in this view of time because he knows that he does not "need" to perform for anyone in any way; he has seen his death and he knows that he will not die at war and thus does not to pretend to be something that he is not. This attitude allows him to completely ignore the pressure that men at war feel to be the stoic, brave soldier, and instead, he passively allows others to ignore, look down on, or even take care of him as they wish. Whereas other men in the novel look at the past traditional masculine performance of World War I as a means of survival and maintaining their

sense of identity during World War II, Billy's concept of time allows him to ignore "evidencing" manhood in this way.

My analysis of both Heller's *Catch-22* and Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* in Chapter One will focus on establishing contrasts between the central protagonists and the soldiers with which they are surrounded insofar as they differ in their reliance on outdated models of masculinity. As I will argue, both Heller and Vonnegut create characters who try to maintain the World War I attitude of stoicism and desire to "advance," both on the battlefield and in their careers. In *Catch-22* the characters of Colonel Cathcart, Captain Black, Lieutenant Scheisskopf, Dobbs, and McWatt work to perform masculinity and try to feel in control of their surroundings. In order to deal with the unknowns of war, they focus on something they can control—their gender performances. Similarly, the characters Roland Weary and Paul Lazzaro in *Slaughterhouse-Five* both over-perform their masculinity in ways that alienate them from others and render them deeply unsympathetic characters. Yet perhaps ironically, the characters that embody such traditional forms of masculinity in *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* are frequently ostracized or alienated from their fellow soldiers and often suffer untimely deaths. Many of these deaths are the result of an inability to adapt to new challenges and experiences that defy the terms of these earlier, masculine roles. In turn the reader is invited to consider these characters, and their deaths, as a critique of masculine gender norms inherited from World War I literature like that of Hemingway and Dos Passos.

Although the protagonists of *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*—Yossarian and Billy Pilgrim, respectively—may appear passive by comparison with the ambitious and traditionally "manly" soldier-characters who surround them, I will argue that they nevertheless exhibit moments of self-awareness, confidence, and even bravery in untraditional ways. Their rejection

of adherence to traditional masculine norms and even the project of “evidencing manhood” during warfare make them very different from the protagonists of canonical World War I narratives. By creating characters who survive, in part, by not performing according to gender norms established in World War I, and by not subscribing to images of the “Good War” that circulated after the end of World War II, Heller and Vonnegut both disrupt the gender binary, illustrating an alternative to the masculine heroic soldier. In Heller’s novel, this alternative emerges through the novel’s attack on any fixed relationship between signifiers and signifieds, while in Vonnegut’s novel, I will argue, gender norms are fundamentally challenged through Billy Pilgrim’s nonlinear understanding of time. As these novels misuse language and dismantle ideas of past, present, and future, they threaten all arbitrary relationships that society creates—including what it means to be a soldier at war. Although Yossarian and Billy are clearly flawed characters, they ultimately seem better able to adjust to the wars they fight by not insisting on trying to make World War II experiences fit a model established by representations of World War I. Yossarian and Billy Pilgrim emerge as sympathetic characters, in part, because they reject the need to perform masculinity for others or even for themselves, allowing for the disappearance of the need to “evidence manhood” and the concern regarding the “crisis of masculinity.” Instead, these novels enter into the fragmented and disillusioned experience of war right from the beginning, doing away with any romance or pride in the wartime experience that remained in American fiction about World War I.

### **1.3 Vietnam War Narratives: New Journalism, Magical Realism, and Schemas**

Upon returning home from World War II, veterans such as Heller and Vonnegut wrote novels that did not glorify their war experiences nor uphold the need to perform or “evidence” manhood as had been common in literary representations of World War I. Considering what

these veterans had seen while at war, the celebration of winning the war and the depiction of World War II as the “Good War” did not feel appropriate, and their novels include soldier-characters who are forever haunted by seeing the worst sides of humanity. Despite the impact of these and similar novels, however, they were unable to correct a cultural drive and perhaps need to portray American participation in World War II in a positive light, and “unfortunately, it has been this ‘polished’ version of World War II—this paradigmatic ‘Good War’ interpretation—that Americans have routinely turned to in times of crises... when searching for a moral blueprint to guide their future actions” (Kinder 201). This moral blueprint later evolved into what I will discuss as the Vietnam soldier’s schema—a set of expectations for a particular experience based on past representations. As the horrors of World War II were overshadowed by this new version of a good and moral victory, soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War expected to have similar experiences and the opportunity to improve the world and save people. Unfortunately for those young men that went to fight in Vietnam, their expectations of what war should be like were based on their highly idealized knowledge of World War II which, though contradicted by novels like *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, were what the mainstream popular culture grasped onto. Instead of using the novels published in the decade or so after the dropping of the atomic bomb, Vietnam War soldiers created schemas that were influenced by representations of the “Good War.” As Kinney and others argue, film images of John Wayne and Audie Murphy helped to perpetuate this distorted view of World War II, in which representations of military and civilian death and destruction were overshadowed by flag-waving, American patriotism, and propaganda focused on the Axis of Evil.

The schema that the Vietnam soldier embodied was not only ill-suited for the current war, but was based off of manipulated facts, which created assumptions about what their

experience at war would be. Kali Tal discusses schemas and explains that the soldier's schema of war is "the particular set of explanations and expectations generated by an individual to account for his or her circumstances and actions" (Tal 225). Since their schemas were based on the "Good War" representations of the second World War, they inevitably would realize that the idea of war and their actual reality of war would not align. The protagonists of many Vietnam War narratives cope with their newfound knowledge by purposefully misreading their environment. Tal quotes psychologist Daniel Goleman, who explains that "the misinterpretation of what goes on around us is frequently useful as a coping strategy if a properly interpreted event threatens important, foundational schemas" (Tal 225). The way in which these characters misinterpret their surroundings is through believing in their own individual fantasies of participating in missions that will help the United States and/or their fellow soldiers.

Coming to Vietnam with a "Good War" schema and a grandiose plan to save Asia from the evils of communism did not at all prepare soldiers for the lack of clear objectives, and the type of guerrilla warfare, which they encountered. Vietnam veterans who later became writers had to find a different way to depict this military shift and they formed a new style of writing to match the new style of war. As Nielson states, there was "something new about the war that required a new way of telling" and this is now the "dominant critical attitude toward imaginative prose about the Vietnam War" (152). Since their expectations were so different from their experiences, writers turned, in particular, to New Journalism. Carpenter defines new Journalism as "the work of a war correspondent, but it is not journalism in the ordinary sense of the word, i.e. an objective, detached reporting of the 'facts.' Instead, it is... a hybrid form that, in typical postmodern fashion, blurs traditional genre distinctions... the New Journalism abandons all pretense of impersonal objectivity, substituting instead an intense subjectivity" (Carpenter 36).

The blurring of fact and fiction caused some criticism amongst scholars. Dwight MacDonald called the new literary style “Parajournalism—a bastard form exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction” (qtd in Nicholson 55). Though MacDonald’s assessment holds some truth, I believe that the experience of the Vietnam War was so different from the expected “Good War” that it was appropriate to blend fact and fiction in order to report on the feel of a war in which it sometimes seemed impossible simply to list facts associated with each event. I would include all New Journalism Vietnam war texts in Cobley’s argument that *Dispatches* “makes the more significant contention that facts can never speak for themselves because they are always already somebody’s interpretation. On the most basic level, the experience of Vietnam convinces Herr that information does not necessarily produce understanding” (100). Using New Journalism, the mixing of fact and fiction is an attempt to ease the anxiety of writing war narratives and to help overcome the difficulty of conveying meaning through straight reporting of events.

It is not just critics that emphasize the blurring of boundaries; the authors themselves that write in the style of New Journalism also want to make clear that they are not reporting on strict facts. Authors like Philip Caputo and Karl Marlantes, both of whom served in the Vietnam War, write novels based on their individual experiences in-country. They are adamant that these are accounts of their experience, yet contain fictional elements. Marlantes even emphasizes this fact in his title using the word novel: *Matterhorn: A Novel of the Vietnam War* (2009). Caputo similarly makes clear in the prologue of *A Rumor of War* that this “is simply a story about war, about the things we do in war and the things war does to them” (xiii). Stories and novels imply fictitious elements and writing in the form of New Journalism allows these authors to blur the boundaries between fiction and fact in order to reach a “truer depiction of the war” (Neilson

147). This not only provides an opportunity to focus on a more authentic depiction of the war experience, but it also provides a sense of what the soldiers felt in-country—as if they in a fictional world.

This other-worldly feel of Vietnam made the genre of Magical Realism another popular choice for Vietnam War writers to convey their story. Though Magical Realism was initially associated with Latin American literature, it suited the Vietnam War as well. David Danow explains that these texts “derive from a host of Latin American realities... an imposing geography, composed of daunting natural barriers... a frequently unbearable humid Caribbean atmosphere that inevitably dampens the spirits. The geographical proximity of the jungle to the city elicits a related omnipresent sense of the closeness of the prehistoric past to modern life, of myth, of primordial thinking, to scientific thought” (71). Danow’s description of the environment that prompted Latin American writers to resort to magic realism can also be applied to the environment of Vietnam, which likewise consisted of daunting natural barriers, weather that dampened spirits, and a sense of the encroachment of mythical and primordial thinking occasioned by the jungle. Eva Aldea explains that “‘Metaphysical magical realism’ is characterized by the technique of defamiliarization, creating an uncanny and disturbing atmosphere, but without an element of the super-natural... a ‘magical’ consciousness of reality” (Aldea 3). Though she speaks of Latin American literature, this description holds true for Vietnam literature, especially Tim O’Brien’s *Going After Cacciato*. The characters are in a disturbing atmosphere (Vietnam’s jungles), and they imagine or hallucinate different sights and sounds, forcing them into a “magical” consciousness.

The use of the word “magical” for Aldea and Danow refers not so much to ghosts and myths—though these do exist within Vietnam War literature such as Robert Olen Butler’s *Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* (1992) and Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* (1990)—but more so to a perceived disruption of time and space. Danow continues to explain that the “‘magical dimension’ is hypostatized in literature by the superimposition of one perceived reality upon another” (71), and Rawdon Wilson adds that “magical realism focuses the problem of fictional space... by suggesting a model of how different geometries, inscribing boundaries that fold and refold like quicksilver, can superimpose themselves upon one another” (Wilson 210). Space, whether physical or within the conscious, drives the Vietnam narrative’s magical quality and shows the enfolding of realities upon one and other. For example, readers of Vietnam War narratives are confronted with characters driven by assumptions of World War II, pressure from family, fear of dying, intimidation by the unknown of the jungle, the Vietcong’s radical war tactics, and rampant drug use, to the point that all of these influences collapse onto each other. Aldea’s metaphysical magical realism as a Vietnam War narrative genre utilizes elements of New Journalism through very straight-forward descriptions. Additionally, I would argue that the enfolding of multiple realities is what causes war correspondents and veterans alike to create the genre of New Journalism; though these Vietnam War narratives are written in a journalistic tone, but the experience cannot be fully expressed without turning to fictitious elements.

The first reality to be hypostatized was their schema of war. Many protagonists of these narratives start their journey with a fantasy image of what war will be like. Caputo, who nods to the old World War representations, is excited to not be “watching it on a movie or TV screen, not reading about it in a book, but *there*, living out a fantasy” (6). His schema based on fictional accounts, turns into his own personal fantasy of “charging up some distant beach head, like John

Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima*, and then coming home a suntanned warrior with medals on my chest” (6). His expectation of what war will be like allows him to form this image of heroic actions and pride, but his attitude quickly changes after he realizes that this war is not like the past wars. As they spend more time in-country, we also see soldiers fantasize about leaving the war, such as Karl Marlantes’ character, Waino Mellas. As he waits for rescue after being attacked by the Viet Cong, he thinks about leaving: “They’d never expect a single Marine to break the code and slip by them. He’d hump right out to VCB and safety. He’d hump right out of the war. The fantasy kept returning, with new details. But it remained a fantasy. A more dominant part of him would adhere to the code. He’d die before he’d abandon anyone. Nor would he surrender” (Marlantes 421). The fantasy here allows Mellas to temporarily escape his dire situation and each time he wants to leave the war, he can return to the fantasy of going AWOL and add new details to his fictional experience.

Michael Herr, although not actually a veteran of the Vietnam War like Caputo and Marlantes, writes about the fear and violence he experienced as an embedded reporter accompanying the troops. He too finds himself blurring reality with fantasy: “Sometimes I didn’t know if an action took a second or an hour or if I dreamed it or what” (Herr 20). Herr jumps from very specific accounts of time to the moment possibly being a dream, showing how even simple forms of narrative description, like time, become complicated while in Vietnam. Herr also talks about the fantasy derived from the assumed experience of the World War II veteran, and how that turns into a nightmare upon experiencing Vietnam. Herr refers to a World War I movie as inspiration for his schema: “and then your *Dawn Patrol* fantasy would turn very ugly, events again and again not quite what you had expected” (Herr 230). We see in these three novels that the authors write small individual fantasies for each character. Whether the illusion of what the

Vietnam War would be like, the individual soldier's inner thoughts while in-country, or just the experience of being in a space where your schema is continually challenged with no escape, all these fantasies provide the reader with the sense that World War II representations led soldiers to feel disconnected from their reality such that they needed to turn inward to cope with their experiences.

The differences between World War II and Vietnam do not just stop at the experiences during deployment; these soldiers' schemas would be challenged even further upon returning home. While so many men went to fight for fear of disappointing family or being judged by friends, the real criticism came after their service. American civilians' reactions to the Vietnam veteran also affected the literary output and anxiety of writing. The need to tell their story and disrupt the civilian schema of the "Good War" becomes even more important—so important that relaying of facts, many of which would appear violent and cruel, would never help the civilian understand the Vietnam experience. Just as soldiers were affected by World War II images, so were civilians: as a result, it was crucial that writing about Vietnam depict not only facts, but also the raw emotions of the soldiers experience them.

Chapter Three of my dissertation will focus on metaphysical magical realist novels written in the style of New Journalism. Tim O'Brien's Paul Berlin in *Going After Cacciato* and Denis Johnson's Skip Sands in *Tree of Smoke* struggle to adjust to the Vietnam War as their schemas are challenged by their traumatic experiences there. The differences between their World War II-influenced schemas and the Vietnam War are so large that the adjustment turns into not only an outward performance, but also attempts to live out entire internal fantasies. Using Kali Tal and Daniel Goleman's discussion of an individual's personal schemas, I will address how the schemas of Paul Berlin and Skip Sands contradict their experiences and lead

them to the construction of fantasies through which they attempt to gain a sense of control and usefulness that is largely denied them while in-country. As a result, in these novels a mere coping strategy turns into entire plot sequences.

Each of these plots consists of much more than an effort to escape the war or to live up to the image of John Wayne; instead, Paul Berlin and Skip Sands use their fantasies to imagine missions of extreme importance, which in turn allows them a kind of agency denied them in reality. Just as the World War II novels include characters holding on to the myths of World War I, the Vietnam War narratives include characters that refuse to adjust and force their environment to fit their World War schema. In *Tree of Smoke*, Skip Sands maintains the desire to be useful and “win” the war, but he continually and unconsciously misreads his surroundings in order to maintain his schema of war and his relationship with his uncle. *Tree of Smoke* does not include fantastical elements in the writing itself, but the entire experience of the war for Skip Sands is imaginary. He creates an entire secret mission that his uncle, Colonel Sands, graciously allows him to be a part of. Skip does not rework his schema, and instead misinterprets his experiences, which explains why he ignores any warning signs and his gut reactions for years. Instead of adjusting his schema of his relationship with his uncle and his purpose in Vietnam, he continues to prolong his fantasy mission until it is clearly too late and his life is ruined.

Tim O’Brien’s *Going After Cacciato* follows Paul Berlin’s mission to Paris, which is his fantasy mission that he creates in order to cope with the trauma of death, fragging, and Cacciato’s disappearance. Berlin, like Skip, Caputo, and Mellas came to Vietnam wanting to help and do good—like the previous generation did in Europe— but because of the lack of opportunity they must go inward and create these illusions. Whether these men experience small daydreams, intricate storylines, or melding their fantasy with reality, they are struck with the

sudden realization that this is not like World War II and they must mentally adjust while dealing with the trauma of war. Using one's imagination and mixing reality with fiction not only becomes the imaginative prose that we associate with the Vietnam narrative, but also how the characters in the novel viewed and experienced the war as well.

The Vietnam literature, even the novels published almost fifty years later, all contain some sort of fantasy element. I argue that this is due to the men's specific personal schema in that they were faced with a war experience that they could not align with the previous military engagements in any meaningful way. It was not just the advancements in technology, but the enemy's tactics, the environment of Vietnam, and the rampant use of drugs that made the men feel completely disoriented. Opportunity to exhibit and perform acts of masculinity were scarce, and the approach used to fight the Viet Cong evidenced manhood even less than the tactics of previous wars. Even though opportunities for bravery were rare, we still see in the literature that those who persist in personifying the World War traditional soldier mentality usually end up ostracized from their group or even dead. Like Yossarian and Pilgrim, the protagonists found in these war narratives must find a way to cope with their assumptions of what war should be like. Instead of critiquing the way others use language or disregarding linear time to disrupt deeply engrained binaries, the men in these novels must go inward, for it is not just the national myth of World War II that they must contend with, but their own personal myths. Their schema of what war should be, based on the "moral blueprint" of World War II, which in turn was based on the masculine performance of World War I, is challenged on a personal level; therefore, the men must internally reconcile or manipulate their interpretations of their environment in order to survive. In Vietnam literature we see the men force their environment to fit their schema in order

to cope with the unknown in various ways that cannot be seen; thus, the focus of Vietnam is psychological survival.

#### **1.4 The Iraq War Narrative: Framing the War and Maintaining Civilian Support**

The response for the next generation fighting in Iraq is to reject the inward, personal focus of the Vietnam soldier and to worry instead about what the outsider thinks about the military as a whole as well as the individuals within it. In the wake of lack of civilian support for the Vietnam War, as discussed above, there is, for participants in later American wars, a deep need to maintain public support and understanding—something that Iraq War narratives emphasize repeatedly and make central through the theme of storytelling. As the Afghanistan and second Iraq War drag on, the resemblance to Vietnam becomes more and more apparent, which in turn creates more anxiety and more of a desire to manipulate facts to avoid comparisons to Vietnam. Two examples of this manipulation of facts in the public sphere can be seen in Pat Tillman's death and Jessica Lynch's rescue.

In April of 2004, Pat Tillman, a standout NFL player, was killed in Afghanistan. Forgoing a multi-million dollar football contract, he and his brother had enlisted into the army and then later into the Ranger program after watching the aftermath of the World Trade Center tragedy. Initially the military reported that Tillman was killed during an enemy ambush, but five weeks later the actual truth came out—he was killed by friendly fire: “The records show Tillman fought bravely and honorably until his last breath. They also show that his superiors exaggerated his actions and invented details as they burnished his legend in public, at the same time suppressing details that might tarnish Tillman's commanders” (Coll, “Unnecessary Death”). Eventually after an investigation, America learned that “dozens of internal Army documents...describe Tillman's death by fratricide after a chain of botched communications,

a misguided order to divide his platoon over the objection of its leader and undisciplined firing by fellow Rangers” (Coll, “In the Kill Zone”). The military’s response to the chain of events involving a lack of communication, an order that did not make sense, and the firing of weapons under the assumptions of an enemy target that led to the death of a very high profile soldier is, I would argue, a cover-up of mistakes that makes the military look careless and out of control: two adjectives reminiscent of the Vietnam War. While this example serves as an extreme, we see the lengths officers are willing to go to in order to maintain the military’s reputation for composure and control while in the Middle East.

In response to learning the truth of Tillman’s death, John McCain stated: “whatever the cause... you may have at least a subconscious desire here to portray the situation in the best light, which may not have been totally justified” (qtd in Coll, “Managing Facts”). For the top military officers faced with the situation, this desire appears to be more calculated and thought out than just a subconscious desire, especially when Tillman was not the first soldier whose experience was manipulated in order to illustrate the military’s competence and garner continued support from American civilians. A little over a year prior to Tillman’s death, Jessica Lynch, along with others, were rescued from a hospital in Iraq. Due to the fact that this was the first prisoner of war to be rescued since World War II and the rescuee was a woman, the entire operation was recorded for all the world to see. Upon her return home and following her rehabilitation, the military and media erroneously reported on her heroism and experience as a POW. Lynch publically spoke out against the description of a heroic attempt to avoid capture and continually shoot at the enemy to protect those around her, even testifying before Congress in an attempt to set the record straight: she was not stabbed and hit while at the Iraqi hospital, she did not fire her weapon, she is not a hero but a survivor, and the true heroes are the ones who

rescued her. In all the reports and interviews, Lynch repeatedly questions why her experience was misrepresented and highly publicized as many news outlets and the military initially claimed she “fought until she ran out of ammunition,” when she was really taken prisoner without firing a single shot and all her injuries were caused by the Humvee crash.

I argue that the answer to Lynch’s questions about why she was made out to be a hero is that the military learned from the Vietnam War about the importance of managing and shaping Americans’ reactions to American military conflicts. Because of how divided the previous war rendered our country, the military has sought since to avoid any negative press. This avoidance led, in the cases of Tillman and Lynch, to outright lying in order to protect the military and bolster its appearance of competence; both lies can be regarded as efforts to avoid a reaction like that of so many American civilians to the Vietnam War. But it is not only the military that is invested in maintaining good veteran/civilian relations: many civilians now advocate “supporting our troops” regardless of their political opinions of the United States’ involvement and conflicts in the Middle East. And this reaction can be seen in the public outpouring of support for Tillman and Lynch, whether deserved or not. The military stretches the truth, the American people ignore the similarities to the Vietnam War, and everyone can continue with the status quo. What we see in the news and what we learn in the war narratives from the Middle East conflicts is that there is a disconnect between what the military and media report and what returning soldiers say. Unfortunately, it is Tillman, Lynch, and the others who suffer; they are caught in the middle. These men and women know how ostracizing participating in a controversial war can be and they want to maintain the support during and after their return; however, they also do not want to lie about their experiences or speak out against the military. This issue only surfaces upon

returning home and they cannot know the consequences of the military's story-telling until it is too late.

Many of the narratives about the First Gulf War, the war in Afghanistan, and now the war in Iraq focus on the stress a soldier feels when navigating contact with civilians. Whether answering mundane questions or being thanked for their service, there is something about these wars that causes anxiety when soldiers are asked to speak about them. Whether talking to the media, family, or strangers, characters display a dilemma that haunts their conversations: should they behave according to their thoughts and feelings or according to what the military and/or civilians expect? Anthony Swofford's book, *Jarhead* (2003), based on his experiences in the Gulf War in 1990, shows that this is not a new phenomenon. Haunted by the response of the American public to the Vietnam War, the military has been carefully crafting stories or omitting details in order to establish and maintain public support for decades. Swofford provides the reader with the cause of this new focus in the first paragraph of his novel. He explains that "Iraqi atrocities are being exaggerated by Kuwaitis and Saudis and certain elements of the U.S. government, so as to gather more coalition support from the UN, the American people, and the international community generally" (5). The claim that those in charge disseminate pieces of embellished information in order to manipulate the American people is a main theme that will be seen throughout the Middle East conflict war narratives.

Swofford's novel illustrates Judith Butler's concept of "framing" as a direct reaction to the Vietnam War. She likens the act of framing to that of a con: it is a "tactic by which evidence is orchestrated so to make a false accusation appear true. Some power manipulates the terms of appearance and one cannot break out of the frame" (Butler 11). This means that as those in power manipulate information, the audience finds themselves stuck within the framed story,

because the reader cannot know what is true and what is false. As we see in Iraq War narratives, there are various approaches to framing a story, ranging from leaving details out to not speaking on certain subjects to embellishing facts, or just plain lying. Regardless of the approach taken, the desired outcome is the same—to make sure civilians and the media do not see the similarities of the wars in the Middle East to the Vietnam War for fear of losing support while in-country and upon returning home. As Swofford makes clear, civilian support is incredibly important, and just six weeks into his deployment, reporters are already coming to speak to his squad. For the enlisted soldiers, excitement stems from their families sending them newspaper clippings about acquaintances deployed; but Swofford claims that “now the clippings will end. The reporters will write about us, and when you’re written about, you don’t need the clipping. You stand tall and have your picture taken and you say wise, brave things that your family and friends read and they become even more proud of you... because now you are brave and wise and your words and photo are in the newspaper” (13). This need for validation comes not just from one’s family, but also from the American people as a whole. Although the soldiers, as Swofford reports, feel useless and bored, at least they can make it appear to those at home that they are special and brave.

Similarly, the officers deployed also feel excitement about the press’ visit and feel the need to prepare the men. Days before the two reporters arrive, “Sergeant Dunn has already recited a list of unacceptable topics... He’s ordered us to act like top marines, patriots... the best of the battalion” (13-14). The officers fear that the men will act out of control, speak about training or their weapons, and give the reporters a negative impression of their group and the military as a whole. Indeed, the reporters themselves appear to be aware of the fact that the soldiers have been prepped in advance and that their comments might reflect their officers’

desires to censor them: “they shake our hands and urge us to speak freely, but they know we’ve been scripted; they know our answers to their questions have already been written on our faces though maybe not in our hearts” (16). Swofford even mentions that the woman reporter acts as if she already heard all these answers from the last group of soldiers, alluding to how constructed these interviews are (16). What the reader recognizes in *Jarhead* is that a short impromptu interview, introduced with a quick media preparation talk, will later turn into entire military departments created for managing public affairs, providing hours of interview practice for soldiers and encouraging their participation in multiple press events. Because our prolonged involvement in the Middle East really has begun to resemble the Vietnam War, there is now more and more focus on managing the public perception of the military.

The need to “frame” one’s experience does not just occur when a soldier is part of the military but, in fact, continues even when he or she returns home as an individual. Civilians have been well-taught by the media that they must support their troops regardless of their thoughts on the politics of the war—a fact that has been especially emphasized in the wake of 9/11 regarding Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. This emphasis on a need to support the troops at all costs has, ironically, caused the disconnect between civilians and soldiers that is a major focus of contemporary U.S. war literature. Having seen the coached and prepared soldiers in interviews on television, civilians all too often assume that this rehearsed representation is the truth. When they later encounter veterans, they thank them for all their hard work and sacrifice. For the veteran who feels that he or she has not done anything to deserve such support—and may even feel guilty about his or her service—this demonstration of support can appear false or unwelcome and may generate resentment toward civilians.

Such resentment on the part of veterans toward civilians is described in Kevin Powers' *Yellow Birds* (2012). As the protagonist, John Bartle, who has just finished his deployment in Iraq and has landed on American soil, enjoys a beer at the airport awaiting his connecting flight to his home town, the bartender tells him all the cliché phrases: "Damn shame... I just hate that y'all have to be over there... we ought to nuke [them] back to the Stone Age... Whole place is full of savages, is what I hear" (106). As Bartle attempts to pay for his drink, the bartender points "to a yellow ribbon pinned on the wall between a signed eight-by-ten glossy of a daytime soap star and a faded newspaper clipping of a man with a giant catfish splayed over the hood of a red Ford pickup with a rusted front quarter panel" (Powers 106). Yes, the yellow ribbon represents support for the troops, but how comical for it to hang between a soap star and a man with a giant catfish on a pickup truck. From Bartle's perspective, it is almost insulting to equate the ribbon with those two meaningless photos. This bartender represents a civilian American who wants to support the military, but does not want to actually think about what these young men and women experience and how it is much more complicated than just nuking an entire nation. While the gesture to pay for his beers is kind, Bartle becomes angry because he "didn't want to smile and say thanks. Didn't want to pretend I'd done anything except survive. [The bartender] reached out to shake my hand and I picked up the money and handed it back to him and turned and left" (Powers 107). In Bartle's view, the encounter is frustrating, rather than rewarding, because he feels that civilians do not really want to understand his experiences and, instead, just go through the motions of support; in turn, the veteran cannot really speak about his feelings because to admit to conflicted emotions and trauma would be to reinforce the trope of the unhinged, crazy "Vietnam veteran" which the military and the public has done so much to try and forget. So

instead, the soldier suffers alone, unable to speak thoughts that might upset the carefully framed images of the war constructed by the military and the media.

In Chapter Four of my dissertation I argue that David Abrams' *Fobbit* (2012) and Ben Fountain's *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2012) both illustrate the phenomenon of "framing" and the impacts this framing has on soldiers, veterans, and civilians. This focus on carefully managed storytelling and framing the soldier's experience—a focus that is new to the U.S. war narrative—appears to the reader of *Fobbit* through the work done by the Public Affairs Office (PAO), which manages soldier deaths, the civilian media, and the reporting of mistakes made both on and off the forward operating base (or F.O.B.). The importance of words and framing is made clear in this novel as officers continually tell those writing the reports that there is no bad news so long as they put positive spin on everything.

Using Butler's account of how framing war and experience impacts soldier and civilian perception, I argue that numerous characters, including Staff Sergeant Chance Gooding, Lieutenant Colonel Stacie Harkleroad, Lieutenant Colonel Vic Duret, and Captain Abe Shrinkle, become victims of attempts to frame events in the most positive light possible. They are selective with their facts, careful with their word selections, and/or straight out lie in order to garner civilian support, and the novel covers a wide range of framing. The main events that the characters focus on are the killing of an Iraqi terrorist that has failed to detonate a bomb, the killing of a mentally disabled man at a gas station, the careless discharge of a grenade that kills an Iraqi, and the death of a newly demoted officer who frequents the Australian military's pool posing as a British land surveyor. Each of these moments forces the PAO to somehow account for the events, but to illustrate them in such a way that does not make the military look bad. This stems from the fear of a homecoming similar to that of the Vietnam veterans. Vietnam has

caused the military as a whole and the individual men in the PAO to concern themselves with how they are perceived. Again, we see a return to performing for the other, like in the World Wars, but through the use of language, not actual gender performance, in order to exhibit control and usefulness in Iraq.

If *Fobbit* shows how information is framed, Fountain's *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* shows us the consequences of framing the war in Iraq for soldiers who return to the United States. Fountain's novel focuses on a group of soldiers whose battle was caught on video and went viral. They then find themselves on a weeklong press trip throughout the country, which culminates with their various experiences with civilians at the Dallas Cowboy's annual Thanksgiving football game.<sup>1</sup> These men, including the narrator, struggle with their expected performance of the perfect soldier. They must answer the questions about the death of their friend on live TV and they must maintain their composure at all times for fear of portraying the military in a bad light. The main concern for the characters in both novels is to avoid any comparison to the Vietnam War and its veterans. In doing so, they lose a little bit of themselves and begin to resent those that believe everything in Iraq is going well and that Americans are sacrificing so much in order to do important work.

Most notably, the protagonist of Fountain's novel resents the older, wealthy men who do not see him as an individual, but as a representative of the military as a whole. These men praise the soldiers but continually use empty buzz words of "so proud" and "honor" that do not mean anything to Billy. Many of these admirers are too old to fight and feel safe showing their support, and yet they still treat the war as more a form of entertainment than an actual situation with real-

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Fountain actually was inspired by the halftime show at Dallas Stadium on Thanksgiving Day that had a group of Iraq soldiers standing there as fireworks and jets flew over.

life consequences. We also watch the men interact in awkward interviews where the men have been prepared beforehand by military public relations about the appropriate things to say all in the hope that Americans will continue to support the war. Scholars such as Patrick Deer and Andrew J. Bacevich explain the civilian/military divide and how framing the war strains the relationship: as long as civilians support the troops, they can keep their distance from our military involvement in the Middle East. The consequences of this surface once the two groups are face to face with extremely different understandings of the war.

What the real consequences are of the civilian military divide and the act of framing the wars in the Middle East remain to be seen, and Americans will not know the true result until our next major war. What is clear though is that as each war influences and shapes the next war, there will be parts of this drawn-out Middle East conflict that will undoubtedly hurt the next generation of soldiers, especially since this war has been represented to the American people in such a positive way from the start. I also would argue that there have been some major shifts in the military as well: most notably, women are being allowed to fight on the front lines and the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” has been repealed, both of which will also cause the war narrative to evolve. As the military becomes more diverse, there will be a shift in the literature, driven by the experiences and identities of the authors writing. Though women have published their stories while in-country, those stories have usually taken the form of non-fiction memoirs; as yet, most fictional war narrative has been written by men. I believe, however, that this will change over time and will result in even richer and more nuanced war narratives in the future—narratives that may challenge the near hegemony of previous male, heteronormative fictional accounts.

My dissertation will show that the myths of war are perpetuated by popular representations of the subsequent war. Each new generation is inundated with images of heroism,

patriotism, and strength and for many new soldiers, this is how they believe war to be. As the war narratives I have discussed above illustrate, representations not only affect the expectation of war but also how soldiers adjust to their new, unprepared-for reality. Each war's collection of narratives includes protagonists that cope with their revelation in similar ways, which is also inspired by previous war representations. So, when soldiers attempt to find some agency during or even after their deployment, they still respond to the myths of war fashioned in previous representations and face extreme difficulty controlling their expectations and establishing agency.

As we will see in these six novels, soldiers' expectations lead to contradictions, confusion, and even death due to their inability or refusal to adjust. The men enter into chaos once in-country; they understandably cling to their expectations, because they are the only known factor they can hold onto. These novels allow us to see raw and real emotions, but they also allow us to see commonalities amongst different veteran writers. There are common themes that repeatedly appear within each war's narrative, which further emphasizes that these characters react to their previous knowledge of war and cope with the stark differences through similar means. The World War II novels reimagine key components to human civilization: meaning-making through language and time. The characters in Vietnam novels cope through creating fantasy missions that help distract them from their actual reality. The Iraq war novels show us how important it is to put a positive spin on all information disseminated from the Middle East, even if that means withholding information, and how this negatively affects the civilian military relationship.

## **2 FEELINGS OF FEAR AND COURAGE WHILE COMBATING GENDER EXPECTATIONS IN WORLD WAR II**

World War I, originally the war to end all wars, saw an unimaginable amount of death and destruction on a global scale. The casualty counts of civilians alone rose to over seven million. The massive scale was not the only change, but the way in which war was waged changed as well. Men found themselves not out in the battle field like past wars participating in hand to hand combat, but instead were relegated to the trenches, dealing with mortars and the automatic machine gun. They witnessed lives lost daily for just a gain of a mere few yards and this took its mental toll. “The Great War” was the first war to result in public awareness of “shell-shock” or what we would today call PTSD. Though World War I’s advances in technology and military approaches resulted in a rather peaceful end with signed treaties and the dissolution of empires, it in no way prepared humanity for what came two decades later. The idealistic modernist vision of our world and the push for improvement and advancement was shattered with the knowledge of concentration camps, ethnic cleansing, and the atomic bomb. World War II showed us the destruction and disregard for humanity that was possible, and with the end of the war came the end of the modernist project and the turn to a postmodernist view of war.

If World War I soldiers had difficulty with technology’s assault on their physical senses while in the trenches, many World War II veterans found their emotional senses traumatized as well. While fighting for a good cause, American soldiers still faced fear and death, but the end of this war and its everlasting images gave these men more than physical ailments; they were truly ill-equipped to process what they experienced. Fiona Reid states that “the shell-shocked soldiers

of the First World War have never been glorified or glamorised in the same way as their physically wounded comrades, they have never been portrayed as battle-scarred warriors. On the contrary, during and after the war they were sometimes vilified and often ignored or marginalised” (Reid 91). Because men with shell-shock/PTSD were viewed negatively and not lauded as the heroes associated with World War I, one would expect the World War II soldier to internalize this knowledge and try to perform according to the traditional masculine military norms expected of American men and soldiers at the turn of the century; however, as we see in the World War II narratives, this is not the case.

Those at war understandably have difficulty coping with their own mortality as they constantly encounter their potential death. These internalized fears create a need for a coping mechanism, and the only direct knowledge World War II soldiers have to refer to is the men who came home from World War I. This creates a difficult either/or situation; they can embody the glorified heroic soldier or the marginalized shell-shocked veteran, reaffirming a binary model of soldier behavior. For the men participating in World War II, they modeled their masculinity by committing to their interpretation of the overtly masculine World War I soldier, which was done in order to differentiate themselves from cowards and gain acceptance from their peers and superiors. This generation of soldiers held on to the belief that they could control their experiences and reactions, as long as they maintained the appropriate gender performance.

Similar to the way that men had adjusted their approach when going to war to ensure they did not turn into the “shell shocked” veterans, postmodern authors adjusted their approach as well. Instead of embracing “meta- or master narratives—universal syntheses premised on hierarchal self-other dualisms”—the postmodernist writer “rejects them, emphasizing the diffuse, antihierarchal, antidualistic, local, particular, partial, temporary” (DeKoven 16). Marianne

DeKoven continues to say that the 1960s gave way to a “postmodern hyperspace—mobile, decentered, nomadic, fragmented, border-crossing, shape-shifting, unencompassable by self consistent, centered reason” (17). This hyperspace is where readers find Joseph Heller’s and Kurt Vonnegut’s protagonists in *Catch-22* (1961) and *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). Within these novels we see the rejection of hierarchy and dualisms by protagonists Yossarian and Billy Pilgrim, respectively. These two novels veer away from stories of strength, courage, and love that authors like Hemingway and Dos Passos produced through Frederick Henry and John Andrews, and in their place Heller, through language, and Vonnegut, through time travel, create flawed, yet sympathetic characters that challenge the conventional gender performance of World War I soldiers.

Many critics argue that Heller and Vonnegut use postmodern humor and satire to illuminate the absurdity of war. Kevin Brown defines postmodern humor as “rebellious against the norms of literature and trying to subvert them with no motivation other than pleasure” (47); but I would argue that the endgame for Heller and Vonnegut is more than just pleasure. Both authors attempt to illuminate the strict gender binaries of war and the absurdity of the adherence to the stoic, heroic image that the military and general society encouraged men to project, if not fully embody, in the first half of the century. While many critics focus on these novels as anti-war in orientation, and they certainly are in their own right, these novels can also be seen in a larger context as not just against war, but against the acceptance of the modernist masculine norms and gender binary still lingering in the 1960s. Both novels include men who exhibit the expected behaviors of the strong and brave World War I soldier, but in a comedic, irrational, negative way. Thomas Pollard states in his essay on *Catch-22*’s gender dynamics that gender and military ranks are incredibly connected and the higher the rank, the more masculine the literary

character behaves (116). Although in these novels not all high-ranking officers exhibit overly masculine behavior, I would add that this connection between ranks and gender makes war a prime setting to examine past gender binaries from within postmodern hyperspace. The officers serve as a touchstone for soldiers' behavior, but as we see in the postmodern war narrative, not all characters perform correctly, which leads to soldiers policing those acting beyond the prescribed performance. Regardless of rank, these one-dimensional masculine characters illustrate the potential downfall of strict adherence to one's masculine performance. And as we will see, Heller and Vonnegut highlight the construction of masculinity through their main characters John Yossarian and Billy Pilgrim, who embody a more flexible gender identity and are arguably more sympathetic and adjusted while at war.

## **2.1 *Catch-22*: Bravery, Cowardice, and the (un)Making of Meaning**

Many characters in the novel perform as expected of the World War II soldier because of their knowledge of the aftermath of World War I, and there is no way to escape this knowledge. As Judith Butler has stated, gender is a social construction and it “is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (6). Subsequently, these men going to defend their country have been conditioned by their environment and the politics of the modern period. Their “bodies are understood as passive recipients of inexorable cultural law. When the relevant ‘culture’ that ‘constructs’ gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws... not biology, but culture, becomes destiny” (Butler 11). There is no escaping the knowledge of the correct way to behave, and those who behave incorrectly are chastised by themselves or, if they continue to stray from the norms, those around them.

Along with the conditioning of gender performance by culture, Heller's novel explores language as well. Many literary critics discuss Heller's confusion of language, disruption of the signified/signifier relationship, and the meaninglessness of the actual words spoken by characters, as a way to show the absurdity and humor of war. Stephen Potts and Thomas F. Bertonneau both see the novel as commentary on the "war on language." As we confuse the meanings of words and signifiers lose their relationship to signifieds, then words "no longer signify as expected; they no longer signify at all and mysteries are multiplied beyond necessity. Initially, this leads to paradoxical and comic effects" (32). Gary W. Davis also comments on this devolution of language, explaining that "*Catch-22* exposes the meaninglessness of our conventional understanding of discourse and its processes" (66). This confusion of language is clear throughout the novel, but I see this as commentary on not just language, but general culture as well. The characters using convoluted sentence structure and logic are those attempting to follow the masculine gender norms; the characters disrupt language and gender simultaneously.

As we break down one societal agreement that assigns arbitrary meaning to an arbitrary sign (i.e. language), we then weaken other relationships constructed by society as well. Ferdinand de Saussure argues that the "the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary... The idea of 'sister' is not linked by any inner relationship to the succession of sounds... [T]hat it could be represented equally by just any other sequence is proved by differences among languages and by the very existence of different languages" (de Saussure 67-68). And yet, when we are born into a language we link the sounds of sister with the actual idea, and embody the word and identity marker of sister without a second thought. We accept the label sister, because we are called sister, and all these terms and identity markers "in principle on collective behavior or –what amounts to the same thing—on convention" (de Saussure 68). As

more and more people agree to be called sister and call one's self a sister, the stronger the connection between the word and the idea becomes. Continuing this thought process, de Saussure then states that "in this sense linguistics can become the master-pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system" (de Saussure 68). If semiotics is the study of signs that are accepted to make meaning, then I would argue that gender is another example of signifying. There is no inherent relationship between the signified—biological sex—and the signifier—masculine or feminine gender norms—but society places great meaning on this relationship in order to organize and structure our existence as a whole.

If we accept that gender is another example of the arbitrary relationship between sign and signified and that the connection between the two is arbitrary, then as the characters in *Catch-22* use language incorrectly and meaning begins to break down, especially for the overly masculine men who adhere to the World War I gender binary, we can argue that the gender binary breaks down as well. Heller illustrates what happens when people disregard the societal contracts of language and gender and how this opens up an array of possibilities for meaning (and non meaning) making. This complication of meaning-making is where the idea of Catch-22 as a kind of double-bind comes into play. The other soldiers accept the notion of Catch-22. When Yossarian starts to reject the expected gender performance, they explain to him the double bind: sanity or insanity. Yossarian can only be sent home if he is crazy, but "a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind... [I]f 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" (46). There is no way around this logic, similar to how our culture dictates our meaning making. If we reject the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, then we cannot express ourselves; however, if we use language or gender to

express our rejection of this relationship, we in turn use and accept the meaning culture prescribes. There is no way to reject gender because as Butler states it is fundamental to politics and culture.

At the end of the novel, however, Yossarian finds a way to protest against the expected adherence to gender norms. This comes at the realization of Snowden's secret, which is that "man was matter... [T]he spirit gone, man is garbage" (440).<sup>2</sup> This realization represents matter as one's biological makeup; but it also means that man matters, as in serves a purpose. Yossarian sees the spirit—a kind of fusion of masculine and feminine principles—as what makes a man matter; without one's spirit, our life is meaningless. It is not culture alone that dictates how others read our body, but our spirit. Here he recognizes the importance of living according to one's spirit and not one's body: "set fire to him and he will burn. Bury him and he'll rot, like other kinds of garbage" (440). What separates man from garbage is his spirit, which leaves Yossarian with the desire to change his environment and not allow his spirit to be set afire or buried. He must embrace his spirit, both masculine and feminine parts, and forget about what those around him attempt to do to him.

Colonel Cathcart and his raising of the number of missions is one outside factor that exerts direct control over Yossarian and the other men in his group. Cathcart represents one form of masculinity that not only confuses his men, but makes him extremely disliked and isolated from his peers during his entire time in Italy. He exudes a pride and confidence which

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<sup>2</sup> Snowden's secret has been the center of many scholar's interpretations of the novel. Alfred Kazin sees it as the novel's "primal scene" (490). David M. Craig states that "out of Snowden's viscera, the genetic coding for all of Heller's fiction emerges" (235). Robert Merrill finds Snowden's death to be the culmination of the novel's meaning (46). And Stephen Doloff believes this to signify the "intimations of immortality and mortality—the former glaringly repudiated by the novel, the latter grotesquely confirmed" (181).

continually leads him to raise the number of missions the men must complete before being discharged.<sup>3</sup> The first day that he meets his squad he “was there, brimming with tough pride in his new outfit and celebrating his assumption of command by raising the number of missions required from twenty-five to thirty” (53). Ironically though, he only outwardly performs this extreme level of confidence; inwardly, Cathcart is very insecure. He is described as a “slick, successful, slipshod, unhappy man,” who “wanted to be a general. He was dashing and dejected, poised and chagrined. He was complacent and insecure, daring in the administrative stratagems he employed to bring himself to the attention of his superiors and craven in his concern that his schemes might all backfire” (187). Brett Wiley claims that it is Cathcart’s need to be General that “distinguishes him from all the other characters in the novel” and “eventually result[s] in making him the enemy of his own men” (83). Though his desire for advancement does distinguish him from the other characters, it is not just his ambition but his entire masculine identity that makes his men dislike him. All of the characteristics that Heller lists in this quote represent binaries, which could be superimposed onto the gender binary. Cathcart fights against representing the feminine pole, and just as he sees no opportunity for fluidity between these minor characteristics that he embodies, there is no possibility for fluidity between the genders either. Cathcart sees only success or failure, and since there is no in-between, he overcompensates to be seen as a success, just as he overcompensates to be seen as a masculine Colonel.

Additionally, just as masculinity needs femininity to serve as a contrast, Cathcart also uses those around him as a comparison to measure his success. He “could measure his own

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<sup>3</sup> The United States Army Air Force considered a complete tour for a heavy bomber crew to be 25 missions due to the mental and physical strain on this particular group of men.

progress only in relationship to others, and his idea of excellence was to do something at least as well as all the men his own age who were doing the same thing even better” (Heller 187). The convoluted language used to describe Cathcart’s view of success illustrates a larger social construction of an individual’s own self-worth. Cathcart bases every decision on how those around him will view his choices, and what those viewpoints will do for his reputation. He uses a special cigarette holder because he believes that it makes him look “debonair and intellectual” (187). He continually raises the number of missions because he wants to stand out and be promoted to General. However, his reasoning for his men to stay and fight is not to defeat the enemy, but for his group to have the most casualties. In Cathcart’s mind more casualties means more sacrifice and actions of bravery, which in turn will lead to more praise. He tells the Chaplain that he will volunteer the men for Avignon again because “the sooner we get some casualties, the sooner we can make some progress on this” (282). And the push is for his men to make the Airforce periodical’s Christmas issue, because he imagines “the circulation is higher than” (282). Due to his misguided motivation, the meaning of sacrifice for the good of the country is completely disrupted. Cathcart’s complete disregard for his men’s lives and the desire to stand out as a brave leader willing to lose men for the good of the country makes him a caricature of the idealized vision of the World War I officer who embraces danger in hopes of helping win the war.

Although a willingness to sacrifice one’s self and fight for the good of the world may seem to be a noble idea, Heller shows the hypocrisy behind a multitude of these actions by making Cathcart’s projects backfire, illuminating his manipulative nature. He “wanted to be a general so desperately he was willing to try anything, even religion” (189). Cathcart then points to *The Saturday Evening Post* that contains a story about another chaplain who said prayers in

the briefing room before each mission. The entire reason Cathcart wants to conduct prayer service is so that he can be featured in the *Post*. Eventually this idea becomes a moot point when he realizes that the newspaper will not write an article about the same exact story twice. His prayer service idea has nothing to do with religion or wanting to put his men at ease before they go to battle, but instead, all Cathcart wants is accolades<sup>4</sup>.

Another example of Cathcart's debasement of seemingly admirable pursuits becomes evident when he decides to write "form letters." He tells the Chaplain and Corporal Whitcomb: "write a letter of condolence for me to the next of kin of every man in the group who's killed, wounded or taken prisoner. I want those letters to be sincere letters. I want them filled up with lots of personal details so there'll be no doubt I mean every word you said" (280). This quote illustrates Heller's play with language which underscores the irony of such letters. Heller builds on this slippage further when this disingenuous effort to console families leads to a great failure. No one checks the letters before they are sent to these grieving families, and the reader sees one of the consequences of these form letters. A letter sent to Doc Daneeka's wife is nothing like Cathcart hoped for: "*Dear Mrs., Mr., Miss, or Mr. and Mrs. Daneeka: Words cannot express the deep personal grief I experienced when your husband, son, father or brother was killed, wounded or reported missing in action*" (344). Sending letters appears to be a terrible mistake and accomplishes the complete opposite of what Cathcart hoped for, but Heller makes the situation even more absurd, underscoring the failures of civilian and officer. This death did not happen and the entire letter is fiction; however, by making Mrs. Daneeka, who has also been

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<sup>4</sup> Wiley points out that Cathcart's hypocrisy is Heller's way of making "a parody of America's tendency to accept death, indecency, and indecorum as mere byproducts of success and accomplishment" (85). Cathcart is a parody of mainstream American society's willingness to forgo morals in order to succeed.

receiving letters from Doc, believe that her husband is really dead, Heller implies that the civilian is partly responsible for the misunderstanding as well.

The fact that Mrs. Daneeka believes this obviously carelessly miswritten letter instead of her own husband's pleas can be seen as a commentary on how civilians respond to masculine performance as truth<sup>5</sup>. Mrs. Daneeka maintains her societal agreement that men in power are superior to her, and Cathcart outranks her husband. The official "word" trumps her husband's emotional pleas for help. Yet, the connection between the letter and its meaning is arbitrary and what she reads has no real meaning from a linguistic and literal sense. This lack of meaning found in the letter illuminates the lack of meaning found in Mrs. Daneeka's stubborn belief that her husband is dead. There is no meaning in the letter, but being a member of society, she must accept it because of its official capacity and the socially constructed belief that the military would not make a mistake.

Cathcart is not the only character concerned with image, and even some of his motivation stems not just from the desire to look good, but to hurt others' reputations as well. Captain Black starts the Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade with the hope of isolating Major Major and making him appear disloyal. Black claims that he is "going to make every son of a bitch who comes to my intelligence tent sign a loyalty oath. And I'm not going to let that bastard Major Major sign one even if he wants to" (112). Not only does he prevent Major Major from proclaiming his loyalty, but he also makes everyone sign the oath. This does not just occur when someone comes to him, but "all the enlisted men and officers on combat duty had to sign a loyalty oath to get

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<sup>5</sup> Leon Seltzer claims that Heller includes this absurd humor in order to expose society's polluting of our political, social, and economic systems. I would argue that Doc Daneeka's wife exemplifies this situation by relying on society's view of the Armed Forces instead of her own common sense and critical thinking skills.

their map cases... a second loyalty oath to receive their flak suits and parachutes... Every time they turned around there was another loyalty oath to be signed” (112-13). Because Black was enraptured “to discover himself spearheading the program” (112), he fails to see how meaningless these signatures are. To Black “the more loyalty oaths a person signed, the more loyal he was... it was as simple as that” (113). Clearly his thought process is faulty and his plan to make Major Major look bad backfires as well, because no one seems to care or recognize that Major Major does not participate. Black and his oaths exhibit another instance of an individual’s need to perform their masculinity and the arbitrary nature between the signifier and signified: he asserts his authority and believes he shows how his soldiers represent real American patriotism, but there is no true meaning behind his “crusade.” Since men are signing oaths without really believing in the message, Black’s oaths are not only meaningless, but also make all the other oaths (i.e. military oaths) worthless. His performance makes him feel good about himself, but the positives of the movement end there, and in fact he makes the men’s signatures on all other documents less powerful.

Another character who becomes obsessed with a pointless side project that he regards as an exhibition of masculine pride and strength is Lieutenant Scheisskopf<sup>6</sup>, who is obsessed with parades and marches. While at training in Santa Ana, California, Yossarian encounters the weekly parades that Scheisskopf loves so much. Every week “the best squadron in each wing won a yellow pennant on a pole that was utterly worthless. The best squadron on the base won a red pennant on a longer pole that was worth even less” (72). Not only are men forced to march and practice their marching, but they also must drag their pennants everywhere until the

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<sup>6</sup> By the end of the novel he is promoted to General, which further exemplifies how arbitrary and absurd the officers are in the novel. This jump from Lieutenant to General in such a short time, even renders the title of General, or any rank, meaningless.

following Sunday. What should be a source of pride is “absurd” to Yossarian: “No money went with them, no class privileges. Like Olympic medals and tennis trophies, all they signified was that the owner had done something of no benefit to anyone more capably than everyone else” (72)<sup>7</sup>. Yossarian makes a rational point, because the entire program does not benefit anyone other than Scheisskopf, who feels pride and a sense of accomplishment as a result of these parades and marches. Even from a civilian perspective, events like this are thought to be a source of celebration and importance, but there really is nothing to celebrate according to the men partaking in them, other than an indication that someone is better than someone else at marching.

Scheisskopf’s obsession continues even after he arrives in Italy. He asks General Peckem about parades, claiming he was told he could still conduct them. The thought of conducting weekly parades while in battle is ridiculous, but just like many of the other officers in the novel, Scheisskopf sees this as his one unique way to show off his masculine pride. The two men end up compromising on the idea of “just send[ing] out weekly announcements *postponing* the parades. Don’t even bother to schedule them. That would be infinitely more disconcerting” (323). Peckem adds another layer of absurdity to the obsession, but also understands the point of them as a performance. When he tells Scheisskopf not to cancel them, but to just postpone, he basically says that canceling the event would do the complete opposite of displaying pride and makes him appear even less in control of the situation. For Scheisskopf, the parades represent a source of power over his men and environment, and because he lacks actual leadership skills, the parades serve as an avenue to “successfully” lead the men. Although these marches are completely unrelated to the actual war effort, to cancel the marches would disrupt the foundation

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<sup>7</sup> These awards represent another example of meaningless items holding value because of society’s agreement that they are important.

of his entire masculine identity, so he relies on what a parade represents rather than finding a meaningful way to lead his men.

The officers also possess an oddly strict adherence to rules and regulations and defer to protocol over common sense. Similar to Mrs. Daneeka, they choose the representation of reality over what they see with their own two eyes. One example of this occurs when Yossarian moves the bomb line in order to postpone their flight to Bologna. The men nervously wait for the weather to improve, and as days pass, “they began to hate the bomb line itself. For hours they stared relentlessly at the scarlet ribbon on the map and hated it because it would not move up high enough to encompass the city” (119). What the bomb line represents turns into the actual space. The figurative representation becomes the sign and the space itself the signifier. A ribbon stands in for their actual reality, which parallels the constructed meaning society assigns to gender and language. Because the men enter in that societal contract and accept the relationship between the signifier and signified, the men see the movement of the ribbon as determining their future. Clevinger even says to Yossarian that “It’s a complete reversion to primitive superstition. They’re confusing cause and effect... They really believe that we wouldn’t have to fly that mission tomorrow if someone would only tiptoe up to the map in the middle of the night and move the bomb line” (119). Everyone does in fact believe this, the officers included, which becomes clear when the next morning the ribbon is moved and the mission is canceled. This regression to primitive superstition implies that the men are incapable of differentiating between reality and a representation of reality. By conflating representation and reality, Heller uses this moment to exemplify the absurdity of the blind adherence to any signifier/signified relationship.

It is not just representations that these men confuse with reality, but they ignore the literal reality itself in order to blindly follow procedure. When McWatt’s plane crashes and Doc

Daneeka's name is on the pilot's manifest, everyone assumes that Doc is dead. Even though he is not even on the plane and continually says to their faces: "I'm right here" (338-39), they do not listen to his pleas and question why he never jumped from the plane. Eventually they cannot ignore him so easily, and must take special measures to avoid conversations with him. When Daneeka runs "out of the medical tent to remonstrate with Sergeant Towser," Towser "edge[s] away from him with repugnance and advised Doc Daneeka to remain out of sight as much as possible until some decision could be reached relating to the disposition of his remains" (341). This instance demonstrates a complete refusal to admit any sort of mistake. If the officers admit that Daneeka is not really dead or that the ribbon representing the bomb line was not in the right place, then they run the risk of showing incompetence. If they show their incompetence, then they lose their status, and this leads to following rules and not admitting to mistakes, no matter how obvious the mistake is, which eventually evolves into some sort of ridiculous cover-up that makes them appear to be even more incompetent.

McWatt is another example of reliance on the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. He ignores the actual signs of danger while flying and focuses on the meaning behind what kind of masculinity his flying style represents to those around him. He "loved flying too much and went buzzing boldly inches off the ground... edge[ed] the belly of the lazing, slow-cruising plane just over the crest of mountains in the middle and then... began following the falling land down as fast as the plane would go" (332). This moment breaks Yossarian out of the façade of his previous exhilaration at danger. Though he feels very safe when flying with McWatt, he also recognizes the potential consequences of McWatt's arrogance. On the other hand, some others who fly with McWatt find his dare-devil antics entertaining. Even a new bombardier exclaims "Whee!" (332) as McWatt flies, making it appear that not only does

McWatt enjoy the rush, he also enjoys the admiration he receives from his peers and the control he feels over their lives and the plane. Flying is McWatt's way of exhibiting his masculinity. He lacks power on the ground, but when in the plane, he creates a space where he is in total control. However, his approach to dealing with the unpredictability of war does not end well.

The fun takes a different turn on the day McWatt kills Kid Sampson. As all the men take a break on the beach, McWatt flies "along the shore line with a great growling clattering roar over the bobbing raft on which blond, pale Kid Sampson" is resting. McWatt flies "just low enough for a propeller to slice him half away" (337). It is in this moment that Heller shows how harmful the adherence to masculine performance can be. McWatt's reliance on an arbitrary connection between being a man and exhibiting courage in order to gain acceptance leads to an experience so traumatic that McWatt knows he will never be able to perform away his emotions. This results in his decision to turn "again, [dip] his wings once in salute, [say] oh, well, what the hell, and [fly] into the mountain" (339). Here the reader witnesses the novel's sole example of the direct result of a soldier's performance of masculine behavior killing another American soldier. Cathcart might be responsible for deaths, but he lacks the knowledge of, or the direct connection, to the individually deceased; however, McWatt literally sees Kid Sampson's body chopped in half. Essentially this is a freak accident, and McWatt's reaction shows the downside to behaving in a strictly masculine way while at war. Heller's description of the tragedy of the murder/suicide might appear to be a hard lesson, but the others fail to see the significance. Cathcart does not feel guilty, but McWatt does, which leads him to see the futility in the gender binary at the end of his life. Because McWatt is so conditioned to see gender as only masculine or feminine—courageous or cowardice—he cannot control his emotions and maintain his performance as a fearless flyer. Now that his avenue for performance has led to such a terrible

event, he has no other way to exhibit his bravery. The breakdown of his signifier/signified relationship leads to the dissolution of his identity and his suicide. McWatt and Kid Sampson are sacrificed in order to show the reader the danger of seeing masculinity in only one rigid way.

Violence against another also serves as a way to exhibit one's masculinity. Perhaps the least disturbing instance of violence occurs when Appleby and Orr get into a fight over a game of ping-pong. After Orr drinks a little too much, he "smash[es] open Appleby's forehead with his paddle" (55). This leads Chief White Halfoat to fill with "joyous excitement" and punch "Colonel Moodus in the nose" (55). No one gets in trouble, and in fact because General Dreedle dislikes Moodus so much, he has Halfoat punch Moodus on occasion for entertainment, but no real permanent damage is done. Violence against others, however, is not always harmless and funny, especially when Dobbs decides that he wants to murder Cathcart<sup>8</sup>. He comes to Yossarian hoping for encouragement: "I need you to tell me to go ahead... and I'll blow his brains out all by myself the day after tomorrow" (227). Though Yossarian hates Cathcart, he cannot provide the support that Dobbs needs. Yossarian tells Dobbs that even though he believes Cathcart might be the cause of his eventual death, "he's got a right to live, too" (226) and "it would have been a great idea if you had gone ahead and done it without even speaking to me. Now it's too late. I don't think I can tell you anything" (228). Yossarian does not stand in the way of violence, but he does not want to participate in it. Men like Orr and Dobbs feel out of control in these moments and turn to violence in order to gain some agency; however, this avenue of masculine performance cannot be sustained and only works for the moment.

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<sup>8</sup> Dobbs was also present for Snowden's death and continually begged for someone to do something, "weeping pathetically for help" (50). It is possible that like Yossarian, Dobbs also has a case of PTSD from this situation and blames Cathcart for Snowden's death.

The reason Dobbs feels so out of control and needs to feel empowered again is because of Snowden's death. When their plane is shot during the Avignon mission, Dobbs begins to weep, and sobs "Help him, help him" (225-26). After this moment, Dobbs becomes "a shattered wreck of a virile young man" (226), perhaps because he blames his piloting skills for Snowden's death. Dobb's witnesses Snowden's thigh wound where "it was impossible to tell where the shreds of his saturated coveralls ended and the ragged flesh began" (436). Following this scene, he witnesses, alongside Yossarian, "Snowden's insides slither[ing] down to the floor in a soggy pile... just... dripping out" (439). Yossarian interprets this scene as man's spirit being what matters. On the other hand, Dobbs takes this new knowledge and, seeing life as meaningless, wishes to make someone pay for the atrocity he witnessed. This interpretation leads him to want to kill Cathcart and embrace even more death and violence.

In addition to violence, another traditional way to exhibit masculinity at war is through aggressive sexuality. It is important to note that, unlike the whirlwind romances (i.e. that of Hemingway's *Frederic Henry*) seen in some World War I narratives, sexuality in *Catch-22* is often problematically linked to violence. After Rome is bombed, Yossarian walks the streets, looking for any available woman to help him deal with the devastation of the city and to find a moment of control. At one point during his walk he hears from a window "an unhappy female voice pleading, 'Please don't. Please don't'" (414). Later he sees a drunk woman backed into a corner, while four soldiers surround her planning on taking turns with her, as she begs them to "Pleeshe don't" (414). Yossarian wants to help these women running through the streets, but instead looks for policemen or others to come to these women's aid. Yossarian is trapped in the gender binary and his fears of what his helping these women might mean to the other men. Yossarian could be seen as not a part of the group by not condoning sexual assault. His loyalties

could also be questioned: does he care more about his fellow men in arms than a foreign prostitute?

Perhaps the most disturbing of the violent outbursts that night is when Yossarian sees the “plain maid” from “the officers’ apartment, whom none of the men had ever slept with” (417). That night, Aarfy rapes her and holds her prisoner in a closet for almost two hours. He then proceeds to throw “her out the window. Her dead body was still lying on the pavement” when Yossarian reaches the officer’s apartment (417). Aarfy’s response to Yossarian is “I had to do that after I raped her... I couldn’t very well let her go around saying bad things about us, could I?” (418). This use of “us” shows Aarfy’s complete dedication to the men around him and his desire to protect their reputations no matter what. The calm and logical demeanor with which Aarfy speaks disturbs Yossarian, who keeps telling him he will be arrested. When they hear sirens, Yossarian believes the police are coming for Aarfy, but they actually arrest Yossarian for being in Rome without a pass (419). This situation exemplifies the absurd value placed on masculinity. Yossarian breaks the rules of the military and goes against his men, which is interpreted as a lack of courage. He must be punished, whereas Aarfy asserts his sexuality and protects his and the military’s reputation through violently killing a maid and, as a result, gets away with it. These situations provide insight into the reason why so many men do not fear punishment. It also offers an explanation as to why those men who do not display these violent and sexual tendencies (i.e. Doc Daneeka, the Chaplain, and Yossarian) continually face reprimand and punishment.

Though Yossarian only briefly encounters these women that night in Italy, there are some female characters in the novel who are depicted more fully and who complicate the gender binary. While Nately’s whore, Nurse Duckett, and Mrs. Daneeka represent very traditional

female roles for a World War II novel, they do assert some agency that challenges gender norms. Tomas Pollard focuses on gender norms in the novel and looks at how “gender catch-22s and comic reversals of gender hierarchies reveal much about the self-destructive potential of gender ideals” (119). Nately’s whore appears to be the most objectified and one of the most subordinate characters in the novel because she is Italian and a prostitute (Pollard 116). However, she does find a small space for agency, especially when the officers hold her captive. Her complete disinterest in behaving like an actual hostage drives the officers crazy: “She didn’t care about them a bit, and it upset them terribly. They shook her roughly each time she yawned. She did not seem to care about anything... They were utterly demoralized men of distinction” (Heller 352). She completely dismantles their confidence by her lack of anxiety. Pollard’s view of the novel illustrating that the correct performance of “gender carries with it coveted forms of approval or privilege” is troubled during this scene. Nately’s whore does not recognize their overtly masculine behavior, and without audience “approval,” the men are rendered impotent and powerless. Here Nately’s whore illuminates the arbitrary connection between power and masculinity for American soldiers. As a marginalized character, she can do this because she has nothing to lose, whereas Yossarian cannot, because his life depends on his fellow soldiers.

Though Nately’s whore remains captive, she successfully resists, albeit silently, until the end of the novel when she revolts violently. After initially trying to kill Yossarian when she first hears of Nately’s death, she begins to stalk him. Twice she disguises herself as a man. First, she dresses “in a mechanic’s green coveralls” and “wait[s] with her steak knife” (Heller 397). Then she dresses in a soldier’s uniform (429), a representation of the pinnacle of violence and masculinity. In these two moments, Nately’s whore illustrates an instance in which a woman confuses the signified by exploiting the arbitrary connection between power and uniform. If

someone can just wear masculine clothes and pretend to act like a man, then there is no real “masculine” behavior that is the exclusive property of men. And if anyone has the ability to perform in a masculine manner in order to gain some power, this will threaten all signifier/signified relationships and essentially masculine identify itself. However, Nately’s whore not only exposes masculinity as a societal construction, she also discovers that it fails to garner her power, just as it fails to work for some of the men in the novel.

Nurse Duckett also displays masculine characteristics when she decides to end her relationship with Yossarian. She feels “ashamed of him because he had refused to fly more combat missions and would cause a scandal” (417). Regardless of whether she feels shame due to his cowardice or just the thought of the potential air of disgrace that would surround him, it does not matter; Duckett recognizes Yossarian’s lack of masculine performance and instead of being the passive girlfriend, takes matters into her own hands and moves on. In fact, she makes a decision that she will “marry a doctor—any doctor, because they did so well in business” (362). On one hand, these make her seem like the type of woman who just wants a man with money, an association that holds a very negative connotation; but this shift in their relationship’s power structure could also mean more. Yossarian acts cowardly and passive, taking on the feminine role in the relationship, and this causes Nurse Duckett to shift her performance as well and play the man in the relationship. She makes a decision and completely cuts Yossarian off. Though Duckett has agency in this scenario, Heller still shows her version of masculinity—money and ambition— in a negative light.

Duckett is not the only woman who appears to be looking for financial stability. We also see Mrs. Daneeka who, though heartbroken at first over her husband’s “death,” suddenly begins to feel better once she realizes her financial situation. As news of her loss spreads, more and

more organizations send her checks: “Her fantastic wealth just kept piling up, and she had to remind herself daily that all the hundreds of thousands of dollars she was acquiring were not worth a single penny without her husband to share her good fortune with her” (343). However sad she may feel, she takes her money and her children and moves away without a forwarding address (344). The addition of no forwarding address would imply that she does not want to be contacted, which begs the question: contacted by whom? One could assume that the only person that could contact her that she would not want to hear from is her husband who she knows is actually alive. Mrs. Daneeka chooses agency over her life and wealth over love. She lacks emotion, and desires power, which makes her husband’s struggle in Italy appear even more pathetic. This depiction of her situation makes her version of agency negative as well.

These three women are not positive representations of gender performance, nor do they think in conventionally moral ways. Many feel that Heller has included passive, subordinate characters<sup>9</sup>, but I would argue that these characters represent more complex examples of the failure of the gender binary. These women have similar desires for power and no longer want to live life according to how a woman should behave. So when they recognize the failures of the traditional female performance, they attempt to behave as they have seen men behave; yet this complete shift to the masculine pole in the binary does not work for them either. Violence and trying to amass wealth in order to feel secure about one’s self and environment just temporarily fixes the problem, regardless of the individual’s biological sex, and Heller illustrates this through a variety of characters, including the women, further illustrating how rigid adherence to correct masculine norms will not solve all problems.

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<sup>9</sup> Many readers dislike the representation of women characters in the novel, and Heller certainly represents women as imperfect; however they fit with the parody of masculine gender roles regardless of biological sex.

Yossarian also refuses to follow the rules of the gender binary after Snowden's death. Out of all the characters, he embodies the freeing possibilities of allowing one's self to oscillate between masculine and feminine behaviors according to one's thoughts. Even his nickname, "Yo-Yo," like the children's toy, alludes to his constant fluid motion wherein he never performs according to one gender for very long. The first instance of his fluidity takes place in the hospital, where he has been sent with jaundice. He had a pain in his liver initially; however "the pain in his liver had gone away, but Yossarian didn't say anything" and "made up his mind to spend the rest of the war in the hospital" (7-8). This appears extremely cowardly, and even Milo tells him that "[he] can't keep running into the hospital every time something happens [he doesn't] like... the best thing to do is fly the missions. It's [their] duty" (65). Yet to Yossarian, duty does not matter, and Yossarian returns to the hospital multiple times throughout the novel allowing himself to feel fear and behave cowardly. With that said, Yossarian also plays a masculine role and wages a war against words. He asserts his power when censoring letters: "Death to all modifiers, he declared one day, and out of every letter that passed through his hands went every adverb and every adjective. The next day he made war on articles" (8). He "attacks names and addresses on the envelopes, obliterating whole homes and streets, annihilating entire metropolises with careless flicks of his wrist as though he were God" (8). Heller describes these acts using masculine descriptors, but nothing truly violent takes place. In fact, Yossarian's masculinity is undercut by his lack of rule-following and failure to properly perform his job as a censor. Right at the start of the text Yossarian illustrates his gender as straying from masculine ideals and his lack of desire to follow society's norms—both gender and linguistic.

For the majority of the novel, Yossarian disrupts the expected masculine performance and his peers attempt to police him in order to push him to behave in line with expectations. Regardless of those around him, he not only embodies a lack of courage, but instead of hiding his fear, he outwardly discusses it. Brad Baumgartner argues that “it is Yossarian’s *anxiety* towards death that separates and distinguishes him from the others” (2). I would argue that all the men feel anxiety towards death at one point or another, but what sets Yossarian apart is that he sees no problem exposing his fear. When he has a conversation with Appleby and Havermeyer, they ask him if he’s yellow and he readily admits to them that he is and that he wants to leave. Havermeyer’s responds: “I couldn’t do that. I might bring some disgrace on my wife and kid if I acted like a coward. Nobody likes a coward. Besides I want to stay in the reserves when the war is over. You get five hundred dollars a year if you stay in the reserves” (401). Havermeyer finds his courage in his fear of embarrassing his family back home and wants to ensure his financial status after the war, exemplifying the negative social and economic implications of refusing to fly. Yossarian does not defend himself nor does he argue with them, because his masculine image does not concern him. Perhaps the reason Yossarian is able to transcend gender is because he is more concerned with staying alive. His Assyrian background (Heller 9, 110) might have led him to be raised as a survivalist after his people were victims of genocide. He is part of a culture that dates back to the Neanderthals and is considered one of the world’s first people. At a time that pre-dates gender and language, the concern was solely staying alive. I would argue that this is a part of Yossarian’s DNA, and so when he feels threatened, self-preservation trumps all, whereas the American men have different values.

Another instance of his disregard for gender norms occurs when he goes to talk to Major Major. When Yossarian explains that he is afraid, Major Major’s response is that is “nothing to

be ashamed of... We're all afraid." Yossarian responds very matter of factly: "I'm not ashamed... I'm just afraid" (102). This lack of shame stumps Major Major, who has no answer for this, because "what could you do with man who looked you squarely in the eye and said he would rather die than be killed in combat" (103). Unlike Havermeyer and Appleby who would feel shame if they admitted they felt fear, Major Major is afraid and does feel shame. Major Major puts a lot of energy into hiding from anyone who wants to speak to him. Finding himself ill-equipped for his position of power, he sneaks around in order to maintain the façade that he knows what he's doing. When Major Major realizes that Yossarian does not care, he equates the notion with Yossarian's wish to die rather than be killed in battle. As this "death" would clearly be figurative, Major Major illustrates his fear of a loss of manhood over his actual death. Being outed as a coward and someone unwilling to fight would essentially dismantle anyone's public masculine identity, which to Major Major would clearly be worse than death itself.

What complicates Yossarian's fear and desire to run away from the war throughout the novel are the moments when he does come across as courageous. Yossarian fights; even though he is terrified, he still gets in his plane and bombs targets. He even makes the unilateral decision to fly back over the Ferrara target in order to hit the bridge and make sure to destroy it and complete the mission (138). He also speaks his mind along with some of the other men. When told to bomb a village in order "to knock the whole village sliding down the side of the mountain and create a roadblock that the Germans will have to clear" (325), the men protest. They refuse to kill innocent people without so much as a warning. At the end of the novel, the moment where Yossarian rejects Colonel Korn's proposal might be the most courageous moment of his life. Colonel Korn tells him that if he just agrees to like them and be their friend they will "glorify [him] and send [him] home a hero, recalled by the Pentagon for morale and public-relations

purposes. [He'll] live like a millionaire. Everyone will lionize [him]... have parades in [his] honor" (427). Korn promises the ultimate package of masculinity: fame, fortune, and guaranteed hero status, but Yossarian rejects this, and in this moment rejects what these signs signify as well as any need to perform according to the norms of masculinity. When speaking to Major Danby, who clearly sees breaking the deal made with Korn as courageous, Yossarian asks him what he would do. Danby tells him: "I'm such a terrible coward I couldn't really be in your place" (447). Traditionally, going AWOL and running away for Sweden would be anti-masculine<sup>10</sup>, but from an alternate perspective, Yossarian breaks social norms and decides to stand up for himself in a very different way than the other soldiers. I thus disagree with Moore's analysis of the end of the novel as representing Yossarian's psychotic break. According to Moore, Yossarian has had irrational thoughts throughout his time in Italy and in the end, he has a "schizophrenic breakdown: His hallucinations have distinct paranoid ingredients" (439). Throughout the war, however, Yossarian exhibits a schizophrenic gendered identity, erratically performing different roles on the gender continuum according to each situation. He is brave or cowardly because he chooses to be, not because society and his peers require it.

## **2.2 *Slaughterhouse-Five*: Surviving through the Disruption of Linear Time**

As Heller uses language to threaten the gender binary and masculine ideals, Vonnegut uses time, another societal construction, to disturb gender. Time only exists because we as society have given words like past, present, and future meaning. However, has the past really passed if it continually affects our present and future? I would argue no. Vonnegut's organization of the novel, which is full of flashbacks and flash forwards, shows how we constantly relive our

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<sup>10</sup> This fear of giving in to one's fears and running away from the war is a common theme throughout many war narratives, and one specifically seen in the novels discussed in the subsequent chapters.

past and allow it to inform our future, and Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of *Slaughter-House Five*, definitely embodies this concept. Like Yossarian, he also holds an important secret, which helps him resist or ignore societal pressure to act in a masculine way. Although, if Yossarian's secret allows him to find agency in his life, Billy's secret takes any agency out of life, yet both have feelings of freedom from these secrets. The secret originates from the Tralfamadorian concept of the passage, or lack thereof, of time—which they do not regard as a linear process. This belief system leads Billy to live a life that appears cowardly; however, Vonnegut depicts all the characters' masculinity in the novel as humorous and absurd performances, which leads the reader to sympathize with Billy regardless of his decisions.

Alfred Kazin, Kevin Brown, and Tony Tanner interpret Vonnegut's novel as advocating for quietism and pacifism. Since we cannot make sense of people's irrational and violent behaviors in our past, we can only hope that they recognize the error in their ways. Similarly, because of the Tralfamadorian tenet that everything is already as it will be in past, present, and future, which suggests a rejection of free will, H. van Stralen, C. Berry Chabot, and Lynn Buck feel the novel reveals an indifferent cynicism and existentialist slant. Robert Merrill and Peter A. Scholl see the novel as a form of "social protest written by a man who likes Utopian talk, speculation about what the Earth should be, anger about what the planet *is*" (66). Though Merrill and Scholl see the novel as protesting war and violence, I will argue that it also challenges the gender binary through its depiction of the violence and inhumanity of the masculine characters in the text. This challenge to the gender binary consists in portraying overt masculinity not as a stable foundation for civilization, but as a destructive force that explains the recurrence of war throughout human history. In this regard I am in partial agreement with Peter Kunze, who calls the text a gray comedy (rather than a black comedy) because it blends "absurdist black humor

with guarded sense of hope. A light exists at the end of the tunnel—or, at least, a belief in it exists” (42). I agree, there is hope at the end, but that hope is not just the end of war on Earth but the existence of a more fluid understanding of gendered performance, which will create freer people unconcerned with asserting their individual power, which could eventually lead to peace.

Roland Weary and Paul Lazzaro, two characters that attempt to assert their individual power, exemplify the overly masculine and violent behavior. This behavior is especially directed toward Billy, which in turn makes his lack of masculinity much more evident. Weary clearly wants to be and sees himself as a leader, since he is “so much busier than anybody else” (Vonnegut 41). He carries around a “whistle he wasn’t going to show anybody until he got promoted to corporal” (40), which illustrates his expectation for future success, even after finding himself behind enemy lines. Additionally, he imagines himself and the two scouts that Billy and he travel with as the “Three Musketeers” and envisions “an officer congratulating [them], telling them that he was going to put them in for Bronze Stars” (43). The irony of this situation is that Weary does not lead the group; in fact he previously caused his entire gun crew to be killed prior to meeting the two scouts. Weary took one shot and missed, which allowed the Germans to see their location and shoot everyone but him (34-35). Though a missed shot is forgivable, Vonnegut writes Weary’s actions in such a way that makes him appear as a terrible soldier and person. The fact that he continually saves Billy’s life (34) does not redeem him, because his motivations are not to save his fellow brother in arms, but to receive accolades for himself. Weary does not represent the hero he sees himself as, because he only does good out of a desire for recognition.

Regardless of his motivation, he attempts to be a good soldier, but at the same time his overt use of violence and sexuality highlights his sadistic side. He beats everyone up for no real

reason: “It was a crazy, sexy, murderous relationship Weary entered into with people he eventually beat up” (35). He also tells Billy about his “father’s collection of guns and swords and torture instruments and leg irons and so on” (35) and he continues to talk about torture techniques. Clearly, the war did not awaken Weary’s violent nature; it has been an intricate part of him since childhood. Along with his violent outbursts, Weary’s sexual nature disturbs Billy as well. Weary carries around a “dirty picture of a woman attempting sexual intercourse with a Shetland pony,” which “he had made Billy Pilgrim admire... several times” (40). First, the fact that Weary continually shows and harasses Billy with this picture begs the questions of how focused and aware of his situation he is, making his desire for promotion even more ridiculous. Second, he forces Billy, who is clearly uncomfortable, to look at it multiple times, establishing that he is not only a physical bully but a psychological one as well. In just a few pages, Vonnegut makes Weary out to be a very unlikeable character through his overt performance of two major masculine traits—violence and sexuality.

After Weary dies, Paul Lazzaro takes on the overly masculine role, and the reader can see similarities between the two men’s performances. Lazzaro enjoys telling stories, like Weary, but his stories focus more on revenge and the violence he has previously participated in. He tells Billy how he killed a dog that bit him by putting sharp pieces of metal inside of a steak and feeding it to the dog (139). His point of telling this story is to let Billy know the value of revenge: “it’s the sweetest thing there is” (138). This moment especially disturbs Billy since Lazzaro has told him that he had “given his word of honor to Weary that he would find some way to make Billy Pilgrim pay for Weary’s death” (84). Combining his love for revenge and his volatile nature, Lazzaro comes across as a loose cannon. When Edgar Derby gives his acceptance speech, Lazzaro tells him to “go take a flying fuck at a rolling doughnut” (147). These reactions

to taking revenge and Derby's speech could be due to Lazzaro's need to gain some agency while at war. People are dying and he is now a prisoner of war and has no hold over his present, so he finds a small space where he can feel some control over his situation, no matter how it affects others. Kunze discusses this notion in a more general sense, claiming that "not only are boys not masculinized by war, but that war emasculates them, revealing their ultimate impotence in the face of death" (53). Because they are emasculated, a process Lazzaro and Weary undergo while at war, they feel an even stronger need to over-perform in whatever space they can to still maintain some control. This creates a continuous cycle, which leads to more violence and more grasping for agency.

Billy's reaction to both these men is the same. He recognizes their power and fears them, and yet at the same time, he knows he has no way to stop them, which is similar to how he interacts with other masculine characters before and after the war. We begin to see how Billy allows his past experiences to shape his present and future, which frees him from adhering to masculine principles because he knows he is incapable, from his previous experiences, to live up to the ideal—so why even try? Billy's father serves as his first introduction to masculine gender norms and perhaps causes his first realization that he cannot live up to those norms. This first becomes clear to him when he goes to the YMCA pool to learn to swim. His father tells him he was "going to learn to swim by the method of sink-or-swim... going to throw Billy into the deep end, and Billy was going to damn well swim" (43). Billy sinks to the bottom and must be rescued. Another instance of his father's attempts to push Billy to perform according to gender norms occurs during their family trip to the Grand Canyon. As they stand on Bright Angel Point, they all look down one mile to the bottom. His father's reaction is to: "manfully [kick] a pebble into space" and say "well... there it *is*" (89). Twelve-year-old Billy, on the other hand, wets his

pants out of fear. His father serves as a clear model of bravery for Billy, but Billy knows from an early age that he cannot fulfill those expectations.

Billy's failure to perform according to standard models of masculinity continues while at war. Even as a young adult, he cannot perform his gender according to the expectations of the gender binary, and it becomes extremely obvious that Billy is not afraid to behave more passively and exhibit his fears in a way similar to Yossarian. Moreover, just like the soldiers in *Catch-22*, the men in *Slaughterhouse-Five* also stand in stark contrast to Billy. He is the Chaplain's assistant, so he already feels "powerless to harm the enemy or to help" (30). When behind enemy lines, he walks around "bleakly ready for death" (32). Even when he is shot at, he stands in the middle of the road waiting for the second try, because he "wouldn't do anything to save himself. [He] wanted to quit. He was cold, hungry, embarrassed, incompetent" (34). Vonnegut constructs Billy in a way that makes the reader pity him, but at the same time feel anger toward him, because he does not even attempt to try to survive. With that said, Billy already knows when he will die and it is not while at war, so there is no point in even trying to fight. His situation underscores the fact that feeling and behaving according to feminine norms is acceptable, but there must be a space for agency, regardless of the gendered performance. In this moment, Billy completely lacks any agency that Yossarian finds and just remains immobile.

Not only does Billy resign himself to death and being looked after, but the Germans also view him as lacking any masculinity and target him. At first they give him a too-small civilian coat with a fur collar, while the rest of the men have soldiers' coats. Supposedly, they randomly hand out overcoats from a frozen pile to the American prisoners who need them (81); however Billy's is different from everyone else's. When Billy receives his coat, previously owned by a civilian, it is too small and has an odd fur collar. He "glanced dully at the coats of his neighbors.

Their coats all had brass buttons or tinsel or piping or numbers or stripes or eagles or moons or stars dangling from them. They were soldiers' coats. Billy was the only one who had a coat from a dead civilian" (82). Billy's reluctance to put the ill-fitting coat on shows that he believes that if he dresses like a brave soldier, then perhaps he will behave like a brave soldier or at the very least viewed as one by others; Billy assumes that the clothes somehow affect his performance. This continues when the narrator compares him to Cinderella. In desperate need of boots, Billy takes one of the stage props from the Englishmen's most recent rendition of "Cinderella": "the boots fit perfectly. Billy Pilgrim was Cinderella, and Cinderella was Billy Pilgrim" (145). Just as Cinderella's personality does not change whether she is dressed for the ball or in her rags, Billy does change regardless of how masculine an outfit he wears. Also, the analogy of Cinderella further highlights his need to be rescued by a man, just as Cinderella allows others (such as the fairy godmother) to take care of her. She in fact does not control any moment in the story and does not fight back against her aggressors, similar to Billy's behavior throughout his life.

Due to his knowledge of his death and ending, Billy continually appears to exhibit a lack of spirit and will to live. The Germans see Billy's vulnerability as well. A photographer comes to take pictures of the American prisoners to show that the Germans are doing better than they really are. They photograph their tattered feet and inappropriate footwear, which is due to the Germans taking their boots. Then the photographer wants an action picture, leading the German soldiers to stage a photo using Billy. They push him into the bushes and "when Billy came out of the shrubbery, his face was wreathed in goofy good will, they menaced him with their machine pistols, as though they were capturing him then" (58). This recapturing scene mimics Billy's mental state. If Billy were truly being captured, he would not have a goofy grin but instead would be frightened and/or angry by the thought of being held captive and losing to the enemy.

If any other man were told to “pretend,” they would mimic that fear and anger of losing control during a capture, but Billy finds grinning to be the appropriate reaction. Billy goes through the motions whether in reality or play-acting with no regard for his life or safety, creating an image which the Germans capture and immortalize. This moment could be seen as his exhibiting of bravery, but since Billy does not react appropriately to being captured he appears to lack the agency to make a concerted effort to sabotage the photographer and the German mission to fool their public. Billy is just biding his time until the next event. He does not feel the need to fight back because he lives and the Germans lose. This knowledge may help Billy’s mental state, but it makes the others view him negatively.

Later in the war and the novel, when meeting the British POWs for the first time, one even “touched him exploratory here and there, filled with pity. ‘My God—what have they done to you, lad? This isn’t a man. It’s a broken kite” (97). The Englishmen see Billy much as the reader does, and their shock and disgust mirrors our reaction. In this light it is rather ironic considering the British are performing “Cinderella.” They do not choose a play that exudes masculine norms and characters for them to play, but a fairy tale, which is comprised of mostly female parts. They too are not men in the traditional sense that they expect from Billy. Nevertheless he does manage to find some agency momentarily when he decides to eat the malt syrup at the factory in Dresden. On their first day of work everyone sneaks spoonfuls of syrup enriched with vitamins and minerals for pregnant women, but Billy does not. It could be argued that he does not steal syrup because of his lack of courage, but on the second day he takes a spoon, “thrust it into the vat, turned it around and around, making a gooey lollipop” (161). On day two, Billy has somehow found the mental fortitude to steal and risk getting caught or perhaps his basic human instinct kicks in. Though he finds the strength, at the same time, he

creates a lollipop out of the syrup, making him seem like a child. This moment shows Billy's ability to perform a fluid gender; he is courageous but also emasculated through Vonnegut's descriptions of how he eats the syrup.

Billy's indifference towards masculine performance and control over his present continually comes across to others as cowardice. Throughout his life, Billy Pilgrim appears to be extremely passive and even feminine, but through his understanding of Tralfamadorians, he finds a belief system that allows him to cope with all his past traumas and inability to follow society's norms. Billy is fully aware of his cowardice, but what he learns on Tralfamadore helps him accept his past, present, and future. They tell him "this moment simply *is*" and compare life to "bugs trapped in amber" (77); free will only exists on Earth (86). This view of life is in line with Billy's passive acceptance of his situation and previous negative experiences. He allows his environment to mold and freeze him. There is no changing his passive, feminine nature, because he has always been and always will be the person he is, and according to the Tralfamadorians his life can only and will always be that way. The "so it goes" phrase repeated in the novel after every death is Billy's acceptance of their point of view. Daniel Cordle sees this reaction to the hundred plus deaths in the novel as negative: "The mechanical regularity of the phrase is a denial of any form of development and progression" (175). But what exactly are Billy's other options? He has no support to work through his past and he can only accept it; he cannot change it. Men during World War II did not have the freedom to behave how they wanted, because society constantly manipulated them. Since Billy could not live up to those expectations; he realizes at a young age that instead of continuously trying, he can accept himself.

His gender is not the only aspect of himself that Billy learns to accept; he can also accept the traumatic events he has endured and the mental anguish he continually experiences. He reads

Kilgore Trout's book *Maniacs in the Fourth Dimension*, which asserts that certain people exist "whose mental diseases [can't] be treated because the causes of the diseases [are] all in the fourth dimension, and three-dimensional Earthling doctors [can't] see those causes at all, or even imagine them" (104). These fantasies of no free will and the lack of ability to change the future, coupled with the possibility that no doctor can help him because of a lack of the capability actually to see the disease, give Billy a sense of relief and freedom. We as readers are tempted to see Billy running away from his problems and not caring what anyone thinks of him, but instead Billy sees any attempt to solve a problem or work through one's past as futile and completely relinquishes control because his life "just is."

All of this is not to say that Billy does not care about anyone. In fact, he sneaks out of his house to go to New York City "where he hoped to appear on television. He was going to tell the world about the lessons of Tralfamadore" (199). Vonnegut juxtaposes Billy's hope with the news of that particular day, which is "about power and sports and anger and death" (200). Billy wants so badly to free other people, to help them stop trying to change and be something else. The list of power, sports, anger, and death all traditionally represent masculine characteristics and desire, and Billy wants to change the broadcasted message. He no longer feels fear and the need to live up to society's expectations, and this helps him understand his experiences in his past as well. From the Tralfamadorian perspective, he was supposed to wet his pants at the Grand Canyon and he was supposed to be ridiculed at the POW camp— nothing could have changed that. No amount of bravery or cowardice could alter the outcomes of his life.

Martin Coleman views Billy's movement in time negatively, arguing that Billy's lack of relating his experiences during his past and present means that "time is meaningless to Billy Pilgrim because he is unable to reliably relate experiences temporally. He does not feel the

connections among his experiences; rather he feels disconnections and disorder absolutely” (688). Through his adoption of “the Tralfamadorian view of time, he aligns himself with a traditional privileging of knowledge, wrongly understood, over concrete human experience” (689). Coleman finds this novel a rejection of “the method of Billy Pilgrim, while always remaining sympathetic to him” (696); but if we regard Billy’s issues as caused by the pressures of gender norms and expectations, then the Tralfamadorians and Billy’s experience can truly provide insight into coping with traumatic experiences and one’s reactions or failure to react. Billy does not have a problem with himself. Instead, the problem derives from everyone around him projecting expectations onto him that Billy has no desire to fulfill. Billy does not even attempt to be someone else, because his newfound beliefs are extremely positive. Everything is as it should and will be; there is no way to change anything, and now he can be happy just existing and helping others to feel free as well.

Just because Billy is content does not mean those around him are. His gender and his newfound belief system complicate his relationship with the women in his life, especially since they expect him to behave in a certain way. His wife Valencia is described as ugly and as someone Billy did not originally want to marry (107); but prior to his Tralfamadorian revelations, Billy does marry her and Vonnegut alludes to the reasoning for his decision: “he had been rewarded for marrying a girl nobody in his right mind would have married” (119). His father-in-law gave him a new car, they were able to purchase an all-electric home, and he was promoted to manager of Valencia’s father’s most prosperous office (119). Billy moves up the social ladder by marrying a woman above his social status instead of honestly working his way up. He has the masculine desire to provide for his family and embody a successful image, but at

the same time he does not want to put forth the effort or care how this will affect him or his family's emotional future.

His wife, on the other hand, remains completely oblivious to Billy's true motivation and feelings. Valencia dedicates herself to performing the role of the dutiful World War II veteran's wife, even though she does not really know her husband's true feelings nor his experiences during war. Arguably, her adherence to the role of traditional wife is the direct cause of her death, because instead of thinking of her own safety and the status of her car after an accident on the way to the hospital, Valencia can only think of rushing to her injured husband; as a result, she subsequently dies of carbon monoxide poisoning. Her death further highlights the dangers of blindly supporting strict adherence to gender roles. She believes Billy to be a good veteran and husband worthy of her care because he is a man, and therefore must operate within the masculine pole of the binary. She never thinks to question him or her own reaction to his past, because that would be disrupting the gender divide in their marriage and would not appear to be very "feminine" of her.

She does, however, try to connect with her husband and gain some deeper understanding of him. On their wedding night she asks Billy about the war and, like any traditional World War II wife would, tells him how proud she is of him for being a soldier—although unknown to her, he was only a chaplain's assistant. She wants him to tell her about the war, but he does not and answers her questions vaguely (122). She clearly knows nothing about his role in the war or lack thereof, but still tells him, "I'm proud you were a soldier" (121). Valencia maintains constant dedication to Billy and desires his approval, even going so far as promising to go "on a diet" so she can "become beautiful for [him]" (120). Her only possibility for agency is controlling her

food intake. She wants to be attractive for him, while he fantasizes about another woman (Montana)—a fact that makes pride in him even more misguided.

Billy lives through a similar honeymoon scene on Tralfamadore with Montana Wildhack. While side by side in bed, she says, “tell me a story” (178) and Billy actually opens up and tells her about Dresden (179). Perhaps Billy knows that Valencia would not really hear and comprehend his story and could never truly understand his experience, especially since he did absolutely nothing that would garner her pride, which would in turn disrupt her gender performance as well. Billy knows that he did not perform according to the ideals of the masculine soldier and does not want his new wife to know, whereas Montana, essentially a figment of his imagination, already knows the truth and can listen without judgement. Vonnegut here provides commentary on a civilian wife’s unwavering pride to those who participated in World War II no matter what their role or their actions. Readers can readily see the hypocrisy in this reaction to soldiers coming back from war, particularly in light of the selfish violence exhibited by characters such as Roland Weary and Paul Lazzaro.

Where Valencia fails, her daughter finds a space to assert power. Barbara, appearing savvier than her mother, also takes on a more masculine than feminine role, underscoring Billy’s passive nature even more. When Valencia dies, Barbara takes an active role in her parents’ household:

She also thought that she was head of the family, since she had had to manage her mother’s funeral. Since she had to get a housekeeper for Billy and all that. Also, Barbara and her husband were having to look after Billy’s business interests, which were considerable, since Billy didn’t seem to give a damn for business any more. All this responsibility at such an early age made her a bitchy flibbertigibbet. (28-29)

Barbara steps up and assumes all the responsibility, but her performance of leadership makes her appear “bitchy.” Barbara “reproach[es Billy] for writing ridiculous letters to the newspapers” (131) and tells him that “if [he’s] going to act like a child, maybe [they’ll] just have to *treat* [him] like a child” (131). Instead of trying to understand the trauma her father has just undergone—his deadly plane crash and the subsequent death of his wife—she scolds him, which takes away whatever semblance of power he had to begin with. Barbara and the overly masculine men lack compassion, but society as a whole will accept overt masculine violence; the difference between the two groups is that society lauds men for exerting power over others, especially when the other, man or woman, does not behave according to social conventions. On the other hand, Barbara exerts power that society has not bestowed upon her, making her masculine performance even more threatening to the gender binary. If a woman can claim power and act like a man, then she shows that there is nothing inherent in the connection between biological sex and gender identity. The use of the word “bitchy” to describe Barbara only illustrates how society negatively labels women who threaten the rules of the gender binary and attempts to police them through negative reinforcement. Whether the actor is a man or woman, Vonnegut leads the reader to reject both performances, because we sympathize with Billy.

Throughout Billy’s life others have told and shown him the proper way to behave according to masculine norms. Despite these attempts, whether at war or at home, Billy struggles with these expectations. His difficulty and the trauma he experienced, and relives over and over, leads him to look at life through the eyes of the Tralfamadorians and to accept that he has no free will and no possibility exists to alter his future. By this philosophy, everything that Billy does and says is meant to happen. Cordle sees the end of the novel as an opportunity for Billy to finally take action: “he is left with an opportunity at the end to do something to transgress the

pattern of the rest of his life, refuting the Tralfamadorians' beliefs" (175). I would argue, though, that he does make a choice and behaves in an extremely brave manner, similar to Yossarian's actions at the end of *Catch-22*, Billy does so while still accepting the Tralfamadorians' beliefs. His choice is to spread the word regardless of the potential consequences, one of which is his ultimate death. He does transgress the pattern of his life by accepting the Tralfamadorian belief and working to help others as he has been helped, knowing full well what this will lead to in the end.

*Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* both show that when postmodernism and the fictional war narrative meet, there is room for multiple interpretations of gendered performance at war. Heller and Vonnegut reveal how the image of a heroic and brave World War soldier clearly cannot be fully sustained by every soldier. Vonnegut's and Heller's masculine characters, whether men or women, behave irrationally because of their concern for, and devotion to, their rigid understanding of gender identity. They focus on how others perceive them and fear appearing feminine to their fellow soldiers. These two novels turn that fear around, however, making those traditional "masculine" men (and women) appear as the opposite of the modernist World War narrative characters. The majority of these characters over-perform, showing the construction of strict masculine performance at all times. Yossarian and Billy serve as contrasting characters to the masculine men (and women), and though they may appear "feminine" in comparison, they perform gender in a more genuine and personal manner, making them better off than the other characters in the end of the novels. Billy accepts his past, present, and future and is completely content with life, and Yossarian finally leaves the war ready for the next chapter in his life.

### 3 FANTASY MISSIONS, INCORRECT SCHEMAS, AND DISREGARDING THE TRUTH

Approximately fifteen years after World War II, the United States' focus gradually shifted from Europe to Asia, culminating with our involvement in the Vietnam War. Scholars, historians, veterans, and civilians alike all recognize the differences between this war and both World Wars. It was not only the potentially nefarious motivations of American politicians and the negative view towards the men enlisting or abiding with the draft which differed greatly from the past war's idealism and civilian support, but the soldier's experience physically, emotionally, and mentally was reworked as well. There were no Nazis or concentration camps to free; the glory back at home was fairly nonexistent as well. Instead they had a draft that forced men to fight, weakened feelings of national patriotism, a lack of motivation, and the knowledge of how ill-equipped American soldiers were to fight the Vietnamese.

The first major difference that those serving had to adjust to was the inability to feel a true sense of heroism and bravery. In the past, the view of what makes an effective soldier was "motivated either by a sense of national patriotism or by a belief that he is fighting for a just cause" (Moskos 72). Even World War II soldiers could take some comfort in their sacrifice, but the Vietnam War complicated these motivating factors. Men were not going to war because of patriotism; instead, many went to Vietnam not for their country, but because of internalized familial and societal pressures. Fear of disappointing friends and family, or even fear of not being able to return home if one dodged the draft, forced men to go to war. Many men claimed that they went to war out of cowardice and not bravery.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, fighting for a just cause

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<sup>11</sup> In "On the Rainy River," Tim O'Brien states that he "couldn't endure the mockery, or the disgrace, or the patriotic ridicule...[he] couldn't make [him]self be brave. It had nothing to do with morality. Embarrassment, that's all it was" (*The Things They Carried* 59).

could not possibly motivate these men, due to the fact that many did not know what the United States hoped to accomplish by going to war with the North Vietnamese. Ideas of fighting against communism to avoid its spread throughout Asia seemed in theory to be valid, but the secrecy and unanswered questions that surrounded this war led people to believe that politicians had more at stake than stopping communism half way across the world.

Besides the differing reasons for going to Vietnam, the experiences of the 1960s man differed from those of the World War I or World War II soldier while on the battlefield. The past images of brothers-in-arms and the everlasting connection amongst a group of men in battle created a very specific idea of what serving in war should look and feel like. What military sociologist, Charles Moskos, describes as “combat primary relationships”<sup>12</sup>, which we still see in *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, had been modified before men even began training. The soldier’s approach to the war changed due to the fact that “in World War II, men served for the duration” and “in Vietnam, on the other hand, Army enlisted men served a 12-month tour of duty”<sup>13</sup> (Moskos 75). Moving to serving tours instead of staying for the war’s duration caused a shift from a group mentality of solidarity, to an individual counting down until he could go back home. This did not just affect the relationships amongst men, but also the individual relationship the soldier had with the war itself: “Overall, the rotations system reinforced an individualistic perspective that was essentially self-concerned. The end of the war was marked by the individual’s rotations date and not by its eventual outcome” (Moskos 76-77). This placed

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<sup>12</sup> Combat primary relationships are thought of as the “motivation of the individual soldier as a function of his solidarity and social intimacy with fellow soldiers at small group levels” (Moskos 73).

<sup>13</sup> A tour of duty was thirteen months for Marines.

emphasis on survival and not winning or even caring about the war itself, creating a very different experience before a tour even began.

The disjointed motivating factors and individual relationships to the war are not the only changes from the World Wars; in addition the vastly different physical environment and enemy tactics created even more of a stark contrast between them. One major difference was that in Vietnam “only a fraction of men under arms personally experience[d] combat” (Moskos 74), and because men could only compare their experiences to what they knew from the previous generation, combat was the only way to tell if the United States was winning or losing; plus, it was a major way to prove one’s bravery. Even when partaking in combat, many men felt ineffective and that their lives were constantly at risk as they quickly learned that the Vietnamese fought very differently from classical American military tactics. Additionally, the difficulty of differentiating between the enemy and civilians caused confusion and emotional turmoil for the soldiers. The World War mentality of the military as protector of the innocent was quickly reworked and the original “distaste of endangering civilians” quickly was overcome by the “fear that Vietnamese of any age or sex can be responsible for death” (Moskos 75). Compared to the American military point of view, these abnormal, guerrilla fighting tactics not only went against everything that the American soldier thought war “should be” like; but it also caused them to resort to performing acts that they might not otherwise do.

These circumstances created a miasma of unknowns, which contradicted the expectations of those involved in the war. Trauma theory scholar Kali Tal describes these unknowns and expectations as two different kinds of myth that exist during a war. Though these two myths—national and personal—differ, they “constantly are intersecting” (Tal 224). Though the national myth is important, it is the personal myth, or how the American soldier interprets his

experiences, that causes the most issues for the individual soldier. Tal defines personal myth as “the particular set of explanations and expectations generated by an individual to account for his or her circumstances and actions” (Tal 225), and she compares these sets of explanations to schemas. Tal quotes psychologist Daniel Goleman’s discussion on how schemas “inevitably skew perceptions of events; in fact, that is their purpose” (225). Because schemas are there to help prepare an individual for a situation, they also affect the way a situation is processed; the individual interprets the moment through the lens of their expectation. Goleman further explains that “the misinterpretation of what goes on around us is frequently useful as a coping strategy if a properly interpreted event threatens important, foundational schemas” (Tal 225). Because the soldiers in Vietnam, like World War II soldiers, could only have a schema similar to the previous generation’s experience of war, just as the World War II soldiers, their only option was to use their incorrect schema of war as a way to interpret and cope with the traumatic events taking place in Asia.

These circumstances set the soldier up to have an imagination that perpetually informs his reality, which then continually affects how he reacts and interprets his surroundings. And the Vietnam War became an environment where “experience and imagination face each other, but they also compose a continuum... Reality tests the limits of imagination...as imagination enters and informs the nature and quality of memory” (Myers 173)<sup>14</sup>. Considering these circumstances, many Vietnam fictional narratives reflect the imaginative qualities that the men at war embody. The main characters in Vietnam fiction rely on their original schema, a perspective inappropriate for this war, and when reality does not cleanly align with it, instead of adjusting their

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<sup>14</sup> Literary scholar Thomas Myers sees this in *Going After Cacciato*, but I would argue that this is common across multiple Vietnam War narratives.

expectations, they modify their view of reality in order to cope with their experience. These modified views of reality are not as simple as selective memory or even ignoring certain details, but instead we see the characters completely reshape their experiences to the point where they appear to hallucinate or dream entire plotlines. The expectations, the reworked schema, and the war itself lead these characters to reinterpret their current situation and imagine fantasy missions in order to feel unified—mentally, emotionally, and physically. Instead of feeling out of control and helpless, similar to Yossarian, their imagination gives them a space where they can strive for specific goals and feel important, which in turn helps them survive their time at war. Because they cannot act according to what they have been conditioned to view as the conduct of an “ideal soldier,” they cope with the inner schism between how they know they should perform and their contradictory thoughts and feelings by creating these fantasies. Through their imaginations they can deal with the difficulties of the war, their emotions, and their lack of control over their actions.

Tim O’Brien’s *Going After Cacciato* (1978) and Denis Johnson’s *Tree of Smoke* (2007) include two protagonists that find themselves in a chaotic and uncontrollable environment. In order to take control over their experiences and reconcile their schema to reality, they dedicate themselves to imagining missions that create a space where they participate in important work and are productive representatives of the United States military. Because it is almost impossible to achieve this goal in reality in their situations, Paul Berlin and Skip Sands must manipulate their experiences and imagine that they participate in more than aimlessly marching, checking empty tunnels, and organizing hundreds of index cards for no apparent reason. In an attempt to reconcile their schema and reality, Paul Berlin and Skip Sands find themselves lost in their imaginations, both literally and figuratively. Berlin imagines a rescue mission that takes him and

his platoon all the way to Paris while Sands sees his time in Asia as part of an incredibly important, secret operation that in actuality consists of his Uncle manipulating him for his own ends.

While the spaces they create within their own minds may help these men momentarily, reality continually seeps through and they repeatedly face signs of the truth of their situations, which they struggle to avoid. The two men do what they can in order to survive and maintain their composure and status, but the more energy and time they dedicate to these missions, the closer to the truth they find themselves. For Berlin the truth of what happened to Cacciato, and for Skip, the truth about Tree of Smoke and his uncle, ends in downfall. Skip Sands even recognizes the danger of thinking at all: “In South Vietnam I thought I’d be sidelined. Removed to a place where I could think about the war. But you can’t be sidelined in a war, and in a war you mustn’t think, you mustn’t ever think... War is action or desertion. Do you get the idea here? War is action. Thought leads to treason” (608). Once a soldier contemplates his situation, he gains some individuality, and when those in charge rely on their men to blindly follow orders, a soldier who thinks eventually forms opinions. This was especially problematic in Vietnam where the men felt useless and confused; as a result, thinking led to tensions and disagreements between the soldier and his superiors. Berlin and Sands, who refuse to see their situation from another perspective, use their fantasy missions in order to distract them from processing their reality. The more these two men ignore the signs of the truth throughout their narrative, the deeper they invest in the fantasy, and the harder the truth of their situation hits them at the end of the narrative. The men adhere to the outdated World War ideas of war and how a soldier was expected to behave in the past instead of adapting to the Vietnam landscape and politics, which leads to their ultimate downfall.

### 3.1 *Going After Cacciato*: Searching for the Truth on the “Road to Paris”

In *Going After Cacciato*, what begins as a search for an AWOL soldier turns into an extended fantasy that Berlin revisits continually throughout the novel. Quite quickly, the reader learns that for Berlin “pretending was his best trick to forget the war” (10). And as he walks through mountainous terrain in search of Cacciato, Berlin thinks to himself how much he “liked the silence. He liked the feel of the motion, one leg then the next. No fears of ambush, no tapping sounds in the brush. The sky was empty... even if it had to end there was still the pleasure of pretending it might go on forever” (16). Instead of assessing the situation, interpreting what takes place around him, and forming thoughts and opinions in the moment, Berlin chooses to “pretend” and experience the safety of his fantasy. Here we know that the search must end eventually, either when the missing soldier is found or when Lieutenant Corson decides to abandon the pursuit. Berlin, however enjoys the search since it is an activity with an actual, obvious purpose, unlike many of his other experiences while at war. As a result, he decides to use the search, which ends the next morning, as the springboard for his fantasy of walking all the way to Paris and rescuing Cacciato.

As he delves deeper into the possibility of where his imagination could take him, we learn that the “immense powers of his imagination,” which he finds to be “a truly awesome notion,” are “not a dream,” but instead “an idea to develop, to tinker with and build and sustain, to draw out as an artist draws out his visions” (26-27). This story that Berlin plans to sustain will help him escape to another world, much like creating art can be a form of escape and even a cathartic experience for the artist. It is also important to note that these are not simple random fantasies that Berlin imagines. Instead we see overlapping and shifting moments in time—past and present—during the “Road to Paris” chapters. Berlin’s real world traumatic experiences

shape his imagination in such a way that he can process the deaths of those around him in a safe and private space—his mind. This coping strategy allows Berlin to begin to gain an understanding of his past and a sense of control, albeit imagined, over his present and future.

Many of Berlin's platoon mates attempt to gain control over their environment in a variety of ways, and we see this through Berlin's observations. One of the collective approaches is sustained focus on the mundane. At times there is "a certainty to and regularity to the war, and this alone was something to hold on to" (100), and this can serve as a distraction from the uncertainty that surrounds them.<sup>15</sup> To the outsider the soldiers' obsession with certain minor activities, like their daily basketball game scores and strategies, may appear trivial, but they serve the purpose of distracting the men's minds from scrutinizing their broader situation. The summer time is one example of how important is the strategy of focusing on secondary experiences. As the season continues without a casualty, anxiety begins to rise and they throw themselves into their daily basketball games. Berlin explains how "he liked the clarity of it. He liked knowing who won, and by how much, and he liked being a winner" (102). These games are completely irrelevant to why they are in Vietnam, but the men can focus on them and keep their mind off of the inevitable dangers of war. They can ignore the truth that in order to relieve the collective anxiety of the group, one of them must die.<sup>16</sup> Plus, unlike the war, these games provide a clear-cut winner and loser each day, and at any point in time, they all know their side. The games may appear to be a mental and physical waste of energy, but to the men these basketball

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<sup>15</sup> This is due to the fact that many of the men did not participate in traditional combat and "because there were no front lines, a sudden violent death or maiming could come to anyone at any time, a fact that fueled the paranoia we have come to regard as characteristic of the Vietnam experience...[the war was a] chaotic quagmire with no clear boundaries and no easily identifiable enemy" (Carpenter 35).

<sup>16</sup> With each day that passes, each man knows they get one day closer to someone's death and everyone just wants to know it's not their life that breaks the tension.

games actually fit their war schemas more so than their actual experience in Vietnam, and so they cling to them as representations of what they wish their Vietnam experience could be.

If the men grasp the quantifiable aspects of their life that they can process and readily understand, Sidney Martin also grabs on to what he sees as a clear cut way of interpreting and participating in the war—mainly following rules reminiscent of the World War approach. Martin devoutly follows Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), and while his men may find this tedious and pointless, the need for that regularity and insistence on right or wrong actions represents another way of dealing with the unknown and fostering a feeling of control over one's surroundings. Martin knows what his superiors expect of him and “works through his sergeants according to the rules of command” (163). His rationalization is that “it would eventually build respect for him among the men and boys. The lieutenant had been trained in common sense and military strategy. He had read Thucydides and von Clausewitz, and he considered war a means to ends, with a potential for both good and bad, but his interest was in effectiveness and not goodness” (163). Through his respect for the rules and war theory, he can “safely” navigate the war, maintain control, and perhaps quell his fear; however, this is the wrong war for his behavior.

Martin's approach backfires on him because even in the most emotional and difficult situations, he still maintains his stoic attitude and clings to SOP. His reaction to Pederson's death, a somber and tragic moment, is to “[move] from man to man” and “[make] a list of the lost equipment.” He then leads them “to a hill half a click away... [and goes] to work with his maps and compass” (77). One of Martin's men was just shot and killed by the United States helicopter that they all arrived on, and his reaction is robotic. The argument could be made that he is cold and disconnected from his men, but it could also be his only way to cope with the

trauma. Because of the chaos that surrounds him, in addition to the fact that as the Lieutenant he needs to lead, the only way he can keep order is by following his training. Martin believes that if he follows the rules, then the outcome can be predictable. The reader cannot fault Martin for his behavior, because this is what his war schema has prepared him to do; truly it is all he knows.

Martin's men behave similarly in that they adhere to a set of rules as well. Instead of a staunch regard for the rules of the military, however, they rely on the unspoken rules of how a man should remain stoic at war and show no signs of painful emotion by joking around in order to deal with trauma. They continually mentally revisit the death of Billy Boy Watkins, a boy who died of fright on the battlefield. Billy Boy stepped on a mine and his foot was blown off. As he sits on the floor trying to put his boot back on over and over again, he dies. According to Doc Peret: "I seen it before. The wound wasn't what killed him, it was the heart attack. No lie" (217). This incredible realization that one can die not only as a result of mines or gun shots, but just by being too afraid, is difficult for the men to process. The result is to make jokes: "There were many jokes about Billy Boy Watkins, the way he'd collapsed of fright on the field of battle" (2). They also sing the American folk song "Billy Boy" over and over again (217). It's almost as if by laughing about it, they can become desensitized to the thought that at any moment they could die of fright. Again, the World War schema is to blame for this overly stoic reaction. The fear of becoming the shell-shocked soldier is still strong even almost fifty years later. Although they pretend to not be bothered, however, all the laughing and joking cannot rid Berlin's mind of this possibility and he constantly refers back to Billy Boy Watkins throughout the novel.

The men's unnecessary aggression is another approach to desensitizing themselves to the trauma and attempting to gain some control over their environment. Martin reacts through rules

and regulations, while his men react through random and premeditated acts of violence, which they turn to after Pederson's death. This situation challenges Berlin's schema; on one hand he expects war to provide the opportunity to do good, while on the other hand, he also needs to survive. As the men wait on a helicopter to be dropped in a landing zone, Pederson visibly appears afraid. Berlin notes that "flying scared [Pederson] more than the war" (126). As the helicopter approaches their destination, they begin to be attacked: "Holes opened in the hull, then more holes, and the wind sucked through the holes" (129). The shooting back and forth is constant in the last few minutes of their flight, and the men are told that they must get off fast, "no dilly-dally shit" (129). Less than a minute out, everyone lines up to the back to get off and, "Pederson just [sits] there. The chief scream[s] at him but Pederson [holds] himself together, squeezing his stomach tight and pressing" (130). Finally "the crew chief drag[s] Pederson to the ramp and [throws] him out" (131). Pederson stumbles into the muck of the paddies, and it is then that the gunners in the Chinook, which he just left, shoot him twice. His death, though indirectly caused by his fear, is directly caused by friendly fire. While the enemy threat is understandably unpredictable, one would hope that he could trust his own men to not shoot him. As Katherine Kinney explains in *Friendly Fire*, however, the frequency with which Americans kill other Americans in fictional representations of the Vietnam War illustrates the "measuring of what men can and must do in a war in which boundaries refuse to remain secure" (4).<sup>17</sup> Pederson's death represents the fact that even your own people can kill you when you least expect it; but from the other perspective the reader sees what the men in the helicopter must do in order to

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<sup>17</sup> Kinney argues that "we fought ourselves" and this is "literalized in the repetitious image of Americans killing Americans," which is "virtually the only story that has been told by Americans about the Vietnam War," illustrating not just what happened, but also what "Vietnam meant" (4).

secure their safety as well. Here we see that the death of one man is acceptable in order to save the lives of the rest of the group. This necessity to turn to friendly fire echoes Martin's death as well.

In response to this event, the men revel in the gassing and bombing of the village of Hoi An (78). Berlin keeps repeating, "kill it" (78-9) and then the men "began firing. They lined up and fired into the burning village... the men fired until they were exhausted. The village was a hole... When it was night they began talking about Jim Pederson. It was always better to talk about it" (79). The reader can assume that, much as the soldiers "talk" about other deaths, they are not having sincere, emotional conversations, but are most likely making jokes and acting indifferently. They do care though, because Pederson's death just adds to the unpredictability that the men face. Instead of having to just worry about the enemy, now they must worry about friendly fire as well if they find themselves on the wrong side of the rest of the group. They cope by shooting up a village; once the men feel better about the situation, they can then brush it off and maintain their stoic attitude about Pederson's death. Through the violence, they take control over their environment. By letting some of their anger and fear out, they numb their emotions and can move on.

Though these strategies differ from the outright fantasy that Berlin imagines, in a way, the other men in the novel maintain a fantasy as well. Playing games to feel a sense of accomplishment, pretending that the war calls for the same kind of SOP as the World Wars, joking around as if unaffected by their friends dying around them, and committing random acts of violent aggression just to feel some sort of sense of control over their surroundings all help fuel their individual fantasies. Berlin half-heartedly goes along with these coping strategies; he continually tells himself that he will "adjust. He would play the part. But he would not join

them...When they joked about Billy Boy, he would laugh, pretending it was funny, and he would not let on” (210-11). This last phrase is ambiguous. On the surface we can assume that he means to hide the fact that he doesn’t find these jokes funny, but it could also mean that he is still traumatized by Billy Boy’s death and afraid of being afraid. And this leads to Berlin’s version of pretending. Instead of outwardly acting unaffectedly and bravely, he moves inward and “pretend[s] he was not in the war. Pretending he had not watched Billy Boy Watkins die of fright on the field of battle. He was pretending he was a boy again, camping with his father in the midnight summer along the Des Moines River... and later he pretended, it would be morning and there would not be a war” (208-9). Although the timeline throughout the novel is not chronological, his statement “in the morning he would forget the first day” (209), lets us know that Billy Boy’s death happens right at the start of Berlin’s time in country, which leads to Berlin’s first need to pretend. Since his imagination allows him to move on from this experience, it then allows him to move on from subsequent experiences throughout his entire time at war. There comes a moment when his memories are not enough to distract him, and the Cacciato mission leads to the development of an entire fantasy world and a newly created purpose in order to cope with the trauma of what happened to Cacciato.

The deaths that he recalls hold a special meaning to Berlin and upset him, but it is really the disappearance of Cacciato that shakes him to his core and leads him to his elaborate Paris fantasy. The Cacciato incident, rather than the other eight deaths, causes Berlin to not only take his fantasizing to a completely different level, but also to work through and remember the other eight men, because Berlin is responsible for this particular death. In addition to having to process the trauma from his first day at war to the present, he also feels a sense of urgency to get to and relive the Cacciato moment in order to understand why he blacked out. This process evolves into

the fantasy rescue mission related during the “Road to Paris” chapters in the novel. We see that as dawn draws near while on the Observation Post, Berlin feels the pressure of reaching the conclusion to his fantasy and essentially confronting the truth about what he did that night.

The Cacciato incident is so traumatic that Berlin cannot even remember the accidental murder, and up until the very end of the novel, he is not ready to recognize what he’s done and come back to reality. Because the men cover up what happened to Cacciato, combined with the fact that Berlin basically blacked out and his consciousness will not allow him to remember what happened, he begins a fantasy mission while covering the observation post. Right at the beginning Berlin thinks that he wants to go all the way to Paris, and imagines: “even if it had to end, there was still the pleasure of pretending it might go on forever: step by step, a mile, ten miles, two hundred, eight thousand” (16). The reason Berlin wants this to go to the end is so he can understand and remember what happened, but his subconscious wants this mission to go on forever, because if they continue the search, then Cacciato is still alive and Berlin did not kill him.

Before he can deal with the most traumatizing experience of killing his fellow soldier, however, Berlin first has to understand and cope with the previous deaths he has experienced. Berlin recounts the death of eight men throughout the novel, and each one contributes to his unknown, chaotic world and fuels his anxiety about his own future. Two minor characters that he discusses throughout the novel are Ready Mix and Rudy Chassler. Though Berlin always includes them when recounting the deaths he has witnessed, they do not play large roles in Berlin’s fantasy. In fact, while it is terrible that these men die, their deaths are fairly predictable and to be expected in battle, which means they fit right in with the war schema that Berlin and the others use to frame their experiences. The fact that their deaths “make sense” to Berlin means

that he does not feel the need to dwell on them as much as the other, more unique and unpredictable deaths.

Ready Mix was not with the platoon for long, which makes his death even less an issue for Berlin, because there was not enough time to form any type of relationship with him. In fact most of the men “thought he would die quickly, and he did” (146). Even the way Berlin describes the death of Ready Mix shows how uneventful he found the moment: “For hours the bombers kept coming. The mountains burned. Burning rock. Then Sidney Martin was up and hollering for the advance. Ready Mix was shot—Ready Mix, whose true name no one knew. They kept advancing. The mountains were taken” (177). This matter-of-fact string of short sentences illustrates this person’s comparative unimportance to Berlin. And it is not only his lack of a relationship with the other men, but also the way in which he dies that makes his death so easily accepted. The men expect soldiers to die during an ambush, because one expects to be shot by the enemy while at war; this death fits with their war schemas, and Ready-Mix represents a typical war casualty.

They expect Rudy Chassler’s death even more. Though he is with the squad for a lot longer than Ready Mix and is friends with all of the men, his death serves an important purpose and feels more like a blessing for everyone. During the summer there is an excruciating lull in which no one dies for a little over a month. Everyone waits, knowing that a death is surely coming, and the thought that it could be any one of them makes them even more anxious. When Rudy steps on a mine “it was a relief for them all” (110). Just as Ready Mix died quite predictably, stepping on a land mine is another obvious way to go. When we couple that with the sense of relief that the men feel now knowing their own death did not break the silence, Berlin

and the others do not consider Rudy's death a traumatic event but an opportunity to breathe a little easier.

Rudy and Ready Mix fit with Berlin's schema of war, but the rest of the deaths that Berlin experiences do not. As Berlin experiences one death after another, the final impetus for his fantasy is the death of Cacciato. Many literary scholars provide a variety of reasons for this shift in Berlin's approach to his fantasizing and what "going after" Cacciato really represents, but no one sees Berlin as directly responsible for Cacciato's death. Arthur Saltzman and Dean McWilliams both interpret the "Road to Paris" as a way to escape the war and traumatic events. Saltzman claims, "Berlin tries to exit the war through the power of imagination... Berlin's fictional odyssey represents the mind's reflex reaction against the seeming finality of the facts of war" (35). McWilliams takes this one step further and believes that Berlin's reaction to Cacciato's disappearance is so strong because he is reminded of the events that led up to the murder of Lt. Martin and the fantasy directly relates to his memory of those events (254). Other scholars focus more on Berlin's reaction to the moment, where he loses control when ambushing Cacciato and how dealing with that embarrassment leads to his fantasy. His humiliation leads to his rejection of desertion as a possibility, which Jack Slay Jr. argues illustrates his potential for heroism: "in the midst of his deepest humiliation, an embarrassment caused directly by his cowardice, Berlin steps back into the line of duty and fire and dismisses the occasion to desert in Cacciato's fading footsteps" (Slay 84-85). By rejecting desertion, Berlin exhibits bravery and redeems himself. Brad Lucas believes that throughout the entire "Road to Paris," Berlin continually "confronts the humiliation he suffered during the attempted ambush of Cacciato where he lost control of his weapon and his bowels" (Lucas 31). While all these interpretations represent various possibilities, the fantasy serves an even greater, more inclusive purpose. The

trauma Berlin must deal with is not the result of Martin's death or his reaction to ambushing Cacciato, but the added trauma of his schema conflicting with his reality. While most critics are correct to identify these incidents as potential reasons for Berlin's fantasy, I argue that the "Road to Paris" encompasses all of these micro traumas that Berlin experienced from the beginning.

Berlin experiences serious trauma through the six deaths that he recounts. At the beginning of his first post-Cacciato MIA Observation Post shift, Berlin begins to feel an urge to fantasize. He waits, "trying to imagine a rightful but still happy ending." He "found himself pretending, in a wishful sort of way, that before long the war would reach a climax beyond which everything else would seem bland and commonplace. A point at which he could stop being afraid. Where all the bad things, the painful and grotesque and ugly things, would give way to something better... He wasn't dreaming, or imagining; just pretending" (25). This appears to be the typical way each of his fantasies begins, but it does not lead to his regular setting of his life before the war with his family or thoughts of what he will do after the war. Instead, he uses this time for a different kind of fantasy that is not "dreaming—it wasn't even pretending, not in the strict sense. It was an idea. It was a working out of the possibilities. It wasn't dreaming and it wasn't pretending... It was a way of asking questions" (29). The possibilities that need to be worked out and the questions that he asks all stem from the Cacciato incident.

While his previous fantasies and thoughts help him quell his fear and grief, this fantasy almost makes him feel alive through a sense of deeper exploration of experience, a tactic "deeply rooted in the lived experience of Vietnam" (Myers 173). The possibilities give him a newfound source of confidence: "He felt brave. Tonight, anything was possible... Excited by the possibilities, but still in control. That was the important part—he was in control. He was calm.

Clear thinking helped. Concentrating, figuring out the details, it helped plenty” (O’Brien 63). Relating Berlin’s “clear thinking” to the thinking that Skip Sands associates with treason (Johnson 608), we see that achieving calmness and control can prove therapeutic for the individual man, but can also ruin his usefulness as a soldier. The moment he contemplates the possibilities is the moment that, for Berlin, the possibility of desertion arises. Berlin’s moment of clarity, at the beginning of his shift, does not immediately move to the imaginary, but to his account of Bernie Lynn’s death and its aftermath, followed immediately by the first Road to Paris chapter and essentially the first leg of his fantasy mission to rescue Cacciato. Each main character that Berlin and the others meet on the Road to Paris helps Berlin deal with these particularly unexpected deaths. I argue that Berlin creates these characters and their various viewpoints on war as a guide for the different ways he can react to the loss of the men. Some scholars believe that these memories and moments of fantasy are random, but there is a clear connection between the past and the imagined that exists throughout the novel.<sup>18</sup> I therefore agree with Lucas Carpenter’s assessment that “Cacciato also represents possibility, especially the possibility of meaning, but like meaning, he is always tantalizingly just out of reach” (46). Yet, at the end of the novel it appears that Cacciato is out of reach because he no longer exists and is dead, and this is the truth that Berlin needs to recognize, and each character attempts to bring Berlin closer to that truth.

The death of Bernie Lynn is Berlin’s last memory before moving into his fantasy, and he continually revisits this moment and its consequences. The men blame Bernie Lynn and Frenchie Tucker’s deaths on Sydney Martin, who eventually pays for his actions. Searching tunnels had

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<sup>18</sup> Tobey C. Herzog argues that the novel challenges the reader to make sense of the “three narrative stands—randomly juxtaposed and roughly equal to past, present, and future...randomly recalling the facts of his months in Vietnam” (88).

been a constant argument between the men and their Lieutenant, and Martin continually must remind the men that he is in charge and they must follow orders: “Is it understood? ... IF we find tunnels, we’ll search them thoroughly, by the book, and we’ll do it right. I hope it’s understood” (O’Brien 107). At first Sydney’s constant adherence to the rules results in slight disobedience: “Once, when Martin ordered them to search a small bunker complex, Stink Harris and Vaughn began making pig noises, softly at first, then louder, and others joined in. It wasn’t exactly mutiny, not quite, but it was close. The men walked away... No one cared much for Sidney Martin... The way he kept pushing” (104). This is just the beginning of the disorganized mutiny that Martin’s men later enact.

Additionally this moment creates anxiety when Bernie Lynn continually insists that he heard the shot. Referring to the old adage that you can’t hear the shot that kills you, he claims: “I heard it... I heard it...Bang! Just like... just like that, *bang!*” He then gets a little upset: “What’s wrong here? I did, I heard it... all the way I swear” (66). Here the men witness the fact that Bernie Lynn’s reaction to his war schema not only conflicts with his reality, but that the contradiction between the two leads to his death. As Bernie tries to make sense of the fact that he has been shot, Martin is “calling in the coded coordinates... [giving] each number precisely, pausing, very calm” (68). This scene is quite traumatic owing to the fact that Frenchie’s and Bernie Lynn’s deaths fully disprove the old war myth that the bullet that you hear can’t kill you. But Martin’s stoic behavior makes it even worse and sends the men over the edge: “He persisted in making them search tunnels before blowing them, and after Frenchie Tucker and Bernie Lynn died in tunnels, the disobedience became fully organized” (43). Frenchie and Bernie Lynn needlessly die, and the way Martin reacts is so unemotional that everyone feels that he disregards his men’s safety and only cares about the rules.

These two deaths and Martin's complete disregard for the potential danger of searching tunnels, which may or may not be hiding the enemy, lead the men to kill Martin before he can kill another one of them. This chain of events serves as another instance, like Pederson's death, of the need to preserve the group by sacrificing the individual. With the exception of Cacciato, they decide as a group to frag Martin. Oscar Johnson tells Berlin: "Explain the situation. Take the frag with you. Get him involved in some group rapport" (235). Berlin is tasked with getting Cacciato to touch the grenade, so that all the men will have touched it in a gesture of solidarity. Cacciato refuses, and upon realizing it is hopeless to reason with him, "Paul Berlin pressed [the grenade] firmly into the boy's hand" (240). It is at this very moment that Berlin sees himself as solely responsible for Martin's murder and the only person that knows the truth is Cacciato. Berlin's manipulation of Cacciato's hand leads to one of the most traumatic deaths of the group. Not only does the squad kill their commander, making Berlin partially responsible, but Berlin feels that his forcing Cacciato to touch the grenade results in Martin's death.

These three deaths and the tension over searching and blowing up tunnels leads Berlin to the first part of his fantasy, in which he meets Sarkin Aung Wan, who stays with Berlin up until the very end of the fantasy. The role that Sarkin plays is similar to that of a leader. She is the one who figures out how to escape the tunnels. She explains to them "the way in is the way out... We have fallen into a hole. Now we must fall out... as easily as we fell in" (98). This woman that they just met tells them that they essentially fell into these tunnels because of an earthquake—circumstances beyond their control—and the only way to get out is to give up control once again and fall out. This idea of giving up control and trusting those in charge not only applies to the fantasy, but Berlin's time in the army in general. The men have no control over their

surroundings—only how they react.<sup>19</sup> Their reactions mean life and death, which we see through Bernie Lynn’s death and the deaths that take place in the tunnels. The need to fall out of line, in order to survive, is the reason they kill Martin. It is almost as if Sarkin explains that to get out of the tunnels and survive the war, the men need to do the complete opposite of what they have been trained to do. If the situation is beyond their control, then the only way to feel any type of empowerment is to fall out of line and behave in a manner that is out of control as well. This could also be a partial recognition on Berlin’s part that killing Martin was the right action to take.

While in the tunnels, the men relinquish their control to Sarkin, just as they allowed Stink to lead them to killing Martin. Ironically in both cases the men appear to give up control to a leader, but in both cases the leaders are not in control themselves. Instead of Stink and Sarkin leading based on their own convictions, they are forced to react to those truly in control, which is really no one in particular since it is their environment that controls their actions. Sarkin manages the men but constantly tends to the sickly Lieutenant Corson and basically tells the soldiers what to do. She especially orders Berlin around and tells him what they will be in the future: “In Paris we shall walk everywhere. We shall learn the city... visit monuments and hold hands” (113). She babies him by clipping his toenails (113) and helping him pick out clothes (116). Berlin thinks he’s in love with her, but what is more likely is his training to follow orders allows Sarkin to easily control him. And this is how he sees his role in the deaths taking place around him; he falls in, falls out, and does what he is told in order to survive. We can even see this as his reaction to Martin’s death; he’s not in control, the others are, but he still survives by following and falling out of line, illustrating how, internally, Berlin is still very confused by his situation.

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<sup>19</sup> It’s important to note that many of them don’t even have control over their actual participation in the war.

As Berlin fantasizes about the tunnels, the next character he imagines is Li Van Hgoc. These chapters interweave with Berlin's memories of the deaths of Frenchie and Bernie Lynn and the arguing that takes place after Martin's reaction to those deaths. While in the tunnel, Van invites Berlin to look through the periscope and see the moment from a different angle. As he looks through the periscope, Van explains that "things may be viewed from many angles. From down below, or from inside out, you often discover entirely new understandings" (91). While this comment applies to Van's argument concerning searching tunnels, it also could refer to something deeper. "From down below" could mean down in Berlin's unconscious mind, which essentially is what he imagines on the quest for Cacciato. Berlin needs to leave his unconscious thoughts and push himself to see what happens "above ground" or in his actual surroundings. His new understanding of all his experiences, including what he cannot accept at this point in time, will come from inside his mind or "down below" and move from the "inside out," or move from thoughts to outward action. He can approach the truth and full understanding of the deaths he has seen, but he's not quite ready to completely accept them, which leads to the periscope being destroyed. Sarkin and Van attempt to change Berlin's schema of war by providing him with alternative viewpoints and showing him what has taken place through a different perspective, essentially the perspective of survival. The periscope represents a different schema that will provide Berlin with a more appropriate way to interpret the war and what he has done, but still at the beginning of his fantasy, he is not prepared to deal with these alternatives.

Since Berlin is not ready to rework his schema, he is a prisoner of his own consciousness and interpretations, which then leads to him imagining being Van's prisoner. Van explains: "You see... according to the rules, I fear you gentlemen are now my prisoners" (92). He is a prisoner, but he still wants to escape both his actual emotions and the scenario with Van. When Corson

attempts to figure the way out of the tunnel, Van's answer is to "accept it" (97). And Corson interprets that as to "give up" (97). We see this back and forth struggle in Berlin's memories. As he marches, he decides to just collapse and stop moving, and yet his legs keep marching (167). This back and forth between giving up and accepting his situation is a constant struggle in reality and during the mission to find Cacciato: does Berlin give up his search or does he accept his mission? He is a soldier, this is a war, and he has a purpose. At this moment the reader sees the contradictions between Berlin's schema and what is necessary for his survival and the difficulty it causes.

Another instance where Berlin rejects the others' ways of dealing with their conflicting schemas is in his fantasy of traveling to India. The Hotel Phoenix in Delhi and the character of Hamijolli Chand, or Jolly, represent another of Berlin's attempts to understand deaths of other American soldiers. Immediately upon entering the hotel, the reader is reminded of the mythic creature of the phoenix, signaling a sense of continual regeneration and rebirth. This hotel could represent the possibility of Berlin's regeneration and renewal of his schema and perspective. And perhaps Jolly, who "instantly reminded Paul Berlin of his own mother," a feeling that he explains as "an immediate thing, a total presence" (147), will aid in his rebirth. Jolly might resemble his mother on the outside, but she is not going to help him better understand his situation and lead him to an epiphany. Instead, Jolly discusses trivial aspects of American life such as "sailing ships, department stores and shopping Malls" (148). She brings up television, believing that it is a commonality "among the classes" and "bind[s] together diversity" (149). Over dinner she asks about socialized medicine, complements Oscar on his sunglasses, looks at Stink's four sisters, and listens as Eddie explains the final episodes of *The Fugitive* (150). All this is completely

irrelevant and just shows her making small talk.<sup>20</sup> She's so enthralled with the surface that she doesn't see the larger issues of American life and how divided its people are over the war. Even when she brings up "the Block" in her list of her memories of Baltimore, she doesn't skip a beat after mentioning a prostitution- and drug-riddled neighborhood and moves on to "Little Italy" (148). She illustrates an example of how a civilian can go through life and this war without trying to actually reach a deeper understanding of the consequences of America being in Vietnam. And the men sense it; Oscar calls her a phony: "All that crap last night 'bout RV an' shopping malls. You ever hear such crap?" (151). Oscar represents Berlin's awareness that everything she said was fake, but Jolly also represents Berlin's recognition that focusing on basketball games and the trivial as a coping strategy will not help him survive the war.

The two approaches—being phony or delving down below the surface of one's experiences—become intertwined when Berlin goes into the city. He writes postcards that say, "*Delhi is crowded and beautiful*" (152); he takes pictures of "bloodstones, snake charmers, old men in their turbans and white shorts" (152); he finds himself walking through a residential area that reminds him of home and his mother (152). All these images represent Berlin's schema of what a visit to Delhi should resemble, and he continues to walk, noting that "beyond the houses was a wooden park. Beyond the park were tenements, and beyond the tenements were the shanties. He did not go to the shanties" (152). Just as Berlin cannot look through the periscope and see an alternative perspective, he too cannot go towards the slums of the cities because it would disrupt his schema. Like the scene in the tunnel with Van, Berlin is unwilling to see Delhi through a different lens, which also represents his unwillingness to go all the way into his

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<sup>20</sup> This could be a premonition of how future conversations with his mother, who will not understand his experiences, will feel like.

unconscious and access the perspective he needs to understand and survive his time in Vietnam. And so, in his fantasy Oscar may be able to understand Jolly's viewpoint of focusing on the trivial and reject it, but Berlin still clings to pretending in order to cope with the deaths around him.

Once Berlin reaches Afghanistan in his fantasy, he rejects another alternative to coping with these deaths—especially Billy Boy's death. That night of Billy Boy's death, Berlin recounts this scene and his only reaction is to laugh uncontrollably: "he couldn't stop. He heard the sound in his stomach and tried to keep it there, but it was hard and hurting and he tried to make it quit, and he couldn't stop remembering how it was when Billy Boy Watkins died of fright on the field of battle" (217). Here we see Berlin trying to laugh and joke the death away, like the others do, but it does not work, and he cannot control his emotions. What makes this experience so terrible is the warning to the men that death can come just based on their emotions, no matter how hard they try to hide them. On his first day at war, this is a difficult lesson to learn. It doesn't matter how brave Berlin can seem on the outside, because apparently even holding back one's fear, just like he attempts to hold back his uncontrollable giggling, is futile when at war since fear comes with their day-to-day life. This first night at war sets the foundation for multiple experiences that cause a sense of disjunction between his war schema and what he continually experiences.

Berlin's fantasized response to dealing with uncontrollable emotions is prompted by the mayor of Ovissil. While in Afghanistan, the men stay at the Mayor's house while the train tracks are repaired. The mayor claims to be able to tell a person's history although "never of the future. Fortune-telling is for lunatics and old women. History is the stronger science, for it has the virtue of certainty" (179). This statement is quite ironic, considering history is not certain and subject to interpretation and differing perspectives. Later in the night, when Berlin asks for his history to be

told, the Mayor cannot tell it; “You are young... Come to me when you have had time to make a real history for yourself. I cannot tell unmade histories” (179). While an older person can think this way about a young soldier, it is strange that Berlin’s fantasy includes this. He is not “all that young” (179) as he explains to the Mayor, plus he has experienced and seen a lot in the previous few months. In the fantasy, the mayor uses Berlin’s age as an excuse for not telling his history, but in reality it is because Berlin cannot remember his history that it does not become a part of his fantasy. The mayor, essentially a part of Berlin’s mind, cannot tell Berlin’s history not because he doesn’t have one, but because Berlin has blocked his immediate history out, resulting in nothing to tell.

Perhaps Berlin’s most telling moment in his efforts to recognize and deny the truth occurs when, in his imagined journey, the men reach Iran. Here they speak with Fahyi Rhallon, a captain in His Majesty’s Royal Fusiliers. He is a soldier but “had been recently transferred to temporary duty with the *Savak*” (189). He explains that this job in Internal Security is a “terrible duty for a man who would rather be killing Kurds” (190). Berlin imagining being interrogated by Internal Security could reflect his fear of being questioned for the death of Sidney Martin. The men are caught and detained by a soldier who is now part of the police force. The connection to Martin can also be seen in Fahyi’s statement on rules: “Rules and rules. Red tape like a pit of snakes! It is a genuine miracle that armies ever find their way to battle” (194). The discussion of rules and underground pits and the ability to make their way to fight represents Martin’s adherence to the rules, when it came to the tunnels, and how because of that the enemy won the battle at the tunnel. Here Fahyi also rejects Martin’s behavior at war, and his war schema falls somewhere in between the older schemas of the World Wars and a potential schema for a present day war.

Eventually they leave the police station and go out to discuss their experiences with war, which is where Berlin learns that the secret to war and fighting is purpose. Fayhi says that purpose is the issue with Vietnam and Doc argues saying the purpose is always the same for anyone fighting—“keep breathing” (198). Fahyi answers that purpose keeps him from running, which reflects his war schema: “without purpose men will run. They will act out their dreams, and they will run and run” (199). To which Doc counters with his schema: “Maybe purpose is a part of it. But a bigger part is self-respect. And fear... We stick it out because we’re afraid of what’ll happen to our reputations. Our own egos. Self-respect, that’s what keeps us on the line” (199). This incredibly profound division between purpose for the good of the war versus purpose for the good of the individual hits Berlin very hard because he realizes leaving Cacciato is best for the group and the individual. Yet leaving a man behind goes against his war schema causing such a strong sense of guilt that he even has to take a break from the fantasy and slip back to the observation post. He concentrates and “took a deep breath and let himself go. Yes music and flashing lights and people dancing, and it was neither real nor unreal, it was simply *there*” (200). The reason it feels neither real nor unreal is because the ideas reflect his own inner struggle. Why did they kill Martin? Why did Cacciato disappear? Why did Billy Boy die? All these relate back to their purpose. Berlin struggles with his own inner fears and desire to run. He wants to “keep breathing” and is fearful of what others will think of him if he follows the rules and stays.

This guilt that manifests from the contradictions between his war schema and reality reminds him of Buff’s death and that which preceded it. Berlin does not feel guilt over this death because it seems almost warranted. Two hours prior to Buff’s death, Martin orders them to frisk everyone in a village and a long detailed description follows depicting Berlin’s memory of intimately frisking old men, women, and then “the babies, frisked them in their sleep, spilling out

cradles at gunpoint. Cats and dogs, all frisked. The whole village was frisked. A technique called flame frisking, and then two hours later Buff floated with life after death in his big helmet” (138). Flame-frisking refers to the flamethrowers that the men used to destroy vegetation in order to avoid enemy ambush. This use of flame-frisking leads us to believe that the men never had hand to hand contact with the people in this village, but instead allowed the flames to touch them. What we are left with after “flame frisking,” is a dead Buff. The juxtaposition of these two moments in Berlin’s flashback during a “Road to Paris” chapter illustrates the connection between the two events. Berlin then follows that paragraph with three short sentences: “He remembered it. It was a law of nature. A principle of human conduct” (138). He returns to the present moment on the road to Paris.

Berlin knows that just as Buff was punished for the platoon’s violent actions, he too could be punished and his past could come back to haunt him. And one way to deal with this knowledge is to run. The anti-war California girl, whom they hitch a ride with, assumes they follow her way of thinking, offering up a solution and explaining that “people can plug you into anything you need. Money, jobs, housing. Tickets to Sweden. Contacts. I mean it’s a whole underground network set up for guys like you. Resisters, deserters. Guys with the guts to say no” (276). This underground network may have been an option for Berlin at one point but not anymore. When Oscar asks Doc, “You ever see evil in Nam?” and his response is “What’s evil?” (276), this represents Berlin coming to the realization that it is not the country itself that is evil, but the men that have come there to fight. Berlin knows he has committed evil acts and he feels the need to atone for them, which is represented by the discussion of evil taking place as they drive through a village “full of spires and steeples” (276). Berlin is starting to feel guilty and that guilt weighs him down, but he immediately imagines them driving away from the churches,

essentially divine judgment, and into the forest, back into the dark, where they kick the girl out. He rejects her and in turn rejects running away from the war and his problems. He still needs to get to the end of his fantasy and reach Cacciato.

Even towards the end Berlin questions whether he really wants to know the truth. When finally in Paris, Sarkin asks Berlin if it is necessary to look for Cacciato. His response is it is “not necessary, I guess. But it’s the mission. Missions are missions, you can’t back away. We’re still soldiers” (114). When asked about what happens afterwards, Berlin responds: “if we catch him, then it’s back to the realms of reality” (114). Berlin is obviously aware that the rescue mission is a fantasy, and yet having that goal and being so close to achieving it and gaining some sense of control over the chaos that his life has become while in Vietnam makes him feel better about his situation. He feels like a real soldier, with actual goals, that can make a difference. Sarkin tries to get him to see another way to cope with the Cacciato incident: forget about him and move on, just like Sarkin and Lieutenant Corson do in the end. However, Berlin cannot stop searching and he cannot find Cacciato, because both scenarios lead him back to reality, and he is not ready for that.

Each new character in the Road to Paris chapters reflects the various ways to deal with the difficult events that Berlin has experienced, but the question that remains is what really prompted Berlin to create this elaborate story. He has previously experienced traumatic deaths, including one that he believes he indirectly caused, so the reader can assume that the mystery of Cacciato’s disappearance is special and the reason why he spends an entire night imagining a fantasy mission to rescue him. It is the unknown and the confusion about why Berlin blacked out that force him to want to learn the truth. The incident hits especially hard because he is solely

responsible for Cacciato's death, and we see reality and fantasy combine to force Berlin to remember the truth.

The final chapter of the novel alternates between the last scene on the Road to Paris and the actual scene that leads Berlin to imagining this Road. Just as the men had to march up the mountain after Cacciato, they now march the streets of Paris in search of him. We begin to see the chapter morph between memory and fantasy as Paul Berlin tries to hold on to the image of them in Paris, "but the feeling was Quang Ngai" (326), where the men are currently stationed. We then see Oscar bully the men, calling them names and telling them they are useless, then telling Berlin he's the worst and doesn't want him there (328). Yet, Berlin insists on going with Oscar to deal with the "messy shit" (328). As they approach Cacciato's hotel room, Berlin thinks the place smells like "dust and mildew and age. Damp, like Lake Country" (327). His mind can hang on to the fantasy of Paris, but his visceral senses are back in reality.

In the end, Berlin holds the rifle, squeezes it, and "a monstrous sound hit him. It jerked him back" (330), which can only be the sound of the gun going off and the kickback knocking him to his knees. After a scene of shooting and Berlin clearly losing control, we come back to his memory and Doc telling him "It's okay... all over, all over" (331). We have Berlin lying in the grass, shaking, unable to control his bowels, and unable to speak. These two scenes juxtaposed with each other can lead the reader to believe that Berlin killed Cacciato that night in the mountains. He hears "the heavy sound of something being dropped, someone grunting, and the brittle sound of the fire" (332), which could be the men burning the body and any evidence of what Berlin had done. Corson even says to him, "It happens, kid. Sometimes it happens. You got to—" (332). It could be that sometimes there are casualties like this, or sometimes we shoot our own by accident and you just need move on. Berlin repeats, "I didn't mean to... I was tense... I

didn't mean it" (332). He even returns to where he waited the night before and remembers "the fear coming... shaking feeling. The enormous noise, shaken by his own weapon, the way he'd squeezed to keep it from jerking away" (333). Even Oscar says to him: "That's it... Finished" and does this with a wink "as if to relay some secret" (334). The secret here is that Berlin killed Cacciato and the men cover for him and tell everyone that he is MIA. This not only explains the sense of urgency that Berlin felt to get to "Paris" and reach Cacciato, but this also might be evidence as to why he felt the need to revisit Pederson's and Martin's death—because they too were killed by friendly fire and those responsible were never brought to justice. And that night, the idea for the fantasy is born; Corson and Berlin keep watch, the Lieutenant tells him that "There's worse things can happen.... He might make it. He might do all right" (336), which then leads Berlin to the beginning of the novel where he can imagine Cacciato making it and forget that he killed him.

As it gets later on the Observation Post, and he has finished his two hour shift and Doc's two hour shift, he decides at three o'clock "not to rouse Stink for the next watch—tonight there would be no changing of the guard" (124). And so, if the purpose is to just absorb and comprehend all these deaths, then why does Berlin have this sense of urgency to finish his fantasy, when he could finish at any other free moment? There is something more to this fantasy: in the beheading of the boy in the center of town resonates with Berlin and he tries hard to concentrate, telling himself to "remember the details, store them up for future understanding" (187). One of these details is the fly on the boy's nose. The boy is completely focused on that fly, not even paying attention to being killed. Berlin notes that "the boy's tongue was still moving toward his nose when it ended" (188). The men think he was a murderer, which is what Berlin is. He sees himself in the boy, fixated on one piece of the puzzle (the fly) and not seeing the entire

picture (his dire situation). Berlin is still not ready to accept the truth, and his mind quickly changes the situation such that the boy has actually gone AWOL, which is also the status they give Cacciato in the end. This scene illustrates how Berlin almost rationalizes killing someone else who went AWOL.

During the last third of the novel and the final third of the night, Berlin begins to feel more desperate for the truth. He knows that he has a gap in his memory and can't quite place where it begins and ends. He thinks to himself, "what you remember is determined by what you see, and what you see depends on what you remember" (206). Berlin realizes that what he sees and remembers cannot only be realized through hard observation and self-reflection, but that these are constructions of his mind—his perspective taints the truth: "where was the fulcrum? Where did it tilt from fact to imagination?" (206). Whether the fulcrum shifts to truth or fiction or personal myth and reality, all represent constructs of his mind. The truth that Berlin seeks in Paris will only arrive when his mind is prepared to process that truth. Berlin works off of facts, what he knows and considers truth. He goes with the order of deaths and chronologically lists each person's death. But then he realizes there is no real order: "The facts, even when beaded on a chain, still did not have real order. Events did not flow. The facts were separate and haphazard and random, even as they happened, episodic, broken, no smooth transitions, no sense of events unfolding from prior events" (206). Berlin needs to order these facts and what he knows about that night in order to understand why he feels the way he does.

Toward the end not only does the order of the deaths blur, but reality and fantasy begin to blur as well: "He thought of the sea" (247), which shows him leaving his fantasy, and beginning to think about his surroundings. He then feels that "for a time he was in the two spots at once... One thing leading to the next, and pretty soon there was no guiding it, and things happened out

of other things. Like the time Cacciato went fishing in Lake Country... So he pressed the grenade against Cacciato's limp hand. Was it touching? Was it volition? Maybe so, maybe not" (247). He blurs his reality and fantasy, which means he is thinking and imagining at the same time. If thinking leads to individuality and confrontation of the truth of Vietnam and imagination is used to reconcile Berlin's original war schema, then we have a moment where the two conflate. His memory is disjointed, but this out of control feeling does not just stem from his memory of Cacciato's imagined Lake Country, but also the real moment he shoots Cacciato; the latter directly contradicts his schema and the former directly avoids this contradiction.

The men around him, some sympathetic and some angry, agree to write Cacciato off as having gone AWOL, the same way they agreed to keep what happened to Martin a secret. Berlin feels responsible for both deaths, and the need to understand what happened leads him to his fantasy mission that goes on for miles until Berlin can finally face the truth. Yes, Berlin holds some responsibility for what has taken place, but these deaths and cover-ups truly illustrate how different the primary combat relationships of Vietnam were compared to the World Wars. The closeness of these men combined with their out of date schemas create a breeding ground for mutiny and individual selfishness in the name of survival.<sup>21</sup>

### **3.2 *Tree of Smoke: Blinded by My Uncle and My Ambition***

Skip Sands, the protagonist of Denis Johnson's *Tree of Smoke*, does not necessarily find himself on an entirely imagined fantasy mission, nor does he experience the same kind of trauma that Berlin must deal with, but he still has a specific war *schema* that does not align with his

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<sup>21</sup> This reading lends itself to Charles Moskos' argument that "because of the ideological conformity of World War II, the positive role of primary groups in sustaining combat soldiers became overly interpreted. During the later years of the Vietnam War, on the other hand, soldiers' primary groups probably contributed as much to subverting as to supporting the formal goals of the military organization" (82).

actual experiences in Asia. Taking his ideas about war and the CIA from his father's experience in World War II and his uncle's experience in Korea, Skip arrives in the Philippines expecting to be in a position where he can achieve great things, not only for his own career but for the advancement of the United States as well. His grandiose plans, however are thwarted by seemingly pointless assignments and monotonous waiting at one resort or hotel after another. While we might expect him to recognize that his schema needs to be adjusted, his relationship with his Uncle further complicates his schema. Uncle Colonel Sands has played the part of Skip's father figure for so long that Skip mistakenly trusts him completely. His war schema and view of his Uncle intertwine, and for Skip to reject and rework his war schema would also lead to him rejecting his Uncle and their connection. Because of this contradiction, Skip creates a fantasy and uses his surroundings, just like Berlin does, to construct his own mission. Using his war schema of his purpose in Asia and his relationship with his Uncle, the Colonel, Skip dedicates all his time to his Uncle's article "Tree of Smoke." He does not think about and therefore create an opinion about his situation, but instead imagines a role of importance for himself, which will in turn make his Uncle proud. The plan of Tree of Smoke is to use a Vietnamese double agent in order to plant false intelligence that will greatly hurt the opposition. Skip participates in a mission that is not government sanctioned because he believes it will positively alter the outcome of the war, making him feel important and useful and making Colonel Sands proud. His desire to evoke pride from his Uncle goes all the way back to his time at Indiana University. When he interviews with the CIA, the recruiter asks why he wants to join, and Skip's response is "because my uncle says he wants me as a colleague" (47). The Colonel has influenced every step of Skip's life, making it almost impossible for Skip to see the truth about the man.

Skip interprets his Uncle's motives and the tasks he undertakes through his imaginings about not only what a CIA agent at war should experience, but also what he believes working for a father figure and mentor should be like. The imaginary aspect of this mission is that Skip blindly trusts his uncle and fantasizes that he is an integral part of the effort to take down the Vietcong. The truth that Skip continually ignores is that the Colonel uses him as a pawn and takes advantage of Skip's loyalty and desire to further his own career. Though trauma motivates Berlin to fantasize, Skip's traumatic moment comes at the end of the novel. When he realizes that adhering to his war schema has completely allowed the Colonel to manipulate him into becoming the perfect patsy for a time when the CIA inevitably uncovers what the Colonel has secretly been doing, Skip's fantasy and essentially his life is destroyed.<sup>22</sup>

Similar to the relationship Paul Berlin's fantasy bears to Cacciato's existence throughout O'Brien's narrative, Skip's fantasy can exist only as long as the Colonel exists. The Colonel represents, for Skip, what he hopes to be professionally and is his strongest link to his father, who died in World War II. As we read and learn about the Colonel, his actions, and how others view him, the reader understands that he is not to be trusted. And yet, Skip blindly follows him because the Colonel does not just represent an officer in the Psy Ops department, but the closest person Skip has ever had to a role model. When we first meet Skip Sands in 1965, he feels inadequate in comparison with his Uncle: "Sands felt in his uncle's presence a shameful and girlish despair. How would he evolve into anyone as clear, as emphatic as Colonel Francis Sands?" (47). This question is immediately followed by his thought that "quite early on he'd recognized himself as weak and impressionable and had determined to find good heroes. John F.

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<sup>22</sup> Most criticism of Johnson's novel focuses on the CIA and how it parallels the more recent War on Terror in the Middle East. The issues with the CIA in the novel mirror issues with questionable American intelligence of the present. See Roger Luckhurst and Steven Belletto

Kennedy had been one. Lincoln, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius” (47). Oddly enough, these heroes were murdered or in Socrates’ case forced to commit suicide while standing up for what they believed in.<sup>23</sup> This quote not only illustrates Skip’s desire to feel important and be a part of history, but also how highly he regards his uncle. Just like these historical men, “Skip had made of Francis Sands a personal legend” (47), and even just including him on this list of famous historical figures shows how distorted Skip’s view of Colonel Sands is. On the other hand, this is not how other characters see Skip’s uncle, and the fact that Skip compares him to such well-known men is almost comical once the reader learns more about the Colonel.

Though other characters such as Rick Voss, Terry Crodelle, Lucky, and Eddie Aguinaldo eventually see through the Colonel’s charisma, Skip continually ignores any hint of the Colonel’s true motives. A large part of this is due to his upbringing. Skip was “raised in the American heartland” and so “he was dedicated to steering clear of personal controversy, to ignoring scowls, honoring evasiveness, fending off voices raised in other rooms” (37). His ability to ignore points of contention prepares him to be able to ignore what does not fit into his schema while working with his Uncle in Asia.<sup>24</sup> The relationship that has been cultivated throughout Skip’s childhood also contributes to his inability to see Colonel Sands for who he really is. Since his father died at Pearl Harbor, Skip has held the military and his Uncle in very high esteem, and as a “member of [the country’s] Central Intelligence Agency[, he] considered both the Agency and his country to be glorious” (36). As an adult, he still wears his childhood air force wristwatch that his Uncle

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<sup>23</sup> Though it is agreed on that Aurelius died of smallpox, there was some contention amongst those around him that he was poisoned with something that would mimic smallpox symptoms. According to McLynn, it is also known that Romans liked to “make a mystery” (419) of their celebrities’ deaths, and Aurelius was no exception.

<sup>24</sup> Some reviews, like that of B. R. Myers, find this description of Skip to be unoriginal, but these details are quite important to understanding Skip’s behavior towards his Colonel and other authority figures.

gifted to him (329). While in college, the CIA recruiter asks Skip who his Uncle is, and Skip gets an acknowledgement of respect from the interviewer, who recognizes the name Francis Sands and states that “once a colonel, always a colonel” (48). Before even becoming a member of the CIA, Skip is set up to see his uncle and serving his country through the perspective of honor, integrity, and achieving good in the world. This becomes the perfect breeding ground for his fantasy mission once he reaches the Philippines and the Del Monte resort.

The schema that Skip internalizes for his Uncle and the CIA continues throughout the war, even when Skip should be asking questions or recognizing that he is not involved in an effectual mission, and is in fact being manipulated. When he does have a flicker of realization, he immediately thinks about his father, a thought inextricably intertwined with his Uncle. Skip asks about the German assassin, and his Uncle denies knowing anything about it, and Skip just accepts that as truth. He replies with “you weren’t running the German... That’s good enough for me” and when his Uncle responds that he does not care “if it is or it’s not,” Skip says, “Fuck you, sir.” The Colonel says “I see” and Skip notices his finger trembling as it holds his drink (184). Skip’s response to this conversation illustrates how ignorant he is of how to deal with older men, and as he grows more uncomfortable, he thinks, “Why don’t I have a father?” (185). Skip is so emotionally involved with his Uncle that he assumes the finger trembles out of emotional pain, but the other possibility is that the Colonel trembles out of fear. This uncharacteristic moment might show Colonel Sands that Skip is capable of fighting back and will not be as easy to use as once believed. The conversation continues in a way that pacifies Skip; they take a picture together to send back home to his Aunt Grace, who has been “asking for a photo. They’re all very proud of you. We all loved your father very much” (195). This turns into a serious conversation about Skip’s dad, showing Skip’s vulnerability. The Colonel explains how

wonderful his brother was, but all Skip “wishes he could say” is, “but did he love me, did he love me?” (196). This entire scene explains why Skip is so invested in the Colonel and the Tree of Smoke mission and refuses to see his Uncle for anything but a great man; Skip is blind to the situation because this person is not just the only true connection to his father, but his only true male role model as well. The Colonel has been Skip’s hero, and Skip has tried to emulate him his entire life, and this is the starting point of Skip’s fantasy.

Skip’s mother’s death further compounds his oblivion. His uncle is all Skip has, making it increasingly difficult for Skip to look at the Colonel with a critical eye and the Colonel knows this. When Skip finds out about his mother’s death he states: “Well, Uncle. I’m your orphan nephew,” to which his Uncle replies, “you’ve got family. You’re not an orphan” (383). This continual mention of family throughout the novel makes Skip not only realize that the Colonel is all he has, but it also blinds Skip to the possibility that his Uncle might not have his best interests at heart. Skip cannot change his course because of his reliance on the Colonel emotionally and professionally. Each step he has taken and each task he has completed forces him closer to Tree of Smoke and the Colonel. The Colonel represents all meaning in his life, making it even harder to face the truth regardless of any warning from others or brief moments of clarity that Skip ignores. These moments of understanding create a moment of confusion and discomfort, similar to what Berlin deals with on the Road to Paris, but Skip glosses over them because of his dedication to his schema.

Due to the fact that Skip’s relationship with his uncle holds such high importance for him, the fantasy mission he commits himself to becomes crucial. When he is in-country, he seems to be passed around amongst people. He “accompany[ies] a patrol of the combined Philippine Army and Philippine Constabulary in a fruitless search for invisible people among

dark mountain places,” mostly because “nobody else had any idea what to do with the American” (35). His Uncle assigns him the task of organizing his catalog system:

Over nineteen thousand entries ordered from the oldest to the latest... On the floor beneath the tables waited seven thirty-pound boxes of blank cards and two boxes full of thousands of eight-by-eleven photocopies, the same nineteen-thousand-card system in duplicate, four cards to a page. Skip’s main job, his basic task at this phase of his life, his purpose here in this big bedroom beside the tiny golf course, was to create a second catalog arranged by categories the colonel had devised, and then cross-reference the two... this was the colonel’s private intelligence library, his cache, his hidey hole. He claimed to have accomplished all the photocopying by himself, claimed Skip was the only other person to have touched these mysteries. (47)

These catalogues follow Skip around for years and just appear to be busy work to keep him feeling useful. Yet Skip sees them as an opportunity and even has “taken to adding notes of his own, quotations from his heroes” (48). He clearly attempts to make his mark somehow, and this is his only opportunity. He becomes so intimate with these cards that he begins to reorganize his uncle’s files by location, believing “it would be possible to look at this information as it related to district, village, or city... He longed to trip on a clue and follow it to some ravaging discovery—Prime Minister Ky spied for the Vietcong, or an emperor’s tomb hid millions in French plunder” (247). Throughout the novel, Skip has these cards travel with him everywhere, and he thinks that they will offer up some path to his success. In reality, however, these cards resemble a scrap-booking project. The Colonel never looks at the cards, and the only time he discusses them is when he brings supplies, such as jars of rubber cement. This is not what Skip expected his time as a CIA agent in the Philippines to be, but he listens and trusts his Uncle,

going along with the fantasy of his usefulness and imagining the possibilities that these cards could bring. However, the only purpose these cards serve is to arouse suspicion amongst the Colonel's enemies and distract them from his actual plans.

Eventually Skip starts to push and wants to be stationed in Saigon, which stems from his realization that he is not really an integral part of the mission. He realizes that the "Colonel, Eddie Aguinaldo, the German. They'd traveled here, and no one had told him" (110), leading him to believe that "the Colonel [is] with[holding] things. It prodded at a spot of doubt he harbored, doubt in the colonel's competence, his judgment, the power of his perception. The Colonel was a little crazy. But who wasn't? The problem was that the Colonel might not trust his nephew's talents, might have sent him on a phony errand" (110). The errand here is to visit Father Carignan and Skip has every right to feel apprehension and question why everyone meets secretly behind his back in Mindanao. The reason is that Skip will be the one questioned if the CIA learns of the assassination. The Colonel keeps using Skip as a possible distraction to anyone who might be questioning his actions. The combination of Skip's thoughts of being "his nephew" and being sent on an errand illustrates how difficult it is for Skip to separate the two and see what role he truly plays in his Uncle's plans.

The assassination by the German in Mindanao unnerves Skip and he cannot get past the feeling that something is wrong, and really pushes for reassignment. The reason for this insistence is because Skip's war schema contradicts what he witnessed. He goes back to the United States for language training, thus allowing him to continue living his fantasy and delaying his realization of the truth that his war schema has been completely upended. Upon returning to Asia, he again partakes in another pointless task: translations. Skip and three other American translators spend "eleven baffling months... working on a project of doubtful utility, that is,

pursing a patent folly” (145). And their job is “to extract an encyclopedia of mythological references from over seven hundred volumes of Vietnamese literature, an endeavor waged mostly in three basement-level offices of the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey and consisting mainly of the listing, categorization, and cataloging of fairy-tale figures” (145). Skip tries not to grow frustrated and believes that eventually this will lead to something bigger and more important, so he throws himself into his work and does not even think twice when the translations ship out to Langley and the project stops.<sup>25</sup> In fact, when he is in Vietnam later, Skip asks the local priest to help him collect regional folk tales to help him become a better translator and to help him “understand the language of myth” (230). The project is clearly over, but Skip wants to feel important and useful, so he continues his study of myth, holding on to the fantasy that there was an underlying meaning to the project he spent almost a year on.

Skip’s oblivion stems from his hope for a bigger and more important mission. He continues with the Colonel’s wishes because he sees him as the only way towards a position of power. Skip’s desire for power stems from how he sees others view his Uncle, and this desire to emulate the Colonel leads to his wish to command respect: he wants to be respected in the same way he respects his Uncle. The power that Skip desires is different from the power that the Colonel holds. His Uncle, on the other hand, seeks an individual power, because he truly cares only about himself, making decisions that will benefit him, whereas Skip looks to use his power to benefit the entire group and the country. When told to collect intelligence on Father Carignan in Mindanao, he believes that “these excursions amounted to Sands’ only strategy for gaining

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<sup>25</sup> Skip’s behavior may appear to be a result of his naiveté, but that would simplify his situation. In order for Skip to maintain his schema of the war and his role in the world, he must believe in the possibilities for positive influence. Other than this belief and his Uncle, Skip has nothing. Take away this belief and Skip’s entire life’s frame of reference would dissolve, which it eventually does once he accepts the truth of his situation.

points and landing a reassignment to Manila or, even better, to Saigon” (41). And the reason he says he wants to go to Saigon is because “we’re going to beat them. I want to be there for that” (61). Again, Skip’s hope that his experience in Vietnam will help contribute to the American cause and his use of the word “we” underscores his group mentality; but he does not realize that it is his Uncle’s, not his country’s, cause that keeps Skip under control. Skip cannot see the truth, because that would shatter his image of not only his Uncle, but himself as well. While doing laundry he sits there “hiding, essentially, evading scrutiny—in a rising tide of confusion and dread... He remembered that his life was nothing. He focused on that point on the horizon, the solid, the fixed, the prominent goal: the defeat of Communism. The panic subsided” (160). Knowing that his life has a purpose keeps Skip from spiraling downward. If Skip learns and accepts the truth, then he will be forced to recognize that all aspects of his life have been tainted.

Skip avoids the truth about the Colonel and his situation, but that does not stop him from having moments of clarity during this time period. Right at the start of the novel he asks his Uncle directly: “Are you playing me? Have you been playing me all night?...No. Not all night. Since—” When he pauses, his Uncle prods him to continue his statement and Skip says, “Since I was twelve” (63). Colonel Sands completely ignores Skip’s question and begins to discuss a trip to Alaska. Skip also lets the thought go, and the reader sees that he is not as naïve as he appears and has a deep sense of anxiety. This anxiety intensifies as Skip learns more about Tree of Smoke. He realizes that they are playing loosely with the rules, which makes him uncomfortable. When he raises an objection his Uncle welcomes it, claiming, “Go ahead. We need a Devil’s advocate.” Skip responds with “I think in this case, the Devil is you” (335), a side comment which the Colonel ignores, and Skip goes on discussing the hypothetical plan. The lure of

playing a role in a covert operation, which adds to Skip's desire for importance and power, outweighs his gut reactions.

It's not just Skip who has fleeting moments of comprehension; some of those around the Colonel see him for who he really is. Throughout the novel various people provide their opinion of Colonel Sands. The locals see him as "a kind man. Or at least a careful man" (21). He appears to be jovial and fun, drinking and picking up women with other military personnel all around Asia, but there is also something about him that confuses many of those with whom he comes into contact. He always wears civilian dress (23), perhaps to show that he is on the same level as the civilians or so as not to be feared as an authority figure, manipulating people to feel at ease around him. Clearly Eddie Aguinaldo is not one of those locals that completely falls for the Colonel's manipulations. Eddie asks Skip if he knows his Uncle well, and Skip's answer is that he was trained by him. Eddie then states, "that means you don't know him. It means he knows you" (44). Again we see a juxtaposition of a fleeting moment of truth with Skip's ability to mask that moment through thoughts of family.

It also appears that the Colonel wastes time and energy on odd activities, such as sending away for a Michigan State University football game to be watched by the men in Cao Phuc (210)—a decision which affects the professional impression others have of him. The platoon in Cao Phuc does not hold him in a high regard but as someone who "[won't] shut up. And he wasn't a real colonel, he was more like a Southern honorary fat-boy colonel, and the men called him 'Colonel Sanders' behind his back and referred to these rare morning assemblies in the encampment... as the 'Hour of Power'" (210). Though this makes him appear to be a joke, he also seems aware of how these men view him. In fact they know that "the Colonel wasn't a fool. He had an eerie sense for what you were thinking: 'You men realize I'm a civilian. I confer with

your lieutenant; I don't pass orders to him'" (210). He may not pass orders, but he obviously controls what they do at Cao Phuc, especially in light of the fact that the platoon's Lieutenant, "Screwy Loot," is not exactly stable. The men see the Colonel as "part joke, part sinister mystery. Sometimes he sounded like a cracker, other times like a Kennedy" (210). He is a contradictory character, and his contradictions make those around him, including Skip, follow his lead; he's charismatic but also a little crazy. There might be signs warning that he is not to be trusted, he also manifests signs of moments of ingenuity as well.

It is not just how he appears and talks to the men that make those around him suspicious, but the comments he makes as well. When Terry Crodelle and Rick Voss question Skip Sands, they go back and forth describing him as a great military mind while simultaneously as a dangerous rogue. Crodelle explains that "he's got medals up the ass, okay—but he's not a spook, he's not that type. He *suspects* everybody's against him, but he *acts* like he hasn't got an enemy in the world. You know what a guy once told me about the colonel? 'His enemies are only friends he hasn't defeated yet'" (417). This statement underscores his ability to act flawlessly around people, making his intentions difficult to decipher, which proves to be problematic for anyone in his inner circle. Additionally, we learn here that he is a decorated war hero, which essentially shows that his peers and superiors once recognized him as a good soldier. This image is juxtaposed with the Colonel's twisted sense of camaraderie, illustrating how individualistically the Colonel thinks. What is interesting about this contradiction is that the Colonel appears to be the only character who has remolded his schema to fit his environment; he does not hold on to his previous war experiences and embraces the Vietnam War for its differences. And this change does not go unnoticed amongst his peers. Crodelle recognizes the Colonel's intelligence, but also how that could be viewed negatively: "your uncle has something to teach us, which is: Trust the

locals. He's never separated himself from them. He works with them, he's joined to them. But in doing that, he separates himself from us, his people" (417). Just these quick comments that Crodelle makes to Skip explain the bigger picture of the Colonel's relationship to those in Vietnam. He is not a team player and though he may have noble intentions, the approach is not a group effort.

Skip is still not ready to recognize the contradiction to his schema and the fact that his Uncle only cares about himself. Crodelle may not tell Skip what to do, but he leaves him with the thought that "a man outgrows his mentors. It's inevitable" (417). For Skip to outgrow his mentor, his entire war schema would need to change, because the two are so strongly linked. Even if Skip considered the possibility of moving away from his Uncle and making decisions based on his own desires, Colonel Sands is so perceptive that it would appear that he knows the right things to say and the best way to pacify Skip. When he senses Skip's trepidation, the Colonel manipulates the situation in order to maintain his nephew's level of involvement and keep Skip believing that he has his best interests in mind. He plays to Skip's ego: "I believe we have something in process now that you'll be a very important part of. A crucial part of. But your part doesn't begin anytime soon. I'm afraid what I'm going to ask you to do right now involves a whole lot of waiting... [T]his is something I wouldn't ask anyone else to do" (190). The Colonel subtly continues to string Skip along through these false promises and when combined with Skip's need for acceptance, it is easy to see how he can be so oblivious. The Colonel solidifies Skip's trust when he sends him the "Tree of Smoke" draft. This article is "a partial draft... seven typed pages with handwritten notes—ideas more inflaming than French texts, more sinister than Eddie Aguinaldo's cryptic warnings. On the one hand completely reasonable, on the other alarmingly disloyal" (248). The Colonel knows that his ideas are controversial and could cause others to

question his loyalties, and so sending them to Skip means that he trusts Skip completely. But, along with the draft the Colonel also sends him “a somewhat famous article from *Studies in Intelligence* called ‘Observations on the Double Agent’” (248). One reason for sending Skip this article could be so his nephew can better understand the main idea behind Tree of Smoke, which includes use of a double agent; however, it could also serve as a warning that those in the inner circle know the characteristics of a double agent and would immediately recognize it if Skip’s allegiance shifted away from Tree of Smoke and to the CIA.

The Colonel also makes side comments not directly related to Skip, but that definitely could be interpreted as warning signs as well. When explaining Labyrinth, another of the Colonel’s side projects, he says that “Psy Ops is about unusual thinking, man... We’re on the cutting edge of reality itself. Right where it turns into a dream” (189). On the surface this relates to the plan to blow up the tunnels, but this also reminds us that the Colonel is trained and thinks along the lines of how to wage psychological warfare against anyone he considers his enemy. Skip never considers this because he trusts him. When a nervous Skip questions what they know about Hao, the double agent, the Colonel asks, “what do we really know about anybody in this hall of mirrors?” (337). Again, Skip agrees with the statement, but does not apply it to his Uncle. Even calling Tree of Smoke a “self-authorized national deception operation” (337) poses problems. Besides the inherent contradiction of the words self and national, it is unclear who is being deceived. The ambiguity of the plan to deceive the Vietcong or the United States should raise concerns and Skip should be suspicious of what he agrees to do.

This moment when Tree of Smoke comes to the forefront of his Uncle’s actions represents the beginning of the end for Skip. His entire fantasy begins to crumble and it becomes

harder and harder for him to ignore the truth of his situation. He begins to see Tree of Smoke and his time at war for what it truly has been. Skip recognizes:

the vista of his mistakes, all this wrongness he'd wandered into on the tails of his uncle... He felt surrounded, assailed, inhabited by such serpentine imagery—the tunnels, Project Labyrinth, the curling catacombs of the human ear... but over all loomed the central and quite different image: the Tree of Smoke. Yes, his uncle meant to unfold himself like a dark wraith and take on the whole Intelligence Service, the very way of it, subvert its unturnable tides. Or assault it on the handball court. (344-45)

The images of mazes and tunnels take on a new meaning, and now Skip begins to see that the deeper his involvement with Tree of Smoke, the harder it is for him to find his way out. Skip's revelation echoes Berlin's experience in the tunnels in *Going After Cacciato*. Figuratively traveling deep underground represents going deep into the unconscious and thus learning something likely unpleasant about what one takes for reality. Regardless of this newfound knowledge, Skip does not attempt to turn himself around, but instead blames himself. He contemplates writing a letter explaining that “[he] think[s he] might be bad, [he] could actually be evil, and if there's a Devil it's possible [he's] his ally... Right at the heart of [his] ability to grasp the truth, [he] wants to be paralyzed... [he] want[s his] mind to fail before the truth” (355). Not only does Skip feel that he himself is evil, but he also still tries to avoid the truth of the situation: “he'd come to war to see abstractions become realities. Instead he'd seen the reverse. Everything was abstract now” (357). Instead of facing reality at this point in time, he decides to continue living in his fantasy and in order to ignore his tangible experiences. Through all of Skip's CIA training and the necessity to question lines of intelligence and information gathering,

he does not look at his own personal information with a critical eye, and this results in Skip's downfall.

Soon after Skip begins to question his own motivations and what his Uncle represents, Colonel Sands accuses him of being a traitor. He believes Skip is "in business... running something. Something or somebody" (421). Even though we know that Skip is completely innocent, his Uncle keeps telling him that the CIA knows about the villa because of him: "If they know anything, they know about this place—because you told them... Skip I think it was you" (431). He follows this line with, "I can't explain it, Skip. There's just something about you. You have no loyalty at all" (432). After everything that Skip has done without question, Colonel Sands now pushes him out of the inner circle, not because he believes Skip is disloyal, but because the Colonel knows that Crodelle and Brewster are suspicious, and now is the time to cut ties with his nephew, making it look like Skip has acted alone all this time. Skip's response is: "Uncle... I love you. I would never do such a thing. I do love you, Uncle" (432), which provides the Colonel with the opportunity to sever the most important tie between the two of them: "that may be right. That may just be right. But love and loyalty are two different things" (432). Skip's entire relationship, professionally and emotionally, has centered on love and loyalty being bound together. Throughout the entire novel the Colonel references family by blood and through war, and how intertwined they are, making Skip believe in the fantasy that he and his Uncle are working together.

By continuing to live the fantasy and failing to salvage his reputation, Skip appears to be a double agent, and his demeanor gradually changes. Skip reads about double agents, but he does not see how he has evolved into one. We can see him as pledging allegiance to the Colonel, but his loyalties lie with the CIA and vice versa. According to Dimmer, Skip fails to notice the

similarities between himself and the common characteristics of a double agent, making the situation even more dangerous because of how oblivious he really is. Double agents are described as follows:

They are unusually calm and stable under stress but cannot tolerate routine and boredom... they do not form lasting and adult emotional relationships... they have above-average intelligence. They are good verbalizers... they are skeptical and even cynical about the motives and abilities of others but have exaggerated notions about their own competence...their reliability as agents is largely determined by the extent to which the case officer's instructions coincide with what they consider their own best interests... [T]hey are ambitious only in a short-range sense... [T]hey are naturally clandestine and enjoy secrecy and deception for its own sake. (388)

Every single one of these traits could be used to describe Skip and his experiences throughout the novel. When being interrogated, Voss notices how calm Skip is and he “couldn’t tell whether Sands was a fool, or the Buddha himself. From where came this poised, shiny-eyed amusement?” (416). Furthermore, we do not see him form any long lasting bonds, except with his Uncle, and that relationship is strained at best. And perhaps the most telling trait that Skip possesses is his propensity to tell lies. When Crodelle brings him in, the last “pre-question” for the polygraph test is “Do you enjoy telling lies?” Skip escapes, but later thinks about what his answer would have been: “Yes,” he would have answered truthfully” (462). Additionally, he has become desensitized and inappropriately reacts to the Colonel killing the Vietnamese prisoner at Cao Phuc. Minh notices that “Skip Sands could hardly stand up, he was laughing so hard. He put a hand against the tent and almost pulled it down. Nobody paid attention to him... Skip Sands often smiled, and always Skip Sands joked, but Minh had hardly ever heard Skip Sands laugh.

Why had he laughed at the poor tormented man?” (297-98). This could be uncomfortable laughter, but Minh senses that Vietnam has changed Skip and his view of humanity, which becomes even more apparent towards the end of the novel. After three years of war, the Colonel has finally molded Skip into the perfect patsy, someone who appears to be a loner, incredibly calm, and laughs uncontrollably at prisoners being tortured. The Colonel knows by this time who will take the fall when the CIA comes asking questions.

It is not just the Colonel that sees these traits in Skip; Trung, the Colonel’s Vietnamese double agent, sees them as well. He discusses friends dying while at war and states that eventually “the time comes when you kill a friend. And that might drive you away. It can also have the opposite result—to deafen you against your own voice when it wants to ask questions... [T]hen the time is ready for your own death. Any time it can come, even before your body is killed.” Skip asks, “What exactly do you mean? I don’t think I understand.” Trung’s response is “perhaps you don’t want to” (390).<sup>26</sup> Trung here appears to understand more about the Colonel and the consequences of *Tree of Smoke* than Skip, and he also sees that Skip cannot accept what has changed inside of him. As Skip gets to know Trung a little more, the similarities between the two men become even more apparent. Trung’s mother died while he was at war fighting and he missed her funeral; he has no wife or children; and his father also died while fighting in a previous war. Skip fails to see that his Uncle recruited a double agent from the Vietnamese side and the American side and both will suffer. Skip wants to “stop waiting. To serve. To make himself indispensable in putting this man to use against his own people” (388). What Skip fails to realize is he already serves his Uncle.

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<sup>26</sup> This same sentiment is echoed by Storm, who tells Skip “You’re not who you think you are... You’re dead inside” (Johnson 558).

Even after the Colonel dies, Skip still maintains the fantasy. He receives an old letter from his mother that says, “I know you’re doing what you feel is best for your country. I hope so anyway. I hope you aren’t just stuck. People can get stuck in things and not find the right way to get themselves out” (435). Unfortunately, Skip is indeed stuck. He makes a decision to live his own personal myth and deny the truth about Colonel Sands. Even when he rewrites his Uncle’s obituary, he acknowledges that he “preferred the myth. It told the truth. In this world his uncle had stood out grandly, even more so set against the landscape of his own imaginings. Skip regretted the role handed him at the end, that of traitor to the rebellion” (451). And that role is that of a treasonous double agent, seen in Crodelle’s simple statement: “You work—for *us*” (461). Skip now knows exactly what has happened and how his Uncle set him up, but he makes a conscious decision to continue living the fantasy of Tree of Smoke, believing that he is his “uncle’s legacy. After he died, his spirit entered [Skip]” (609). His Uncle has turned him into someone that he never wanted to be, and Skip accepts it because of his inability to rewrite a new schema. This also reflects Kinney’s interpretation of “Friendly Fire.” As Johnson’s novel suggests, it is not just physical deaths that result from American on American violence, but symbolic deaths as well. Intellectually, both Skip and Paul Berlin have psychologically died by the time they learn the truths they are trying to put off through their fantasy missions.

Skip’s adherence to the fantasy leads to his being ostracized and eventually separated from the army. He cannot go back home because of what he has been accused of and emotionally he has no reason to, since there is no one there for him. His fear of being abandoned and unimportant comes true, leading him to live a life that he would never have imagined for himself. He has a Filipino wife and children, even though we never see him show much of an interest in his family. He went from following orders, wanting to do good work, and essentially being a

passive participant in the war, to a prisoner sentenced to death for dealing illegal weapons. His final words are two letters to Kathy, a missionary widower who he periodically meets during the war. Skip attempts to explain himself, and in the first letter he explains that “there was once a war in Asia that had among its tragedies the fact that it followed World War II, a modern war that had somehow managed to retain or revive some of the glories and romances of earlier wars. This Asian war however failed to give any romances outside of hellish myths” (603). Here we see Skip’s recognition that a lot of his trouble stems from his preconceived notions of what war should be like and his expectations that Vietnam would be similar to the romantic ideal of World War II; but, it was a “hellish myth,” a myth that he created, accepted and lived. And through this myth he acknowledges that “I betrayed / My kindred out of allegiance to my lords / My lords out of allegiance to my country / My country out of allegiance to kindred. My crime was in thinking about these things. In convincing myself I could arbitrate among my own loyalties. In the end out of shifting allegiances ~~I managed to~~ I betrayed everything I believed” (607). Thinking and forming personal opinions and goals destroys Skip’s fantasy, which forces him to finally accept the truth. By adhering to his schema of war and his bond to Colonel Sands, Skip betrayed everything he once cared about. And yet his line of betrayal is cyclical; he betrays everything because of his kindred, meaning his kindred was where his allegiance lied. His Uncle continually overshadows everything that Skip held important.

In a way, at the end of the novel, Skip Sands brings us right back to the beginning. He begins and ends with his kindred, Colonel Sands, in much the same way that Berlin begins and ends with Cacciato. The cyclical nature of these two Vietnam narratives illustrates the protagonists’ need to revisit and relive their fantasies over and over again. As Thomas Myers explains in reference to the “Road to Paris” chapters of *Going After Cacciato*, Berlin’s fantasy is

“an imaginative activity deeply rooted in the lived experience of Vietnam, not a denial of reality but a deeper exploration of it” where “experience and imagination face each other, but they also compose a continuum” (173). I would argue that the same can be said of Skip’s imagined involvement in *Tree of Smoke*. Skip’s fantasy is structured by what he encounters in reality, and his only way to truly understand that reality is to participate in the fantasy so as to discover the missing information to confirm what, on an unconscious level, he already knows.

The resistance of both Berlin and Skip to accepting the truth is a result of the fact that both would have to completely revise their war schemas to acknowledge it: for Berlin this means accepting himself as a murderer, while for Skip it requires recognizing that his Uncle has manipulated him for selfish ends from an early age. These two facts have the power to destroy how they view themselves and their future. Unfortunately for these two characters, and for many others in fictional Vietnam War narratives, instead of accepting reality and modifying their schemas once they locate that missing piece of information, they ignore it. They do this because what they learn is so damaging that they would rather relive their experience again and again, creating a continuum of fantasy, than acknowledge it—a pattern that emerges in the narratives of both Berlin and Skip. They ignore the reality of their situation and continue living in their noble fantasy missions in order to never have to have to really face the fact of being a murderer or a treasonous double agent. What both these novels illustrate is that whatever the men decide to do with their new found truth, accept it or avoid it, it still destroys them—mentally and physically.

#### 4 FRAMING THE TRUTH IN IRAQ AND THE MILITARY/CIVILIAN DIVIDE

Representations of the World Wars influenced how soldiers in the Vietnam War reacted and behaved; because of the expectation to be heroic and courageous in a war where the opportunity to do so was scarce, the men in Vietnam needed to create their own opportunities. If Vietnam War fiction illustrates the desire to make current war experience similar to the previous World Wars, then the fiction of the War in Iraq does the opposite and shows the necessity to emphasize that these soldiers do not resemble the soldiers from the Vietnam War. This proves to be a challenging task, considering that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan appear to lack a clear end and purpose, which suggests a superficial resemblance to the Vietnam War. Due to the disastrous effects of the Vietnam experience, this war still affects the present: “the parallels between the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the war in Vietnam have helped ensure Vietnam’s continued relevance, as soldiers in the Global War on Terror have looked to the culture of the Vietnam War in the hope that it would guide them in the struggle to define their own war” (Ross 342). The ability for the Middle East soldier to define his or her own war can be difficult, which may explain why, until recently, there has been very little biographical or fictional narrative about the Middle East conflicts.

In August 2014 Jeff Turrentine wrote a review of the Michael Pitre’s novel *Fives and Twenty-Fives* (2014) in which he proclaimed that we have entered “a new ‘Golden Age’ of war fiction” (The Washington Post). As Turrentine and other scholars point out, this new Golden Age can be problematic for a myriad of reasons. Turrentine explains that it is contradictory to view this body of literature in a positive light when its direct cause is a series of negative and traumatic experiences: “Nothing complicates the celebration of a cultural high-water mark like the knowledge that we owe it to a rising tide of human misery.” Patrick Deer builds on

Turrentine's reluctance to celebrate the surge of war literature and believes that these novels "demonstrate a remarkable confidence in the capacity to represent wartime America and its global conflicts" (50); however, as Deer points out, the literature is "not based on grand narratives... but on much more partial, fragmented, and incoherent representations of wartime" (51). In other words, Iraq, similar to Vietnam, is not a "total war" compared to the World Wars. American civilians are left with no choice but to "make do with partial perspectives, the blurring of boundaries between civilian and military, and a confused sense of war's purpose" (69). I have argued that Vietnam literature can be described in much the same way in that it consists of fragmented, partial perspectives that blur the distinction between reality and fiction, as well as civilian and military, increasing the difficulty of distinguishing between the Vietnam War and Middle East conflicts.

One difference between the Vietnam War and those in Iraq and Afghanistan emerges when considering the intended audience for dominant war discourse in these conflicts. Deer claims that, with regard to the most recent wars, Americans have been habituated to the militarization of everyday life, war discourse, and uneven representations of the conflict. The "total war culture," is designed to desensitize and "disengage us as citizens from the civic responsibilities and the political and economic consequences that come with the waging of war" (49). America's dominant contemporary war culture works to subtly "compartmentalize civilians and military; to make waging the war the preserve of a technocratic elite; to blur the boundaries between wartime and peacetime; to postpone a reckoning with the human and economic costs of war; and to disempower citizens in making educated judgements about social priorities in domestic or foreign policy" (51). On the other hand, Americans during the Vietnam War did not live in a militarized culture. John Gillis explains in *The Militarization of the Western World* that

there are two types of militarization: “dominance of the military over civilian authority, or more generally, as the prevalence of warlike values in a society” (1). The latter explains our present American culture. While combining the militarized culture with a tight control over information—written and visual—allows for American public consumption, it also allows those in charge of military public affairs to define the war they want the public to see.

The control over the public’s perception is maintained through embedded journalism and the Public Affairs Office—both of which disseminate what Deer calls the “official perspective on the conflicts” (50). The official perspective works to represent a “nebulous combination of the normalization of images of violence, the distancing of the wars as high tech spectacle waged by paramilitary elites, the sacralization of the figure of the veteran, and the maintenance of a climate of fear—all without the need for service or sacrifice” (Deer 70). The result of this “unstable status quo” is the struggle to close the gap between the “civilian and military divide” (70).

The consequences of this struggle, while in country and when a veteran returns home, can be seen in the production of the contemporary war narrative. David Abrams’ *Fobbit* (2012) and Ben Fountain’s *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* (2013) both illustrate the consequences of a war rhetoric that is:

characterized by respect for individual soldier service but ambivalent about war aims articulated by first President Bush and then President Obama. A war carried out by a citizenry and fighting force completely immersed in a new communicative realm made possible by technology. The difficulty of finding equitable ground for dialogue between veterans and civilians. (Molin)

While support for the troops regardless of one's opinion of the war is a positive difference between the two engagements, the general fear of criticizing our War on Terror stems from the effects of the Vietnam War.

Representations of the Vietnam War allowed civilians at home to see the conflict through a semi-filtered lens created by the media, which directly contributed to civilian disgust with the war; this disgust was especially incited by the prolific and visual reporting on the dead. In her 2003 book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag argues that the dissemination of graphic images might backfire. Rather than shocking people of conscience into action, such photos might give rise to “opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen” (13). This led to the ban on photos of coffins returning from the Middle East in 1991. Whether out of respect for the families or the fear of inciting civilians, this manipulation of wartime images by the media is a key example of the “framing” that Judith Butler examines in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*

In the chapter “Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag,” Butler specifically examines the framing of the Middle East conflicts and how Vietnam has influenced that framing, creating a double bind for Americans. She reminds the reader that public reaction to the sight of American war dead during the Vietnam War led, decades later, to the widespread sentiment among state and military authorities that “such images were not to be seen in case they aroused certain kinds of negative sentiment. This mandating of what can be seen... was supplemented by control over the perspective... By regulating perspective in addition to content, the state authorities were clearly interested in regulating the visual modes of participation in the war” (Butler 65). Such regulation does not end with photography; instead, in a clear attempt to

overcompensate for the public suspicion and anger toward soldiers' activities during the Vietnam War, the armed forces during the second Iraq War now try to ward off criticism by carefully portraying soldiers' behavior in a positive manner conducive to building relationships with the Iraqi people.

It becomes clear in narratives about the second Iraq War that maintaining a positive image is now the military's top priority, and those organizing the war focus time and energy on how the media tells its story, how the soldiers tell their story, and how Americans back at home interpret the story. Americans completely removed from the experience can only rely on what they hear and see through the media and the government—a phenomenon that Butler's project *Frames of War* examines in detail. Butler focuses on the problem of framing: "the frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated. They are themselves operations of power. They do not unilaterally decide the conditions of appearance but their aim is nevertheless to delimit the sphere of appearance itself" (Butler 1). The ability to frame experience and information reflects a sense of power, albeit an invisible power, over the civilian people. Butler compares this framing to "be[ing] subject to a con, to a tactic by which evidence is orchestrated so to make a false accusation appear true. Some power manipulates the terms of appearance and one cannot break out of the frame; one is framed, which means one is accused, but also judged in advance, without valid evidence and without any obvious means of redress" (Butler 11). While Butler refers here to the one being framed (i.e. the soldiers), this also can be read as the media's conning of the citizens as well, who cannot break out of the frame either. In both scenarios, those in power spread lies that victimize the soldier and civilian; however, by manipulating both sides—brave soldiers and supportive civilians—to perform for each other, neither has the courage to speak

candidly about the war and/or its consequences, contributing to the political difficulty of withdrawing from the Middle East. Framing poses a problem because “if the media will not run those pictures, and if those lives remain unnameable and ungrievable, if they do not appear in their precariousness and their destruction, we will not be moved. We will not return to a sense of ethical outrage” (Butler 150). And this ethical outrage does not just apply to the innocent Iraqi lives that continue to be lost, but also the young American men and women trying to win the War on Terror. If civilians do not receive the information unfiltered, then those in charge, politically and militarily, can continue their war and the cycle endures.

*Fobbit* and *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* reflect the need to control information and the effect this need has on both the soldiers themselves and American civilians at home. Abrams' novel illustrates the great lengths that the military goes through to repackage certain events, while Fountain's novel shows us the consequences of “embedded reporting” in the twenty-first century. Butler and other scholars, such as Catherine Irwin, define “embedded reporting” as “a type of journalism that reiterates government and military perspectives by restricting the viewer's gaze to certain acts and narratives that support the war effort” (104). By controlling information, the government also can control reactions to the war. Paradoxically, Abrams and Fountain play with this notion by crafting a fictional account of characters framing events and/or themselves for general public consumption, which reflects the act of fiction writing. As Julien Mathonnière argues with regard to *Fobbit*: “Ironically, [Abrams'] is a fiction about how the reality of war is crafted into fiction by the Army master wordsmiths, from the sanitized confines of their air-conditioned cubicles” (5). In other words, the framed is being reframed by the author on two levels: characters carrying out the work of framing within these novels serve as a reflection of Abrams' and Fountain's activities as writers of war novels.

#### 4.1 *Fobbit*: Frame the War for the Civilian, But Do Not Lie

Seamlessly framing reality does not come easily though, especially to those in charge of crafting fictionalized truth. The reader of these novels is invited to consider the tremendous amount of time and energy spent on building relationships between the media, the military, and civilians and thus to reflect on the purpose of these tenuous relationships. *Fobbit* tells the stories of two lieutenant colonels, a captain, and a staff sergeant. Not only does Abrams include their general reactions to Iraq, but much of the novel focuses on the emphasis placed on behaving in a positive manner in order to disseminate positive news to the rest of the world. Throughout the novel we focus on four men: two in the PAO or Public Affairs Office (Staff Sergeant Chance Gooding and Lieutenant Colonel Stacie Harkleroad) and two who go off base (Lieutenant Colonel Vic Duret and Captain Abe Shrinkle). These four men participate directly in events that cause varying levels of damage to lives, property, and perhaps most importantly, the military's reputation. The official reaction to these events is always the same, regardless of who died, how they died, and who is to blame: make sure the media and the American people receive the event in the most positive light possible. It is not necessarily lying, but rather presenting the situation from a positive perspective. Within the novel, we see a glimpse into the manipulation of fact and the "careful control of media reporting, censorship of the wars' violence, and the embedding of reporters within military units" all in order to maintain "the confidence of a domestic public" (Deer 68). Regardless of how much effort is expended by the military, however, the main four events in the novel cannot be entirely repackaged in a positive light for the American public. If civilians were aware of the truly negative events that took place, the level of confidence the American public has in the military would drastically drop, and this threat of the possible dissemination of negative news causes the high level of anxiety among characters in the novel.

The PAO works tirelessly to turn these mistakes into pseudo success stories, as the characters, both on and off base, find themselves struggling to stay ahead of the media while one blunder follows another. Ironically, all four of these particular mistakes revolve around one man: Captain Shrinkle, who is completely oblivious to the trail of destruction he leaves behind. These events begin with a suicide bomber being shot in the head without orders under Shrinkle's command; Shrinkle shooting a mentally handicapped Iraqi civilian at a gas station; and Shrinkle blowing up a Humvee with a grenade. His fourth and final mistake occurs at the culmination of the novel; every day Shrinkle has been visiting the Australian military's pool, a forbidden act, and has been lying about his entire purpose in Iraq claiming to be a British land surveyor—a habit finally broken when he is blown up poolside. Shrinkle's mistakes grow worse as the novel progresses, but he still manages to avoid culpability, reflecting the way the military itself avoids culpability for its mistakes. Shrinkle "frames" his story on a micro-level with the aim of being liked, while the military utilizes the same techniques on a macro-level. Additionally, just as Shrinkle's framed stories do not instill confidence in his men, framing does not exactly work for the PAO either. Gooding, Harkleroad, and Duret all must take these events and turn the focus off of Shrinkle's missteps in order to make sure the media and the people back at home do not see these moments as a result of out-of-control American soldiers, yet at some point it becomes clear that they have taken their story-telling too far and, in Shrinkle's case, have ventured into outright lying.

The novel opens by introducing Staff Sergeant Chance Gooding, who is one of the first soldiers in the PAO to write press releases. When he first arrives in Iraq, the death of a soldier affects him greatly, but now he sees the soldiers as "Dead. Dying. Done for," because "death was a way of life for him, a prescribed job skill he performed with automatic finger taps and wrist

lifts across his keyboard. Death was just one of the commodities he traded on a daily basis” (9). His indifferent attitude is starkly contrasted with his first encounters with death: “Back then, he’d slumped against the wall, reeling from his first deaths as a public affairs soldier serving in his first war” (10). Not only does the reader see him desensitized and nonchalantly “pulling up the already written press release template he used whenever a division soldier died, which lately was at least twice a day” (65), but Gooding compares this to a monetary transaction; these deaths are not of people but are likened to commodities to be bought and sold. Gooding’s job is to tell stories, and for the majority of the novel, he fails to see the consequences of manipulating the facts and how these “reports” affect his audience and himself. His glib tone leads his audience—and the reader—to view these deaths as just the price of doing business in Iraq.

Unfortunately, Gooding will not know the consequences of these press releases until his tour is over and he tries to reintegrate into civilian society. He represents how the process of framing war in order to desensitize Americans has also indirectly worked on himself. Deer explains that what we have today “resembles a holding operation designed to habituate citizens and consumers to war waged at a distance from the majority of Americans by a volunteer military” (49). The volunteer military and the distance from the war combine to create a prime space in which civilian naiveté thrives. To a lesser extent, distance from the battlefield also shapes the attitude of soldiers living on the base, who are known as Fobbits. Gooding has been habituated to death but has also distanced himself from the war itself, since he is never in imminent danger while on base. He thus embodies the “holding operation” of the civilian who can disconnect from the war and not really have to think about the trauma it creates for those in combat; his desensitization is a characteristic that ties him to both combat veteran and civilian. At the same time, the reader also comes to understand that soldiers who go off base feel hostility

toward Fobbits, creating a divide similar to that which they experience between veterans and civilians upon returning home.

Because his work is bolstered by the belief that it is for the good of the country—a belief instilled in him from above—Gooding alone cannot be blamed. An email that originates from the brigadier General quickly trickles down to Gooding’s inbox. It compares Iraqi civilians to “a grain of sand beneath our boots—we never know which way he’ll SHIFT away from us” (245). While this analogy focuses on which way the grains of sand will go, whether in a pro-American or anti-American direction, it also assumes the military’s control of the situation and ability to deal with the shifting of singular grains. On the other hand, this image also illustrates how shaky the ground they stand on is, making these press releases even more important and in Gooding’s eyes more imperative to the war effort. The email continues to explain that “the most troubling aspect of the U.S.-centric stories I’m seeing is the tone of negativity and pessimism... young soldier-journalists are NOT exercising discretion in their choice of words... [T]here is ‘sad news,’ there is ‘tragic news,’ but there is NO ‘bad news’ coming out of Iraq. This negative slant is uncalled for and has no place in what is being released from our office” (247). This command comes down after Shrinkle has shot a mentally disabled Iraqi civilian and inadvertently blown up an Iraqi man under a Humvee. The labeling of this death as just “sad” or “tragic” illustrates Butler’s conception of how the Iraqi people, especially women and children that have been sacrificed, are not considered people and therefore there is no need to grieve or even consider these lives lost. This eases American conscience, but framing events such as what we see in *Fobbit* leads to an acceptance of violence against innocent people for the War on Terror.

The inconsistency of having to report on this information with a positive slant is not lost on Gooding and the other “young soldier-journalists.” One of the Deputy Public Affairs Officers,

Filipovich, even tells Gooding that “what they’re essentially saying is, they don’t want us to report what’s really happening out there if it doesn’t lend itself to a ‘happy’ story” (248).

Filipovich underscores that “the very action of the war, its practices and its effects, are meant to be established by the perspective that the Department of Defense orchestrates and permits, thereby illustrating the orchestrative power of the state to ratify what will be called reality: the extent of what is perceived to exist” (Butler 66). This push for happy endings among the troubling amount of negative news and pessimistic attitudes harkens back to what happened in Vietnam, and the Brigadier General’s email expresses the anxiety that someone older, not one of the “young soldier-journalists,” would remember. Though the men here in Iraq are unsure of their purpose and how they could possibly be helping the Iraqi people, the façade of progress and emphasis on “Triumphant Iraqi Moments” (248) needs to be their focus; they must avoid the negative tone of reality that surrounded the Vietnam War, and make sure to write about the “official perspective.”

Not only does Gooding care about the overall image of the military that he portrays in his press releases, but he also feels the need to validate his own individual participation in Iraq, which is another holdover from the Vietnam soldier’s experience waiting for orders while feeling useless. When in Qatar, Shrinkle questions Gooding about being a Fobbit, and he responds by explaining that he feels okay being a Fobbit: “I’m still here, aren’t I? Lot of door kickers can’t say the same” (195). And yet, at the same time he does feel slightly inadequate compared to those soldiers that go off base and interact with Iraqis. After a bout with a stomach bug, Gooding must receive IV fluids. As the IV is taken out, he starts bleeding everywhere, which causes him to panic. Eventually once the bleeding stops, “Gooding’s head cleared and he started to breathe easier. Thoughts of having to get a prosthetic arm began to evaporate. The cold tingling

remained in his fingers but now he was certain he was going to make it. He *was* going to pull through this okay” (306). Though a comical scene, it illustrates his desire to feel more danger and, in turn, a part of the actual war. As he changes his uniform, he thinks that “when he returned to Georgia, maybe he could wear the uniform into the local American Legion and it would get him a few free beers from all the old battle-scarred veterans sitting at the bar... And that was the best a Fobbit could hope for, wasn’t it?” (307). He knows that he is safe and staying alive is everyone’s individual priority, but at the same time he also feels inadequate, and if he can pretend in his mind or convince others of his worth as a soldier now and in the future, by framing his IV mishap, then perhaps that really is all he can hope for. What makes this notion especially troubling is that those men at the American Legion would believe whatever story he tells them; he could even fabricate his entire experience in Iraq in order to feel better about his own insecurities.

This moment in the infirmary proves to be a turning point for Gooding, and he realizes the futility in framing events, like his IV mishap, because the individual still knows the original version. No matter how he frames his story to his audience, Gooding cannot lie to himself. He spends day after day sifting through deaths, attempting to write them with a positive slant, knowing that he may be at war, but he is as safe as he can be. In his diary, he writes that “fictional tales are better and more enjoyable the nearer they approach the truth or the semblance of the truth” (346). He knows that there is no truth in Iraq and that every piece of information results from someone’s perspective, which is forcibly very pro-American. Regardless, his lying has caused him to react to death as just pulling up a template and entering in necessary information. Perhaps the reason he finds fiction more enjoyable is because Gooding does not have to think about all the death and danger outside the base’s gates as well. Gooding’s diary

entry is correct; fiction is better and more enjoyable, and it holds true for those reading the stories as well. The fictional account is not better or more enjoyable for those who have died or lost a friend, and eventually Gooding sees the hypocrisy of this perspective. He also recognizes his compliance with the approach during his time in Iraq. This realization, combined with his loss of compassion, causes him to have a moment of clarity in which his carefully crafted “frames of war break up or break open” (Butler xxx), causing him to see how manipulating information has consequences. At the end of the novel, upon his frames breaking open and his seeing his entire experience in Iraq, not just carefully selected moments, Gooding runs off base, towards a mortar. Perhaps he goes to commit suicide, or perhaps he goes to help the injured, or perhaps Gooding seizes an actual opportunity for a moment where he can physically and emotionally experience the war. Regardless of his ending, Gooding in the end recognizes the power of words and storytelling and rejects it by attempting to approach some sort of physical, personal understanding of war.

Lieutenant Colonel Stacie Harkleroad is another character who recognizes the power of storytelling and the PAO’s real purpose. He explains that the Commanding General of Public Affairs has reiterated that they “need to keep a tight rein on what our journalists are covering, and *especially*, what we’re allowing external media to see. Remember, we control the agenda and it’s up to us to steer them in the right direction” (253). The ambiguous “them” in this quote is twofold: first, the officers need to control what and how their PAO soldiers report the news, and second, they need to be more careful about how the civilian media reports *their* “news.” They can control the media subtly by manipulating each report and death. The frame that Harkleroad advocates “does not simply exhibit reality but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality... [T]he frame is

always throwing something away, always keeping something out, always de-realizing and de-legitimizing alternative versions of reality, discarded negatives of the official version” (Butler xiii). While this might be acceptable for an individual, as we see in the Vietnam fantasy mission, these versions of reality are disseminated to civilians who only have this information to rely on. Harkleroad and the other officers cannot allow the media, and essentially the American people, to see the truth for fear of losing their support system as was the case in Vietnam. However, it is always clear to the reader that those in the PAO know how to frame an event. These soldiers carefully balance what truths to discard and what truths to report; and most importantly they know not to create fictions.

This knowledge becomes clear towards the end of the novel when everyone in the PAO waits for death number two thousand. Harkleroad and many other officers hope “the last tick mark would have the punch of patriotism, a heart-tugging story that would bring a misty tear to the eye of even the most callous, hard-drinking reporter in the Associated Press. America deserved a grand, glorious death to mark this most ignoble of occasions” (332). The media outlets themselves even continue to call, hoping to get matched up with the company that has suffered the most losses. They ask to follow the groups of soldiers who have had the highest percentages of deaths in hopes to be the first news outlet to report on number two thousand. Officers and reporters alike do not seem to care that they are waiting and hoping for a soldier to die; the focus solely rests on the story that can be constructed around that death. The focus on storytelling as an opportunity for creating sympathy in civilians underscores the immense disconnect between the actual situation and those involved. Due to the fact that the military and the PAO itself are disconnected from the moment and look for a potential public relations piece, those at home become unknowingly even more disconnected from the lived experience of the

soldier, which causes a divide with future repercussions at home. The more the American public reads framed stories, the more they believe the war is being won, the soldiers are doing good work, and that this is not another Vietnam. For the soldiers in the novel, of course, none of these impressions are true. These soldiers will have to face these civilian assumptions after their deployment—a task which, as Fountain's novel makes clear, is not always easy. Whether being thanked for their service, needing to hide their PTSD, or just dealing with the accepted general belief that they sacrificed so much for so many people, these soldiers face a difficult process of attempting to reintegrate into society as civilians.

This civilian/military disconnect exists on a micro level as well. Harkleroad places great importance on what his mother and her friends think about him as an individual. This leads him to take a cue from the PAO and to turn truths into fictions: "Eustace had gotten so deep into the habit of lying to his mother to fuel her Wednesday evening Bible studies that he wasn't sure how to stop, except to one day actually do something that, if not exactly brave or significant, would at least have the truth as its foundation" (63). The truth is that he is a Fobbit, prone to nosebleeds and spilling his dinner, hoping to move up in rank, but a person whose career has become stagnant. No one respects him, and he is so in need of feeling important and useful that he tells his mother stories about his bravery. Instead of his stories illustrating his purpose and making him feel assured, however, they cause him great stress and fear that he will lose his mother's confidence in his abilities, similar to the military's fear of losing the confidence of the American public.

Harkleroad's stress leads him to fictionalize his experience even more. Just as he imagines what his bloody uniform could potentially represent, Harkleroad pretends to be the hero. When telling his mother that a mortar had hit the base, he explains that he was the only one

running towards the impact zone to help, which sounds highly unlikely based on his description: “So, there I was, moving from victim to victim, dressing wounds and stopping the bleeding with tourniquets and, in one case, performing CPR... I take comfort in knowing I saved some lives and those soldiers will go on to fight another day. In anticipation of what I know you will ask, no, I do not know if I will get a commendation or medal of any kind for my actions that day” (120). He continues to humbly brag throughout his email to his mother, and “beg[s her] not to contact Jim Powers down at the *Murfreesboro Free Press* and blab about all [her] son’s accomplishments and heroism over here in Iraq, though [he] understand[s] how [she] must be longing to do so” (121). While Harkleroad feigns modesty, albeit not very well, there might be a part of him that also does not want his mother to tell his story, because he knows that he does not really do the work of a “true” soldier, which is why he feels the need to embellish his stories and build himself up. He tells his mother, “I know you are infinitely proud of the work I am doing in this ‘battle for control of the media’ as we ‘take the fight to the enemy’ but I’m sure you can appreciate the disappointment I felt at not being able to go lend a hand for our men who were under attack” (236). He uses the word “battle” in the hope of seeming more like a soldier when in fact all he does is sit in an air-conditioned office and eat. He might be disappointed to not be out there beyond the wire fighting, yet at the same time he can use his skill as a story-teller to make himself appear more integral to the War on Terror. David Lawrence believes that such fantasies “are simply expressions of escapism” (7), but I argue that Harkleroad’s exaggerations are not an attempt to escape and make him feel powerful for his own sake, as in the case of Vietnam fiction. Instead, the purpose here is to show his importance to civilians. Harkleroad always knows the truth but must hide it from those back home. In turn, the reader recognizes that

Harkleroad is merely feeding his need to seem more useful and successful in the eyes of others, making him appear even more inept and ridiculous.

Harkleroad and Gooding, though they use framing in different ways, both have a need for civilian validation. As Fobbits, they will not gain praise from themselves, their commanding officers, and certainly not their peers, as we see throughout the novel, which leads them to fabricating stories for the only group unable to see through their lies—Americans back home. Both men know what information is being fed to the civilians, which provides them the opportunity to align their “achievements” in Iraq with the mainstream stories being reported, making them appear to be special and performing important work. Harkleroad can tell his mom that his Commanding General “clapped his hand on my shoulder (right there in front of everyone!), called me his hero, and compared me to the Hoover Dam in holding back all the waters of misinformation and gossip” (342) or he can pretend that Jim Powers will want to interview him for the local paper (233) when none of this is true. Likewise, Gooding can tell people the blood on his uniform is from battle, not an IV mishap. These two men embody a unique perspective because they know their positive portrayal and bravery will coincide with the dominant discourse surrounding the war—a perspective that those outside the PAO would not be privy to.

Eventually at the end, after the Shrinkle incident in the Australian pool, Harkleroad’s lies catch up with him. The reader can assume that he takes or at least plans to take his story-telling too far and lies to the media about death number two thousand. Instead of admitting that the casualty was a demoted officer posing as a British national hanging out at the Australian pool, Harkleroad suggests to his Colonel that they could let the story of Richard Belmouth stay as a story about the imaginary Richard Belmouth. Whether because of the pressure from his

superiors, the need to do something to further his career, or just the desire to show his mother and himself that he is capable of more than nosebleeds, it appears that Shrinkle defies orders. The final story he tells his mother at the end of the novel is an explanation that he is “about to be embroiled in an international incident and the news media will soon plaster [his] name and face all over the airwaves, slandering [him] at every turn” (357). Even this assumption appears to exhibit an inflated sense of self-worth, and though a negative story, he still illustrates his importance within it. While the media could certainly place all the blame on him, the truth has not even been posted by any news outlets, and we cannot exactly trust what he tells his mother. With that said, the reality of the situation is left ambiguous at the end of the novel, like Gooding’s story, and all the reader can rely on is Harkleroad’s email that he indeed did lie to the media and his story-telling marks the end of his career. This email appears to be trustworthy since this is the first time that he provides his mother with negative information; however, he could just be creating another story to illustrate how integral he is to the PAO, which makes up for his not participating in combat. Regardless, Harkleroad always frames his story in a way that he hopes will make him look important.

Soldiers who go off base, beyond the wire, do not worry so much about story telling as those in the PAO, but they do have to worry about their behavior: civilian reporters following them can frame their actions in an unflattering light that will make money. Lieutenant Colonel Vic Duret, the battalion commander, constantly thinks about their purpose in Iraq and how the United States’ presence in Iraq appears in the media. At the Quillpen incident, when an insurgent drives into the back of a Humvee with a bomb, all Duret keeps thinking about is the CNN crew watching their every move. Yes, the insurgent concerns him— “Duret was able to cut through the clamor and clearly see the path ahead: get rid of this Sunni troublemakers and move on with

the day” (27)—but at the same time he needs to make sure that their course of action “minimize[s] the appearance of collateral damage on CNN later that night” (27-28). There is a bomb that could be detonated at any moment right next to his soldiers and innocent civilians, yet he has the presence of mind to think about the nightly news and how this event could be construed. He even follows this thought with “and if there were news cameras in the area, make good goddamn sure the soccer balls and lollipops were distributed. Don’t forget to tousle the kids’ hair for good measure before moving on” (28). This moment really highlights how different war has become compared to Vietnam. In the past there was no need to show the Vietnamese people kindness, but now with reporters waiting for a soldier to make a mistake in hope of making a comparison to the Vietnam War and painting the military in a negative light, soldiers have become concerned about soccer balls and lollipops. The fear of losing an Iraqi civilian even trumps his own soldiers’ lives: “Make it clean and professional so no Local Nationals were left broken, bleeding or oozing in the wake” (28). The focus for Duret is Iraqis and the media; not once does he mention concern about his own soldiers’ safety.

Even given the differences in Duret’s presence of mind compared to what officers in Vietnam thought about situations such as these, similarities do exist between the two wars as represented in these novels. One such similarity emerges in the fact that Duret, like Paul Berlin in *Going After Cacciato*, is confused about the true purpose of the American military’s presence in a foreign country. Duret had the impression that the military was there to help rebuild the country: “There were sewer lines to patch, electric substations to rewire, schools to build, backpacks to distribute to solemn-faced boys and girls, local sheikhs to convince that what America brought to the table really *was* better than anything Saddam had offered... *That* was the mission that was supposed to consume the larger percentage of his time” (104). The military and

the media report this as the primary purpose, which makes the occupation of Iraq appear benign and safe, when in actuality that is not the case at all. Instead, “Duret and his men spent their days running from one molehill to the other, whacking anything that moved with their amusement-park mallets... Whac-A-Mole” (104). The comparison to the child’s game Whac-A-Mole truly hints at the need to make quick decisions at a moment’s notice. Though they try incredibly hard to hit only the enemy, it is hard to make informed choices at war once adrenaline kicks in. Just as the game causes the player to bat the mallet in a frenzy, the pressure builds for the men and they succumb to impulse as well. Throughout the novel we see that impulse; getting caught up in the moment results in innocent casualties. The difference between innocent casualties in Vietnam and in Iraq is the soldier’s awareness of the media’s presence. Vietnam soldiers had no idea the extent to which the media could affect their lives after their deployment, while the soldiers in Iraq have seen how unsympathetic the American public can be, which leads the Iraq soldier to take extra precautions to maintain civilian support for the troops and avoid the homecoming Vietnam soldiers received. As a result, civilians do not see the full story and do not expect that Iraq War veterans must confront the trauma from these sorts of situations when these men and women return home. This makes a disconnection between civilian and soldier inevitable in the future.

Abe Shrinkle is another officer who spends some time off base, but after his demotion, he must live the Fobbit life. He is also arguably the most maladjusted and out-of-touch character in the entire novel. The reason is that he frames his own story not for the media but for the officers around him. Shrinkle’s failure to properly lead his men, which causes his eventual demise, results from his hybridization of framing himself along the lines of a World War officer. Shrinkle represents outdated World War officer tactics which leads to his desire to positively spin his

experiences for commanding officers. The other soldiers in the novel succumb to the power of the media and the general American public; they learn from the treatment of Vietnam vets and what Americans believed about that war, whereas Shrinkle solely cares about his own story—not the military’s. While the reader sees the other main characters’ concern for the collective and individual image through the American people’s eyes, Shrinkle exemplifies the ramifications of performing in order to “evidence masculinity” according to anachronistic war experiences and fails to see how this affects those around him. Shrinkle performs along the lines of the World War officer by looking for validation from his men and not the media. This failure to recognize what is at stake ostracizes him from his company and peers because he clearly does not understand the potential fallout bad press could create for the men during and after the war, which makes him despised by his commanding officers and those he leads. However, both those responding to the Vietnam War and Shrinkle use story-telling as a way to cope with their situations. They all still base their behavior on the past and not their current situation, which is one that requires more awareness of their environment and those they lead. Clearly they should be careful with Iraqi lives and they should be cognizant that their actions could be interpreted negatively, but their focus should not be on what will impress commanding officers or gain approval from the American people; instead, they should focus on the men they lead.

In fact, the more the military frames the war, the less American people think about it, as I will argue in my reading of *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*. If all the news is positive and if the public is not shown the ugly side of this war, and war in general, then what would the motivation be to end it? When civilians only hear of men dying heroically, and doing important work, the focus is taken away from the death and sacrifice and manipulated into a show of how great the USA is, leading to promotions and happy Generals. Additionally, taking focus away from the

negative side of the war skews the way the soldier is viewed after deployment. If everything in the Middle East were smooth and the soldiers fighting the war felt important while deployed, as the general civilian would assume, then upon returning home, their PTSD, anger, and/or difficulty assimilating back to civilian life would appear as an anomaly rather than the norm. The specter of the Vietnam War pushes the military to frame stories to maintain American support, avoid the treatment the Vietnam veterans had to endure, and close the divide between civilian and soldier, but in the end framing stories leads to an even more damaging divide, only this time no one speaks about it.

The military advocates focusing on image in relation to the media and civilians, whereas Shrinkle prioritizes his image to his men and his individual career over everything else. He constantly performs the traditional role of an officer from the World Wars, oozing self-importance and pride: “Abe liked the way his voice bounced off the walls of the palace and into the ears of his men. It filled him with a good affirmative feeling of authority. If he spoke a little louder, he wondered if maybe he might draw a couple of colonels to their windows, pull them away from their Fobbit duties to see him out here addressing his men” (76). Behaving this way might have garnered him respect from officers and his men had they been fighting for a visible cause against a clear enemy; however, Shrinkle’s war is very different from World War II, and therefore an officer’s approach to leadership should be correspondingly different. His focus is neither safety nor the enemy, but rather trying to get attention from officers above him. Additionally, as he speaks to his men, they stand in formation even though “most commanders dispensed with the practice of company formations while here in Iraq,” (77). His behavior and leadership techniques do make him stand out, but not in the way he hopes. Whereas Duret focuses on the media and Iraqi citizens, Shrinkle performs for the officers, and neither of them

actually focus on the war itself. Shrinkle and Duret are stuck in previous war mentalities, one man thinking about himself, and the other about those with ties to the media; neither man prioritizes his soldiers. As commanding officers, their main focus should be on those that they lead. Generals and Colonels, sitting in air conditioned offices on base, push their lieutenants and sergeants to perform certain acts without considering what is best for the ones fighting off base; they are only concerned with what will look good in the eyes of the American public. The ones that suffer in the end are the thousands of enlisted men and women forced to do what those in charge tell them, as becomes clear in the novel through Gooding's story.

Shrinkle constantly needs to feel special and bring attention to himself in a manner similar to the overtly masculine characters of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22*. Not only does leadership like this foster resentment, but it clearly does not suit his men or their unique situations. Shrinkle's adherence to this quest to feel important causes problems for him throughout his military tenure, but even after he is demoted to working in the gym and stocking the towels, he still fails to see where he went wrong and continues to frame his story—this time with an outright lie. Shrinkle begins to visit the Australian's pool though it “was a violation of General Order Number Five, Abe felt he had nothing to lose at this point” (226). Because of the shame he feels in conjunction with his identity, and essentially his future, being stripped from him, he decides to not reevaluate his approach to his time in Iraq, but instead frames his entire life and “adopt[s] a new identity... [H]is name was Richard Belmouth... he was a London contractor who was there to advise the United States on historical preservation” (226). Though it may seem that Shrinkle begins to understand that his World War mentality does not fit his present circumstances, his self-correction leads to lying. Shrinkle shows that one can get by if they stretch the truth and manipulate reality, but straight-out lying and making up facts leads to

punishment. His sudden death results in his lie being completely obliterated: “Blink, he’s here, blink, he’s gone. Only a smoking, half-empty pool and an arm in a lap remained” (316). He is not just demoted this time, for outdated tactics, but all that is left of him is an arm in a woman’s lap, illustrating how detrimental lying can be. Shrinkle and Duret look to the past to understand their present and work very hard to frame their stories, and though they both have different aims and objectives, the result is still the same—they lose focus on what an officer in charge should be doing, which is leading. Through Shrinkle’s death, Abrams shows the reader how necessary it is to do everything in one’s power to adjust to the current war and situation. The specter of Vietnam constantly haunts the handling of these situations because the men do not want to be seen the same way as were the veterans of the Vietnam War. There might be similarities between the two engagements, such as the relationship with the Iraqi Nationals and the pointless collateral damage, but the more cover-ups and mistakes that are made, the more focus is taken away from the actual purpose in Iraq, and the more clear is the need for an adjustment to their approach.

While the visual reporting of Vietnam essentially eroded civilian support for the war within our country, the written reporting will be the cause of the civilian divide for the Iraq War. Through specific word choice in reports and press releases, the military maintains control of the media and creates a positive perspective even where none can be found, presenting events through carefully crafted descriptions. Instead of challenging the signifier/signified relationship as in *Catch-22*, the PAO in *Fobbit* uses words to manipulate its audience. When reporting on three Iraqi deaths in a marketplace, Harkleroad tells Gooding to “take out the part about the shopping district and the fruit and tea. It tends toward humanization of the Local Nationals—you know, blurs the line of our neutrality here. Looks like we’re sensationalizing the deaths of these three poor Iraqis” (67). This perspective contradicts what they are actually in Iraq to do. The

American military is there to help the Iraqis rebuild their country, which hinges on the American government and its constituents' view that these people deserve help, and here is Harkleroad worried about humanizing the "Local Nationals" too much.<sup>27</sup> When writing about the Iraqi Security Force's response, neutrality becomes irrelevant: "We need to punch this up with a few adjectives here and there. What about *as they responded with lightning-like speed and efficiency and the daring Iraqi security forces immediately cordoned off the area?*" (73). The focus on the minute details of these reports shows the very careful way the military manipulates information in order to illicit a certain response from American civilians. Ironically this strongly resembles the process of the fiction writer. Authors attempt to craft detailed sentences in order to push the reader to respond. It could be argued that Abrams works on two levels: the reader responds to the novel and the civilian responds to the representations of the war within the novel. Both illustrate the PAO's entire system of operations relies on the hope that those at home do not recognize that even the news cannot maintain neutrality.

Perhaps the most impressive statement the PAO issues concerns Shrinkle's murder of an innocent Iraqi civilian at the gas station. This significant action report describes the incident in the most unbiased way possible. The report does not lie, but it definitely does not capture the situation as third-party viewers, including the reader, would interpret it: "SMOG WAS IN PROCESS OF AUTHORIZING USE OF DEADLY FORCE WHEN ON-SITE COMMANDER NEUTRALIZED THE SITUATION BY FIRING ON SUSPECTED AIF. THE LN'S FAMILY THEN ARRIVED ON THE SCENE AND STATED HE IS NOT AIF, BUT HE IS

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<sup>27</sup> Butler argues that these Iraqis lives do not count in the way that they are represented: "Ungrievable lives are those that cannot be lost, and cannot be destroyed because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone; they are ontologically, and from the start, already lost and destroyed, which means that when they are destroyed in war, nothing is destroyed" (xix).

MENTALLY RETARDED. ON-SITE CMDR STILL BELIEVED INDIVIDUAL WAS A SUICIDE BOMBER” (115). The report completely glosses over Shrinkle’s impulsive behavior. While they were in the process of authorizing use of deadly force, the on-site commander, Shrinkle, acted without any explicit orders. And the use of the word “neutralized” makes the situation appear to be more dangerous than it actually was. The appearance of the man at the gas station was an event that did not need to be neutralized. It is not just the word choice, but also the order of the information presented that is significant in this light. The report first states that deadly force would be authorized, making Shrinkle appear to have shot a little early and creating the sense that his actions were not impulsive, and maybe even acceptable. The reader learns in the middle of the report that the man was “mentally retarded,” but this is only according to his family on the scene—an unverified and potentially untrustworthy source. The tone of this report exemplifies the “righteous coldness” that Butler claims is needed not only “to kill, but also [. . .] to look on the destruction of life with moral satisfaction, even moral triumph” (xxiv). The question about which came first remains. Are Americans, military and civilian, righteously cold at our core or has the framing of this war made us feel morally superior?

It is only at the end of the novel that the PAO sees for itself the negative consequences of words. A mosque is evacuated causing thousands of Iraqi civilians to have to wait outside in the street. At one point someone screams bomb, and though it is a false alarm, “eight thousand sandals now [are] running, running, running with blind panic. Only to find Iraqi police had blocked off roads around the mosque, anticipating attacks on the hundreds of thousands of Shiites who were converging on the capital” (277). The consensus is that “it was the shout that killed, the words that devastated more than any shrapnel or flames could ever do,” and the Fobbits watch helplessly “from their sterile distance, struggle[ing] to make sense of it. They tried

to separate truth from fiction, rumor from confirmed reports” (279). What they struggle to make sense of is just what one of the commander officers of the PAO explained during the insurgent versus terrorist debate: “Words are important. Words can wound, maim, and kill” (160). This serves as the first moment of directly seeing the destructive power of words. If one word can cause this much mayhem, what waits for the soldiers after deployment? Those working in Public Affairs play this dangerous game with words every single day, believing it to be for the good of the country. They use words to directly affect opinions and influence interpretations. Before this moment they have just been writing without considering what this manipulation of the American public may mean for their future. They may not be loathed by the public like many Vietnam veterans were, but their experience will not align with the years of framed reports that they themselves have created. *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* illustrates the actual consequences of framing—a disconnect between civilian and Iraq War veteran.

#### **4.2 *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk: The Civilian Military Divide and Framing***

*Fobbit* is not the only second Iraq War novel that examines the importance of storytelling for the military. Ben Fountain’s *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* (2012) looks at the practice of framing war for civilians and examines the effects on soldiers when face to face with the American public. If *Fobbit* exhibits how framing the war takes place, then Fountain’s novel shows the consequences that framing the Iraq war causes back at home between civilian and soldier. Abrams provides us with how the information is repackaged and Fountain shows the consequences. Additionally, just as Vietnam has affected soldier behavior in Iraq, it has also influenced civilian behavior during the Iraq War as well. David Kieran explains that “Americans have debated [past military] interventions and struggled to understand the experiences of their veterans, Vietnam’s legacy has offered more than a convenient metaphor. It has also provided a

set of discourses and memorial practices that cultural texts have negotiated as they have represented, remembered, and shaped debate over these wars” (4). Though Kieran’s article focuses more on memoirs than fiction, a similar argument applies to the fictional civilians that Fountain creates. Compared to that of the Vietnam War, the current military wants to appear useful and in control and the civilians want to appear supportive and appreciative of the soldiers’ sacrifice, and while both groups play their roles, this performance causes a serious, and sometimes uncomfortable, disconnect between civilian and soldier.

The novel follows a group of men on their “Victory Tour” and depicts their difficulty adjusting to newfound celebrity following the release of a video that depicts them fighting a group of insurgents in the Battle of Ansakar Canal. For two weeks they have been paraded all over the country to various types of events, answering question after question, and dealing with the media and the public’s invasive attitudes. While the men in *Fobbit* make sure that they interact correctly with the media for brief moments, these men are trained to be on their best behavior for two weeks straight while the entire country not only watches them on T.V., but also interacts with them at any moment. This unpredictability creates a tension between the naïve civilian and the experienced soldier.

As various bystanders glorify the men, the reality of the war is invisible; there is a sense of superiority, with offers of jobs upon returning and parades honoring them, due to the constant barrage of positive news coming from Iraq. It is this news that distracts family members, friends, and the wealthy Texans attending the Cowboy’s Thanksgiving lunch from the everyday violence taking place. Instead of viewing the video and the overall war with a critical eye, they fear appearing to be critical of the men in Bravo squad and/or appearing to be too sympathetic to potential terrorists, and this fear stifles any opportunity for meaningful dialogue between the

civilians and the soldiers in the novel. These interactions underscore that the way in which we wage war has shifted the relationship between soldier and civilian and has “absolve[ed] people from meaningful involvement... with assurances of admiration for soldiers displacing serious consideration of what they are sent to do or what consequences ensue” (Bacevich 14). Deer calls this the sacralization of the veteran, which proves to be dramatically different than the view of the Vietnam veteran. There is an “emergence of a seemingly more salutary and even redemptive attitude towards veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. The sacralization—and isolation—of the figure of the veteran is clearly at the core of the militarization of American culture” (Deer 62). As depicted in Fountain’s novel, civilians go above just standard appreciation of veterans, and this causes the soldier to feel isolated amongst the civilian community perhaps because they feel undeserving or even annoyed at the disingenuous attempts at connection, which makes reintegration into civilian life a challenge.

Billy and the other men in Bravo squad encounter masses of people constantly fawning over them, and each group has their own specific motivations. Most of these people that feel safe enough to talk to them are older men: “It’s never the young or middle-aged men who stop to speak but always the older guys, the silverbacks secure in the fact that they’re past their fighting prime” (64). This point illustrates that in order to show support, to continue to embark on “rambling speech[es] about war and God and country” (1), and to speak with pride about the viral video of the shootout, civilians must feel secure in their inability to be out there with those young boys. This is one reason our all-volunteer army, as Bacevich argues, has helped create the divide between civilian and soldier. He claims that in all the ways that actually matter “the relationship has ceased to exist” (14). Young, healthy men stay away from Bravo squad for fear of feeling guilt for not completely supporting the war; but older men like March Hawey and

Norm Oglesby speak to them for extended periods of time because they know they cannot be expected to join the military and go to Iraq.

While support and admiration originate from good intentions, the statements that the older men make appear disingenuous at best. Though well meaning, the rich, older Texan, March Hawey, tells Billy, “listen, when the news broke that night—when they started running that video of yall taking care of business—that was one of the biggest thrills of my life, no lie. It’s hard to put into words just what I was feeling, but it was, I don’t know, just a beautiful moment” (192). Sentiments suggesting that the video provides the biggest thrill of his life are clearly comical and show how the media reports make American civilians think they understand the experience in Iraq, when the reader knows March Hawey has no idea what Billy feels at that moment. Hawey continues to explain how the moment was “cathartic... Seeing yall John Wayne that deal, it’s like we finally had something to cheer about,” because “the war’d been depressing [him] all this time and [he] didn’t even know it” (193). The irony of this comment is clear, because these young men were not playing John Wayne in a movie, nor do they care whether this was “a huge morale boost for everyone” (193). The fact that the man uses the word “cathartic” underscores how he, and essentially many other Americans, see the war as entertainment and not a real situation in which young Americans are fighting and dying. Not once does he really consider that one of their friends has died, nor that these soldiers killed Iraqis; instead, Hawey excitedly speaks about the recording as if it were made for the American people to enjoy and to make them feel better about themselves. The men in Bravo Squad cannot watch this video and feel better about themselves, because it is their actual experience, and there is nothing cathartic about it. As this video is likened to a form of entertainment, it serves as a representation of the “virtuous wars” that James Der Derian describes as “being played out by the military-industrial-

media-entertainment network as our daily bread and nightly circus” (243). The civilian sees this experience as just a form of entertainment—a distraction from the actual political issues at hand and Hawey consumes this media without actually considering the larger implications of this particular moment in the war as a whole.

Older men also want to make sure the Bravo squad men know that they will continue their support. Norm Oglesby, the owner of the Dallas Cowboys, speaks to them at the stadium prior to the big Thanksgiving game, which is the culmination of their tour. He exclaims that he does not “see any signs of *Iraq fatigue* out there. The vast majority of Americans support this war, and they sure as heck support the troops fighting the war. If anybody has any doubts about that, they should just look at the reception you’ve gotten here today” (167). At this moment Norm makes it appear that this entire day is just a show of how he and the other wealthy Texans support the troops, but at the same time, the troops are not really seen as individuals, just as props in a social performance of support for the war. These civilians ignore reality and constantly give the men lip service: “Whatever problems we’re having aren’t yalls fault, we’ve got the finest troops in the world!” (193). These sentiments that the rich men spew are full of “buzz” words, because how do they know the problems in Iraq or how fine American soldiers are? The only information they receive is framed by the military and the media. Just as we see in *Fobbit* through the PAO, these civilian men also do not care about the men themselves and just want to portray the correct image in public.

Along with support, many people feel the need to show appreciation as well. And just as they do when showing support, they also make sure to emphasize the personal nature of their gratitude: “*So proud*, the men say, going around shaking hands. *So grateful*, *so honored*. *Guardians. Freedoms. Fanatics*” (56). Billy is amazed at how nonsensical some of these

conversations sound, and Fountain illustrates this throughout the novel by placing words sporadically on the page; some of these words are misspelled, capitalized, italicized, or placed in bold font. As the reader reads the handful of floating words, such as terror, pray, bless, and hooah, the meaning is lost and all we see is a group of generic buzz words used to talk about the Iraq War (45). Billy's musings and his halfhearted listening support Deer's claim that "the rhetorical gesture 'Thank you for your service' all too often stands in for genuine communication and impeding the possibility of dialogue between civilian and military" (Deer 63). Strangers come up to the soldiers in Fountain's novel with "raw wavering voices and frenzied speech patterns, the gibberish spilled from the mouths of seemingly well-adjusted citizens. We *appreciate*, they say, their voices throbbing like a lover's. Sometimes they come right out and say it. *We love you*. We are so grateful. We cherish and bless. We pray, hope, honor-respect-love-and-revere and they *do*" (37). The question that remains, though, is do these people honestly feel this way or are they behaving like this because they do not know what else to say?

Although Bravo company now occupies a sacred position as revered American soldiers as a result of the viral YouTube video, Fountain's novel makes clear that they have, in a sense, been trained for this since they were children. When they go out on the field before the Cowboys game and start playing some impromptu football, Billy reminisces about the times he played organized football as a kid:

'organized' being the code word for elaborate systems of command and control where every ounce of power resides at the top. It seemed that football must be made to be productive and useful, a net-plus benefit for mankind, hence the endless motivational yawping about teamwork, sacrifice, discipline, and other modern virtues, the basic thrust of which boiled down to shut up and do as you're told. So despite the terrific violence

inherent in the game a weird passivity seeped into your mind... the Army is pretty much the same thing, though the violence is, well, what it is, obviously. (164)

Billy here recognizes the connection between football and the army based not only on their hierarchical organization and discipline, but also on their performative nature and capacity to serve as a form of entertainment. That is, although there is a power hierarchy and an inherent violence in the military as in football, both organizations require civilian support. The media inspires the support by reporting on a perfect catch or an impromptu battle with insurgents in order to titillate the viewer. In both football and war, the men are just trained bodies, following the plays passed down from those above, and this connection highlights how American boys have been constantly trained to play the role as entertainer. This presents the war in such a way that “scatter[s] the effects of war, undermine[s] our ability to focus on its costs, and even naturalize[s] the effects of war as a presupposed background of everyday life” (Butler xiv). The comparison Fountain makes to football shows us how militarized our culture has become; war is as ubiquitous as football.

Completely aware of the performative nature of what they are being asked to do, the men play their part fairly well while on tour in the United States. They know what information can be appropriately disseminated and the way in which to articulate it. When Billy Lynn speaks to Hawey and the surrounding group, they ask him if he was scared. He brushes the question off with an old joke amongst his squad: “As long as you’ve got plenty of ammo, you’ll probably be okay” (194). Of course they all laugh and Billy thinks to himself that “it’s so easy, all he has to do is say what they want to hear and they’re happy, they love him, everybody gets along. Sometimes he has to remind himself that there is no dishonor in it. He hasn’t told any lies, he doesn’t exaggerate, yet so often he comes away from these encounters with the sleazy, gamey

aftertaste of having lied” (194). The tactic of approaching the truth without actually telling it is what all military personnel do when facing civilians or reporters, from the larger scale of the Public Affairs Office in *Fobbit* down to the grunts in Bravo. Billy understands the importance of telling these pseudo-truths, but at the same time his reluctance stems from the fear he felt during the actual moment of the shootout and his fear to go back to Iraq; he plays it cool, and it is his jovial, nonchalant attitude towards his friend’s death and his uncertain future that makes him feel untruthful.

When reporters ask incredibly difficult questions, they expect Billy to be candid and composed. When the “pretty TV reporter in Tulsa” asks Billy: ““What were you thinking during the battle?”, Billy tri[es], he never *stops* trying, but it keeps slipping and sliding, corkscrewing away, the *thing* of it, the *it*, the ineffable whatever” (3). Another reporter on a TV interview asks “What was it like? Being shot at, shooting back. Killing people, almost getting killed yourself. Having friends and comrades die right before your eyes” (40), and then follows with, “*Were you good friends?... Do you think about him a lot?*” (42). These questions and the generic, upbeat, “everything is fine” answers may help the military’s image overall, but they do a great disservice to the individual soldier’s interactions with the media, civilians, and inevitably, their loved ones if they come back home, because everything is clearly not fine.

While everything in Iraq appears to go smoothly from an outsider’s perspective and the military does not foresee any future consequences their media training may cause, Fountain highlights that framing the Iraq War does cause a major disconnect between those serving and those not. The blurring of actual experiences in-country with positive fiction creates a false sense of comfort for those at home; they believe they know the truth, when in actuality they have no idea what these men and women experience. This enrages Billy:

This is a truth so brutally self-evident that he can't fathom why it's not more widely perceived, hence his contempt for the usual public shock and outrage when a particular situation goes to hell. The war is fucked? Well, duh. Nine-eleven? Slow train coming. They hate our freedoms? Yo, they hate our actual guts! Billy suspects his fellow Americans secretly know better, but something in the land is stuck on teenage drama, on extravagant theatrics of ravaged innocence and soothing mud wallows of self-justifying pity. (11)

This moment illustrates Billy's astonishment at how the public can be so naïve and believe everything they read and hear through the media. And when they do learn a sliver of the actual truth, their amazement at the actuality of the situation in Iraq and the Middle East makes him even angrier. This sets those in the military up for failure in the future because they feel as if they cannot speak honestly about their experiences. While those at home wave their flags and hold parades, the soldiers must cope with their emotions and traumatic memories all while being constantly mobbed with performances of "support."

The exhaustion experienced by the men is best exhibited when they sit out in the open and can be approached by the general public. While sitting in the aisle seat of their row, Billy even thinks that "being honored feels a lot like work... He wishes that just once somebody would call him baby-killer, but this doesn't seem to occur to them, that babies have been killed" (219). Americans treat this group of people participating in the Iraq War very differently than those that were in the Vietnam War, but as the reader learns in *Fobbit* as well, these soldiers are not perfect and make mistakes. Billy's wish is for everyone to stop performing and to begin treating one another as adults. Being honored does not, in itself, exhaust Billy; what exhausts him is actually the constant need to perform that implicates everyone, including himself. The

exhaustion is intensified by his knowledge that if everyone stops performing, the entire construction of framing war will dissolve. Fountain's novel dramatizes the fact that there is an "ever increasing intrusion of cameras and reporters in every little corner of battle zones," and this sort of reporting has "ironically done little to improve [civilian] understanding of war. And most soldiers returning from Iraq or Afghanistan betray a sense of annoyance at the idea that the war they saw and lived still inhabits their minds in a way which is too profane and profound to be aptly described by newsmakers or writers" (Mathonnière 2). As Butler argues, this constant intrusion of the media is essential to maintaining the militarization of American culture. The combination of being oversaturated by positively framed news, needing to control themselves while in public, and remembering traumatic events exhausts Billy and the others both physically and emotionally, fueling their resentment toward the civilians that honor them.

Although the civilians want to appear understanding and supportive, the Bravos recognize that they can never truly relate to them, and frustration at this state of affairs is compounded with each and every interaction between the groups. This frustration becomes "the dynamic of all such encounters, [in which] the Bravos speak from the high ground of experience. They are authentic. They are the Real" (66) while everyone else is rendered incapable of understanding. This underlying division resembles the division between the Vietnam veterans and civilians despite the fact that, in this case, it is driven by civilian respect for, rather than demonization of, the returning war veteran. Bravo squad feels superior because of their insider knowledge of what truly is taking place in Iraq. The men in the novel play a specific role, and fool all their admirers, who appear to not recognize their behavior as performances. One disingenuous act by a civilian is returned with another disingenuous act. When Norman Oglesby exclaims how much of an honor it is to meet all the men (109) and spews out words like pride,

courage, service, sacrifice, honor, determination (111), Billy and the rest of Bravo squad sense this is just words, and there is no indication that he cares about these men. The soldiers reject the use of words and storytelling when Oglesby and other civilians are the ones framing an experience, but expect and successfully use this same tactic to tell their own stories. Civilians do not have the same privilege to frame their experiences, because they have not been to war.

All of this resentment at the need for performance and regulation reaches a crescendo during the halftime show. Bravo squad had been concerned about what was expected from them since they heard that they would be participating in Destiny's Child's performance, and no one has given them any indication of what they will have to do. The spectacle that they find themselves in the middle of turns out to be extremely difficult for them for reasons that anyone considering their wartime experiences should have been able to envision. Clearly, if the organizers of the event had actually given thought to the soldiers' experiences as represented in the video for which they are being honored, something might have been done to avert their response to the spectacle of the half-time show; but it becomes clear that spectacle itself trumps any concern for the soldiers' well-being as the men walk out with a corps of ROTCs behind them:

the explosions start and they all flinch... A howl commences deep in Lodi's throat. 'It's cool,' Billy mumbles... *'it's just fireworks.'* Lodi starts laughing, gasping for breath... Crack is looking clammy and grim. If there was ever a prime-time trigger for PTSD you couldn't do much better than this, but lucky for Norm, the crowd, America, the forty-million-plus TV viewing audience, Bravoes can deal... Pupils dilated, pulse and blood pressure through the roof, limbs trembling with stress reflex cortisol rush, but it's cool, it's good, their shit's down tight, no Vietnam-vet crackups. (230)

The complete disregard for what these sounds and lights would trigger in the Bravo squad manifests itself in this show. All the men, clearly suffering from varying levels of post-traumatic stress, react negatively to the situation--an occurrence which should have been foreseen by those planning the show. Trying not to break down on national television in a way that might remind viewers of the volatile Vietnam veterans from whom they have tried to distance themselves, the Bravo men stoically hold themselves together but at a cost. Billy clings to his training and the need to maintain control because essentially, in a sensory sense, this moment resembles a combat zone. In the middle of the show, Billy "wishes he was back at the war. At least there he basically knew what he was doing, he had his training for guidance and the entire goddamn country wasn't watching to see if he'd fuck up" (238). The irony of this situation and Billy's thought is that in both scenarios the entire country does watch them. Whether at war or at home, the media records every move and strengthens the divide between civilian and soldier by showing images with a positive spin, which leads to moments of blatant disregard for the men's feelings when back in the United States. As he clings to his training, he inadvertently helps strengthen the divide between civilian and soldier. The soldier must perform and the civilian sees this and blindly takes comfort in the idea that these young men and women are not the same as the Vietnam Veteran, which means that those back at home are not the same as the insensitive American civilians of the Vietnam War.

At the end of the novel, Bravo company displays three separate coping mechanisms—emotional outbursts, physical violence, and complete stoicism. Sykes breaks down and cries uncontrollably; Crack starts a fight with the roadies of Destiny's Child; and Billy remains stoic and emotionless through it all. While all of America watches him standing there staring up at the sky with tears in his eyes, Billy escapes mentally: "it's like the sleet is dangling and Billy's

flying through it, zooming toward some unnamed but promising place. Everything else falls away and he's happy, free, the sting in his eyes is all speed and upward motion. It feels like escape velocity. It feels like the future... rocketing toward the world to come" (240). Bravo squad is not trained to deal with this sort of publicity, and so Billy copes with the situation by imagining himself alone and free in the sky. Ironically, this appears to be a touching moment to his family, and most likely everyone else watching the show, and Kathryn asks him afterwards what he was doing: "Listen, that thing you were doing at the end, what was that? We were all wondering... when you were looking up at the sky. Like you were praying or something... it looked *sweet*. You were *cute*. We're really proud of you" (252). Even his family falls for the media's production, seeing this moment as "sweet" and "cute," when the noise in fact triggered Billy's PTSD and his need to disassociate in order to not react on national television. America does not see Sykes crying uncontrollably or the men getting into a fight afterwards; instead they see a sweet moment where the men get to stand next to Destiny's Child.

Arguably this moment and the entire past two weeks of the "Victory Tour" cause Billy to deny Kathryn's offer of help going AWOL. His sister puts him in touch with an antiwar organization that will help him because he is "a war hero. Somebody the movement could really rally behind" (253). With promises of legal advice, a place to stay, and money, Kathryn tries to lure Billy into disappearing. She explains to him that he is "too *sane* to go back to the war... It's the rest of the country that's nuts for wanting to send [you] back" (254), and she is absolutely right. The country is nuts and Billy is sane, and that is why he must go back. Billy realizes that he does not fit in with civilian life and cannot deal with the way he is and likely will be treated when he comes home. He constantly has to pretend and speak of his experience in such a way that makes him feel dishonest and disconnected from everyone around him. If Billy goes back to

the war, then he can be back in the presence of like-minded people and he knows what to expect. Though the randomness of Iraq consumes Billy, he would rather live “the Russian-roulette lifestyle every minute of the day. Mortars falling out of the sky, random. Rockets, lob bombs, IEDs, all random” (53). He now sees that being at home provides that same randomness. Billy chooses the physical randomness of being killed or maimed over the emotional randomness that he has experienced for two weeks straight.

The problem that both these novels expose is that reintegrating back into civilian life is a complicated process. When the country’s only exposure to the war is framed accounts via the media and soldiers are trained to also frame their experiences and live up to images of the idealized American soldier or face ostracism like the Vietnam veteran, Iraq veterans will find themselves in an impossible situation. Should they continue to live according to how others view them or behave more honestly and risk the loss of support? Billy rejects both options; he does not go AWOL, as his sister wants, but he’s not truthful either. Instead he returns to Iraq, where he does not have to worry about anything other than staying alive. He is no one’s hero while at war amongst his squad and does not have to answer questions about what he is thinking or lie about how he feels, because those around him already know. This tight knit bond also strengthens the “us versus them” point of view that is already so apparent in the war narrative. Perhaps Billy Lynn sheds light on why and how so many marines continually sign up for additional tours—because the military is the one space where they feel connected to those around them and understood. Framing actual individuals’ experiences in broad sweeping videos and stories has and will have serious consequences for future veterans of the Iraq War.

Iraq veterans may not have to deal with civilian disdain and hatred, but the sacralization and unwavering support, regardless of what good or bad they do or did, makes them feel

inauthentic and not in control of their image. Judith Butler explains in her introduction to *Precarious Life, Grievable Life* that “one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know or barely know, or know not at all. Reciprocally, it implies being impinged upon by the exposure and dependency of others, most of whom remain anonymous” (14). The characters in these novels represent the dependency not only on their fellow soldiers and their commanders., but also the American people. It is not just their life that is in the hands of the “other,” but also the performance of their identity. The pressure to perform according to expectations overwhelms both actor, as in *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*, and script writer, as in *Fobbit*. This creates a fictionalized truth that divides civilians and the military even more. Additionally, and perhaps even more damagingly, American veterans feel pressured to maintain the lie indefinitely.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In the novels I have examined in this dissertation, the myths of war and the idealized images of the American soldier provide a disservice to civilian and soldier alike. As the soldier characters consume various forms of media depicting previous wars, they internalize those images and envision the soldier they want to be. The issue with these representations is that they do not address current wars and current cultural norms, but instead perpetuate mythic caricatures of John Wayne bravery and Rambo-like victories. These images may provide a false sense of relief at the beginning of one's deployment, because the individual believes they have a sense of what to expect; but that relief quickly turns to anxiety upon the realization that the expectations do not match actual experience. The postmodern war narrative underscores that this process can be even more psychologically and socially damaging to soldiers than going to war without any preconceived notions.

These six war narratives show characters that attempt to sidestep the trauma of their newfound mental unpreparedness by adopting specific coping mechanisms that have been unconsciously created by representations of previous wars. Though the attempts to create spaces of agency and control within the chaos appear successful, this is just a temporary solution to an ongoing problem. Yossarian and Billy Pilgrim may have disrupted the binary thinking of their peers through the slipperiness of language and disregard for linear time, but in the end this did not "solve" their problems. Yossarian goes AWOL, and as we find out later, in Heller's sequel to *Catch-22*, *Closing Time* (1994), he does not continue to challenge those in charge, but instead assimilates and works for a defense contracting firm led by the billionaire Milo Mindbender from his squadron in World War II. At the start of the novel he is in the hospital again, pretending something is wrong with him, exactly where *Catch-22* begins. The older Yossarian appears to

have become the type of person he wished to avoid in his youth, and he is literally in the same situation as he was decades earlier, illustrating that his character has not evolved, even though at the end of *Catch-22* it seems he has learned something from his deployment. Similarly Billy Pilgrim's ending is not inspiring either as he is assassinated by Paul Lazzaro. Despite his disregard for masculine performance and his lack of survival instincts, he survives the war in order for it to continually haunt him and eventually kill him. Decades after the war these two characters that appeared extremely subversive while in-country, never really gain control over their lives once the war is over; it still controls them and their fates.

The Vietnam fictions illuminate how the coping strategy of creating fantasy missions does not really provide the agency and satisfaction that Paul Berlin and Skip Sands hope for. Paul Berlin escapes through his quest to find Cacciato, but his quest ends with a realization that his unconscious tried very hard to bury. Throughout the "Road to Paris" chapters Berlin controls his environment, the characters, and everyone's thoughts; but when the memory of what really happened to Cacciato emerges, Berlin finds himself even more traumatized than when the event originally took place. In *Tree of Smoke* Skip Sands' fantasy also traumatizes him. His life ends in a Kuala Lumpur jail where he is sentenced to death for gun running. Instead of participating in an important component of the war and working his way up the CIA ranks, Skip's life devolves into a criminal conspiracy that leads to a death sentence.

The characters in second Iraq War novels do not necessarily attempt to control their environment in-country, but instead work to control civilian perceptions. Due to the public reception of some Vietnam veterans, military officials in the Middle East are acutely aware of how a negative image can affect American civilian support. This awareness leads those officers in public relations to very carefully frame each story about Iraq. Instead of reporting the facts,

they manipulate and omit different pieces of information in order to ensure positive spin on events that could invite comparisons to the Vietnam War. The characters in *Fobbit* that work in the PAO, such as Gooding and Harkleroad, are in charge of reworking press releases to maintain civilian support. The fear of being compared to Vietnam drives them, and even when Abe Shrinkle continually makes one mistake after another, they attempt to clean up the mess. This framing and storytelling pushes Gooding too far in the end, and he, like Yossarian, goes off into the unknown at the end of the novel, unable to cope. Harkleroad goes one step too far and presumably takes his lies to the next level, which could potentially end his career. Though framing one's experiences has the potential to create a sense of agency at war, these two characters do not gain anything positive from this strategy. Gooding realizes how desensitized he has become to death and destruction, and Harkleroad, under so much pressure continually throughout the text, takes his lies further and further until we can assume that it ruins his career. Their coping mechanisms as individuals in the military provides a false sense of control because it is centered around avoiding comparisons to Vietnam. I would argue this is the most damaging of the three coping mechanisms because it harms both soldiers and civilians, denying agency and understanding to both groups.

We see the damage that emerges from framing in *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, in which Fountain writes about the Bravo Squad's Thanksgiving celebration with the Dallas Cowboys. Due to the military's manipulation of information and the way in which stories from Iraq are framed by the media, the regular civilian assumes a different Iraq War experience than the soldier's actual reality. The civilian/soldier relationship then turns into conversations of appreciation for sacrificing so much, because civilians know they need to portray a supportive American in comparison to the American in the 1970s. The soldier then must not only deal with

a barrage of civilians spouting buzz words about the war in Iraq, as we see happen repeatedly to Bravo Squad, but they also must silently work through the trauma that they have encountered in-country. Upon returning to civilian life, soldiers are expected to be happy and proud because that is the message the media disseminates, but in reality this is a war and people are dying. There is a disconnect, which Billy Lynn only gets a short glimpse of during the Victory Tour, but which he now knows will define his future.

The coping mechanisms that each character uses are attempts to assert agency and control over one of the most chaotic experiences a human can endure. The myths from prior depictions of war cause soldiers to prepare for the past and not their present. Even the way in which the characters cope with the disconnect between past and present is, as I have argued, a product of the myths circulated about previous wars, so when it appears they have an opportunity to take control over their situation, they are still being manipulated by the past. Perhaps the motivation underlying the efforts of veteran authors like Vonnegut, Heller, and O'Brien is to help the reader to recognize the inherently problematic nature of representing war to those who have not experienced it directly yet still feel they have some understanding based on popular myth and narrative. By foregrounding the stifling constraints of the gender binary, the need to resort to fantasy missions and imaginary quests, and the damaging impact of framing the war on military/civilian relations, these authors emphasize the need, through their fictions, for civilians to start to support the soldiers through political engagement and careful consideration of the stories that circulate about military conflict, its purpose, and its effects.

Each soldier is affected by the myths of what they "should" be, and this concept is as old as war itself. Images of the ideal soldier can be traced to the beginning of civilization; the Egyptians did not draw pictures of soldiers fleeing battle but fighting to the death rather than

accepting defeat. Each generation hears and internalizes such stories—a fact that has not and may never change. What has changed in the postmodern era is that war literature has increasingly included signs that the idealized soldier—stoic, courageous, and admirable—is a myth that actually haunts the actual soldier, rendering him or her even more at odds with the reality of conflict and its traumatic effects. Throughout the novels I have discussed, those that perform according to the myth of the ideal soldier suffer and are often despised or killed. Even those who recognize the falsehood of these mythic images and struggle to rework them into a new way to approach the war tend to fail. Perhaps the purpose of the postmodern war narrative is to advance a third approach, which is to recognize that the myth itself is harmful in all its forms and must be examined, challenged, and eventually dismantled.

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