POSSIBILITIES OF AFFIRMATION IN JOSEPH HELLER'S FICTIONAL WORLD

by

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ABSTRACT

In his two novels Catch-22 and Something Happened, Joseph Heller portrays a fictional world which attempts to deny the freedom of the individual to act on his own behalf, to develop, and to affirm his own being and liberty of action in the face of this world. The world is portrayed as threatening and hostile in both novels, yet the possibilities of affirmation seem greater in Catch-22 than in Something Happened, due to the elements of the plot alone. However, an examination of certain formal elements in both these books reveals, to some extent at least, that an affirmation is forthcoming. An analysis of these elements shows how the individual protagonist may rise above the threat and exhibit some degree of freedom and self-affirmation.

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans ses deux romans Catch-22 et Something Happened, Joseph Heller envisage un monde fictif qui tente de nier la liberté de l'individu d'agir pour améliorer sa situation, de s'épanouir, et d'affirmer son existence et sa liberté face à ce monde. Le monde est décrit comme un agent menaçant et hostile, mais les possibilités d'affirmation paraîssent plus présents dans Catch-22 que dans Something Happened, à cause des évenements du complot. Toutefois, en examinant certains éléments formels dans les deux livres, on peut constater qu'il existe, en effet, une affirmation. L'abilité du protagoniste de s'élever au-dessus de cette menace, et de s'affirmer, même si restreinte, se montre lorsqu'on analyse ces éléments.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

American literature has always been concerned with the plight of the individual within his society. Just as the American political system has evolved in such a way as to provide maximum civil liberties to the person, so the novel has had, as one of its major concerns, a preoccupation with the situation of man surrounded by a society whose interests do not necessarily coincide with his own. As society has become more and more depersonalized in this century, with the advent of faceless corporations and "organization men" who refuse to take responsibility, it is seen as more and more threatening to the liberty of the individual. What is good for society is not necessarily good for its basic unit, the person. The individual has come to feel alienated and divorced from his society, and in many cases he must strive against apparent hostility to achieve his goals of self-realization and self-fulfilment. He has found that in order to come to know himself and his purpose in the world, he must look beyond his community and sometimes strive for goals which his fellow men may see as unworthy or even ridiculous. This striving of the individual for his own values, goals and raison d'être is the theme of Joseph Heller's two novels, Catch-22 and Something Happened.

Literature may propose different solutions to the plight of man in whatever society he may find himself. What solutions does it suggest to contemporary Western man, who finds himself in a despiritualized society which can often be hostile? Concerning modern life and the contemporary novel, Morris Dickstein has said:

> If the sixties were hysterical (in more ways than one), the seventies risk becoming sterile and catatonic, and the writer, bent of refining his instruments, risks becoming part of that reaction. The times have gone from bad to worse, but the artist who is not part of the solution may become part of the problem.[1]

Here the very role of the author is being considered, and once the assertion is made that some kind of solution should be offered, we are dealing with the ethics of literature. Even "telling the terrible truth boldly, with intellectual verve", as one critic defines the function of contemporary art,[2] is a moral act -- as is the very creation of art:

> The art of literature is thus a meaningful act even when it denies the existence of ultimate meaning. There are no literary nihilists who are all-out nihilists. They are still engaged in the task, however impossible it seems, of communicating their metaphysical anguish, in looking for reasons that will induce belief in life, a pattern of purpose, a principle of justification.[3]

Though they reject outright didacticism, then, there is some agreement among critics that great art will change us in some way, and that this change will be for the better. Somehow this art will enlighten us, expand our world and experiences, and allow us to live vicariously situations which in our own lives might be improbable. "No form of art can survive on total denial alone", says Camus,[4] although an affirmation

can be made without overtly directing us to a specific course of action. In fact, the "call to action remains a workable theme only as long as the author resists telling us what the action should be."[5] Heller avoids telling us what our action (if any) in response to a reading of his novels should be, but we get a few hints in the form of the novels themselves. Northrop Frye's treatment of satire will, I hope, help to make clear how Heller uses this mode to give some idea -- if a minimal one -- of his norms.[6]

The purpose of this study will be to examine the formal nature of each of Heller's novels, to see how some of the ethical questions mentioned above may be treated in the structure of Catch-22 and Something Happened. One of the more important formal features which the author uses in various ways to give some idea of how he stands on these questions is point of view, that is, the way in which we are allowed to see the events of the story. In Catch-22 the narrator is more of an "omniscient" type, who presents us with the story not only as seen by Yossarian, but as it is seen by others. What conclusions can we draw about the hopefulness of Yossarian's situation from the presentation of events in this manner? Bob Slocum, the narrator in Something Happened, is less than omniscient; his narration is given in the first person, so that we are constrained to see reality through a kind of filter: the mind of the protagonist. If this filter gives us a darker view of the world are we justified in concluding that the second novel holds out less "hope" for its

solitary protagonist than the first one? Or are we rather to consider other formal clues -- parenthetical statements, long monologues as opposed to short dialogues, time schemes, etc., in order to conclude that the protagonist's world is not the "real" one at all? Can we infer different conclusions about the author's norms in Something Happened depending on whether we concentrate on the content or on the irony at work? How reliable is the narrator, and how do we know? Is the back-and-forth style of narration in Catch-22 a clue to the kind of process taking place in Yossarian's mind, as he gradually builds up a clearer and clearer picture of the society in which he lives? In the same book, the protagonist's ethical decision (to fight or not to fight) is examined by the imagery of clear vision that gradually develops over the course of the zigzagging story; and there is at least as much authorial commentary in the change of tone as in the more obvious "omniscient" asides.

This thesis will examine these and other literary features to see how they may allow us to infer some kind of affirmative statement about the individual striving for some recognition of his dignity in an insouciant world. In dealing with these various features, it will examine the body of criticism which deals with each of these novels. In examining what has been written about Catch-22 I will try to make clear what the main critical areas have been; most critics have been concerned with the ending, though some touch on other areas as well. Having considered what the critics have contributed, this study will try to show how the ending of Catch-22 is implied

in the rest of the novel by various formal qualities. For example, the imagery of seeing, the tonal change which occurs gradually throughout the novel, and its overall "back-and-forth" structure, all work together. The combined effect is that the final element of the action of Catch-22 is perceived as both inevitable and justifiable. In paying attention to these and other aspects of form, I hope to show that any criticism of Catch-22 which calls the ending "tacked-on" is remiss. Finally, a secondary purpose with regard to the critical appraisal of Catch-22 will be to show that Pianosa is not meant to be a faraway, isolated island whose reality is very different from our own. It represents our own absurd life in the twentieth century, whether at war or during peace.

Wayne Booth suggests that when an author's norms are unclear it may be because the author has given insufficient warning that irony is at work.[7] Not knowing whether the author is being serious or ironic, or whether his narrator is or is not reliable, makes criticism that much harder. However, in attempting a critical reading, I hope to discover what ethic (if any) the author is espousing. I also hope to show what factors Something Happened shares with Catch-22. In this study, I will try to demonstrate in a formalist treatment how both these novels affirm the freedom and worth of the individual in a world that is apparently meaningless, often chaotic, and sometimes hostile. The same problem is treated differently in Heller's two novels. In Catch-22, Yossarian escapes the

mad world of Pianosa and sets out for Sweden, thus opting for freedom. Slocum, the protagonist in Something Happened, does not escape the confines of his situation, although this does not mean that an escape is not possible nor a solution evident to the reader. What, if any, are the possible grounds for success in such a world? To what degree can the individual "triumph" over the threat inherent in the world and achieve self-affirmation and self-fulfilment? Does Heller transcend Black Humour in making an affirmation about the value of the individual? In answering these and similar questions, I have chosen to use a formalist methodology. Formalist criticism seems to have been most fruitful in an analysis of Catch-22 so far, and I feel it can also be applied to Something Happened, since the theme of the two novels is similar.

I will devote one chapter to each of the two novels. In each chapter, the first half will be concerned with the way society is depicted as a threat. For Catch-22, this will include a discussion of the theme of justice, the imagery, the style, and the "catch"; for Something Happened, the threat will be analysed in terms of the "company", chance, the character of the protagonist, and the plot itself. The second half of each chapter will discuss how the protagonist does or does not succeed in coming to terms with this threat, to arrive at a condition of freedom. In the chapter on Catch-22, I will examine Yossarian's character; the overall structure of the novel; the development of imagery; and the change in tone.

The latter half of the chapter on Something Happened will discuss the structure of that novel and its "inner world-outer world" dichotomy, as well as the narrator's reliability and how this relates to an ironic reading.

It remains only to be noted that in a study of this size, the scope is necessarily limited. I will try to present a fairly complete synopsis of the critical response to Heller's novels, and will discuss the ways in which some criticism of Catch-22 can be equally well applied to Something Happened. Some ideas will be presented which may be seen as extensions of the thought of some critics, but I will try to keep really novel ideas to a minimum; I believe that in the relatively rare instances where a contentious position is taken, this position can usually be seen as a logical outgrowth of an accepted analysis. Nor will I try to touch on issues outside the domain of literature as such, believing that a formalist approach works best when it addresses itself to the work at hand, without imposing schemata from elsewhere. Finally, while aware of the difficulties inherent in a critical appraisal of modern literature, I feel I must agree with David Daiches when he says:

> The judging of contemporary literature is much more difficult [than the judging of the classics]. There is no unanimous voice of the generations to tell us which is good, no long array of critics to point us to their virtues. We must make up our own minds. And it is not always easy to assess the value of new books, for it sometimes means dissociating ourselves from our

contemporary feelings about the situations described and looking at the work as a whole as an effective artistic illumination of experience . . . This may be why some critics prefer to confine their reading to older literature; but that is the coward's way out.[8]

NOTES

1. Morris Dickstein, "Fiction Hot and Kool: Dilemmas of the Experimental Writer", Triquarterly, 33 (Spring 1975), 257-272.

2. Robert Alter, "The Apocalyptic Temper", Commentary, 41 (June 1966), 61-66.

3. Charles Glicksberg, The Ironic Vision in Modern Literature (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), p. 62.

4. Albert Camus, The Rebel, trans. Anthony Bower (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), pp. 223-224.

5. Raymond Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 7.

6. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).

7. Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 316.

8. David Daiches, A Study of Literature (London: Andre Deutsch, 1968). pp. 197-198.

C A T C H - 2 2

In Something Happened it is difficult to see how affirmation is expressed, since in terms of the plot itself, the protagonist does not escape the confines of his situation. In Catch-22, however, Yossarian does flee his persecutors and the society from which he has come to feel estranged. He proves his freedom by making a definite choice. The problem here is that a cursory reading of the novel gives the impression that the escape -- which takes place in the last few pages only -- is "tacked-on"; one could argue, as many critics do, that it is not implied by the rest of the book. Jerry Bryant says that Heller attempts to make the desertion appear to be motivated by more than cowardice and selfishness. But "his attempt, unfortunately, saps Yossarian of all his zany vitality and destroys the comic tone of the book." Heller implies that Yossarian must desert, because to stay and fight would mean supporting an absurd and dehumanizing system; under another system, staying and fighting might be worthwhile. However,

> nothing in the rest of the novel supports [the idea of staying and fighting under different conditions] as a basic principle. The war is insane and brutal, says most of the novel, and the people who perpetrate it are equally insane and brutal.[1]

This critic maintains that Heller could have solved this dilemma by having Yossarian stay within the system and refuse to fight.

Bernard Bergonzi makes a similar assertion and believes that Heller shrinks from giving the affirmative answer to the

question that the whole book implies: "was the war just?"[2] Others have called the ending "sentimental", a "deus ex machina", or too apologetic.[3] Stephen Shapiro even finds the whole novel "meretricious" since "if an individual has the right to assert the value of his own survival against any other values, and he may have that right, then he must earn his freedom by confronting the values that challenge it: Heller sidesteps the problem at the end of the novel."[4] There are other critics who do see the ending as implied by the rest of the book or who are at least aware of a regular development of Yossarian's responsibility, culminating in the final action.[5] However, not even the critics who agree that the ending is justified have made a formal analysis of the elements of the novel (characterization, structure, tone, etc.), to see how these unite to justify the plot itself, and the ending. I hope to show that the ending is in no sense "tacked-on"; it is implied throughout the novel. I will do this by first briefly recounting the plot, then considering how the threatening world of Catch-22 is presented. Next I will examine the theme of justice, the visual imagery, and the "catch" as reflected in the style. Then I will look at how the individual affirms himself by breaking away from this world. I will discuss Yossarian's character, the device of repetition and the use of "déjà vu", increasing visual acuity, tonal changes, and finally the escape itself.

The plot of Catch-22 has been called problematic, because of the structure of the novel -- its back-and-forth point of view -- which is at first confusing. For the purposes of this discussion, events can be divided into two groups. The first comprises the action which takes place between the opening pages of the book, when the required number of missions is forty-five, and the end, when the required number of missions has been raised to eighty. The other part comprises all past events, that is, Yossarian's training, the missions to Avignon and Bologna, etc. Rather than attempt to recount the events of the plot in chronological order, a task which has proved impossible for otherwise insightful critics,[6] I will tell them in the order in which they occur in the novel, hoping later to account for the seeming confusion.

The book opens with Yossarian in hospital. Here we meet the chaplain, the Soldier in White, and Dunbar, all important "characters" later in the novel. We meet the other members of the squadron shortly afterwards, when Yossarian is released, and we learn that the number of required missions has been raised to fifty. We hear first about the mission to Avignon where Snowden was killed on page 43,[7] and later, although it has been mentioned in passing, we learn about the catch itself:

> There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and

> had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle.
>
> "That's some catch, that Catch-22," he observed.
>
> "It's the best there is," Doc Daneeka agreed.
>
> Yossarian saw it clearly in all its spinning reasonableness. There was an elliptical precision about its perfect pairs of parts that was graceful and shocking, like good modern art, and at times Yossarian wasn't sure he saw it at all . . .(54-55)

The action moves forward slowly, concerning itself mostly with sketching present conditions and touching briefly on past events which will be more fully elaborated later.

The number of required missions is raised to fifty-five (p. 68) and we have the beginnings of protest from Yossarian (p. 115). We meet Milo Minderbinder, the second most important character in the novel, learn about the pasts of Lieutenant Scheisskopf and Major Major, are told about the Loyalty Oath Crusade, Bologna, Luciana, and we finally get back to the starting point, in the hospital, at approximately the same time, before fifty missions. After a chapter which takes place at the time of Yossarian's training, the action at last begins to pick up. The number of required missions is raised to sixty, and Yossarian shows more signs of rebelliousness. However, he does not yet sanction the killing of those whom he feels are responsible for the plight he is in (pp. 243 ff.). We are repeatedly flashed back to important episodes such as Snowden's death and funeral, each time getting more information about them. Yossarian is wounded, and the pace of the action picks up even more. Orr disappears, McWatt kills Kid Sampson and himself, and the number of required missions is raised to seventy, then eighty. Nately's whore tries to kill Yossarian, who goes through

a "long night of the soul" in Rome. He accepts the "odious deal" offered by Colonels Korn and Cathcart, is wounded by Nately's whore, then, on hearing the news about Orr, finally deserts.

An examination of the theme, imagery, style and action will prove useful in delineating the world of Catch-22. The theme of profit-making at any cost goes hand in hand with the theme of justice with which the novel is deeply concerned. Aside from numerous small allusions, we get a whole chapter on justice (Chapter Eight), which describes Clevinger's trial for conspiracy, a trial in which his guilt is assumed, and which ends in a neat definition of the subject:

> "I'll tell you what justice is. Justice is a knee in the gut from the floor at night sneaky with a knife brought up down on the magazine of a battleship sandbagged underhanded in the dark without a word of warning. Garroting. That's what justice is . . ."(91)

We are reminded of the trial scene in Alice in Wonderland, where guilt is assumed from the beginning, where all kinds of trivial irrelevancies are introduced, and rules made up to suit those in charge. The trial of Clevinger proceeds with as little justice as the trial of the Knave for stealing the tarts. This "justice", which is only the machinations of those in power to keep themselves there, is continued at Pianosa, where Colonel Cathcart, "impervious to absolutes", shows his own ethical relativism in his sycophantic manoeuvering to please his seniors, and in the motivation to get ahead, which is his only driving force. Having his men fly eighty missions may be unjust, but the effect that this will have in furthering his career is more important to Colonel Cathcart. This theme of

justice is an important one, and we are made to reflect on it not only by the obvious allusions to justice and the lack of it, but also by the slightly less overt allusions to King Lear, a work also deeply concerned with justice (and whose imagery is one of the sources of Catch-22's). The two works come together in the penultimate chapter of Catch-22 where Snowden's death is described. Snowden whimpers "I'm cold" just as Edgar says "Poor Tom's a-cold".[8] Both are cold and distraught as victims of the society which has used them as pawns, or has cast them out. When Snowden finally dies, his secret is set free: "The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret. Ripeness was all." (464). The reference is of course to Edgar's

> Men must endure
> Their going hence. even as their coming hither;
> Ripeness is all.[9]

The reference is particularly important because, like Lear, Catch-22 depends for its resolution on a gradual evolution in the vision of its principal character over a period of time. Just as in Lear, "Time shall unfold what plaited cunning hides."[10] In the second part of this chapter I shall examine how the theme of justice is explored by the development of imagery as well as the change in tone.

Yossarian's world is not a rational cause-and-effect one in which every action can be explained. Instead, the primary images are those of disease, madness, absurdity, and unnaturalness. The action begins and ends in hospital, and returns there many times. Most of the time Yossarian is "not even sick" (p. 19) as he tells the chaplain. However, a later exploration

of formal elements will reveal that he is, in a certain way, ailing. The images of disease and the sanity-insanity dichotomy are introduced in the first chapter, in which Yossarian proclaims not only his physical health, but also his sanity. "'Insanity is contagious,'" he says. "'This is the only sane ward in the whole hospital. Everybody is crazy but us. This is probably the only sane ward in the whole world, for that matter.'" (20). All the other combatants are referred to by the narrator as crazy: Clevinger (p. 24), McWatt (p. 25), Nately (p. 25), and by implication all the others who decide to fight:

> . . . outside the hospital the war was still going on. Men went mad and were rewarded with medals. All over the world, boys on every side of the bomb line were laying down their lives for what they had been told was their country, and no one seemed to mind, least of all the boys who were laying down their young lives. (23)

The use of the imagery of disease again links us with King Lear, in which the disease and madness of the characters combines with unnatural events such as earthquakes, to give the impression that the world is turned upside down and that its madness reflects the madness of men.[11] The difference, of course, is that the use of this madness imagery has been taken so far by Heller that it becomes absurd, and, at times, funny. The use of disease imagery also reminds us of certain features of Jonathan Swift, and this, plus the use of names whose meanings are transparent (Scheisskopf, Nately, etc.), links the novel with others in the satiric tradition. Northrop Frye defines satire as militant irony, meaning it uses wit or "humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd . . . [against] an object of attack."[12] That

the tone is humorous and the events absurd in Catch-22 is obvious, as is the object of its attack, the society in which Yossarian lives. Thus it corresponds to the type of ironic comedy described by Frye as a phase two comedy, wherein the hero escapes from a society which does not change.[13] When this type of theme is used in satire, the satirist is attempting to express a pragmatic attitude toward the vicissitudes and anomalies of life, to try to show that experience is more vast than the sense that can be made of it. Yossarian, as the slightly ingénu outsider in the bizarre world of Catch-22, can make no sense of it, and in the end decides to leave it.

The sickness and madness which pervade the world are reflected in the absurdity of the events which take place, both in miniature and at large. Small things, like Major Major's promotion which is due to a computer error, the belief that Bologna no longer needs to be bombed because the bomb line on the map has been moved, and the painting of patients' toes with gentian violet as a cure-all, all reflect the absurdity of the world of Pianosa, although on a relatively harmless scale. The larger absurd events, particularly those caused by the growth of "M & M Enterprises" have a more profound effect and are more importantly indicative of the dangers of the world -- and less funny. Milo Minderbinder is a symbol representing not only the capitalist ethic in its most extreme form, but also the gross lack of responsibility and concern for others that this ethic implies when it goes to such an extreme. Milo exists to make money, and if he has to kill his own men to do it, he will.

His candour is reflected in his description:

> . . . a simple, sincere face that was incapable of subtlety or guile, an honest, frank face with disunited large eyes, rusty hair, black eyebrows, and an unfortunate reddish-brown mustache . . . It was the face of a man of hardened integrity who could no more consciously violate the moral principles on which his virtue rested than he could transform himself into a despicable toad. One of these moral principles was that it was never a sin to charge as much as the traffic would bear. (74)

Later we are told that

> Milo was not only the vice-shah of Oran, as it turned out, but also the Caliph of Baghdad, the Imam of Damascus, and the Sheik of Araby. Milo was the corn god, the rain god and the rice god in backward regions where such gods were still worshipped by ignorant and superstitious people, and deep inside the jungles of Africa, he intimated with becoming modesty, large graven images of his mustached face could be found overlooking stone altars red with human blood. (254)

There is no question that Milo represents a kind of demonic figure, a Mammon of sorts who profits fully from human misery.[14] He is, like the devil and temptation, omnipresent. That he is expected to be so is why Yossarian does not react with anger at Milo's attempted temptation of him as he sits naked in a tree at Snowden's funeral. Like Mammon, who is always gazing at the gold with which Heaven's streets are paved, he is too occupied with the physical reality of things, their literal truth, to be able to see beyond them:

> Gripping the bough above with both hands, Milo began inching his way out on the limb sideways with utmost care and apprehension. His face was rigid with tension, and he sighed with relief when he found himself seated securely beside Yossarian. He stroked the tree affectionately. "This is a pretty good tree," he observed admiringly with proprietary attitude.
>
> "It's the tree of life," Yossarian answered, waggling his toes, "and of knowledge of good and evil, too."
>
> Milo squinted closely at the bark and branches. "No it isn't," he replied. "It's a chestnut tree. I ought to know. I sell chestnuts." (279)

Milo eventually prospers in such a world, to the point that we feel that World War Two is being carried out not to defeat the Germans, but to further business. Milo even says:

> "And the Germans are not our enemies," he declared. "Oh, I know what you're going to say. Sure, we're at war with them. But the Germans are also members in good standing of the syndicate, and it's my job to protect their rights as shareholders. Maybe they did start the war, and maybe they are killing millions of people, but they pay their bills a lot more promptly than some allies of ours I could name." (273)

Milo is the antagonist to Yossarian. His importance is such that his name appears in three chapter titles. In "Milo the Mayor", Snowden's death is described. This is not the only place in the novel where a link between Snowden's death and Milo is made, a link which suggests that Milo's irresponsible greed is a cause of the death of young men. The link with Snowden again appears in the chapter entitled "Milo", and the image of death is reiterated; it is here that we are told about the bombing of the squadron by Milo's planes on contract to the Germans. In "Milo the Militant" we are made to see that the responsibility for what Milo is doing and for the profit-at-all-costs motivation of the syndicate is shared by those who are "running the show". Colonel Cathcart fully supports Milo's venture, and indeed Milo is so militantly devoted to making money that he is prepared to accept even the death of his friend, Yossarian.

Milo's empire, the syndicate, performs the same function as the nameless company in Something Happened. It exists to serve itself and to further its own existence. It is there to make money, at any cost, and in the end it will kill anyone who stands in its way, anyone who does not submit to becoming

a zombie, anyone who questions his existence. As Milo and Slocum both demonstrate, a submission to the syndicate, a fawning and unquestioning acquiescence, is the only way to survive in the terms of its world -- that is, without entirely escaping. Those who do resist -- Dunbar, Slocum's boy -- are "disappeared" in one way or another. Resistance to the syndicate or corporation, then, is impossible so long as this resistance is made on its terms. Only by going outside of its terms and escaping can freedom be won.

This absurd world is what Yossarian inhabits, a world where normal logic is held in abeyance, where the profit motive, symbolized by Milo, reigns supreme. The objective in this world is not to win the war, but to get ahead, to seek promotion. Colonel Korn sums it up:

> "What else have we got to do? Everyone teaches us to aspire to higher things. A general is higher than a colonel, and a colonel is higher than a lieutenant colonel. So we're both aspiring." (450)

The desire for personal advancement at any cost is connected on the one hand with the profit-making theme, and on the other, with the theme of justice. What is important to an understanding of Yossarian's desertion is the men's reaction to injustice. As real justice is blind and impartial, Heller reverses the location of the image, making most of the men blind to the unfairness around them. The imagery of weak vision and poor light pervades the book. All the characters, with a few significant exceptions, have visual defects or peculiarities. Hungry Joe is continually shooting pictures that never come out (p. 34). Clevinger's eyes are tearful and undernourished (p.

43). Appleby has flies in his eyes (p. 55). Aarfy's eyes are "reptilian" (p. 57). Milo's eyes always point "away from where the rest of him was looking" (p. 74). These examples could be repeated ad nauseam, but they are not the only clues that there is some kind of lack of proper vision. Appleby goes to see Major Major early in the history of events, trying to get justice. He learns that this is not so easy on Pianosa; when he asks when he can see Major Major, he is told "Never" (p. 119).

Blindness to justice is not the only kind. The problem goes beyond ethics to metaphysics as it is implied that it is man's inability to see that undermines his faith in God and in divine justice:

> " . . . They've got the new LePage glue gun. It glues a whole formation of planes together in mid-air."
> "My God, it's true!" Yossarian shrieked, and collapsed against Nately in terror.
> "There is no God," answered Dunbar calmly, coming up with a slight stagger.
> " . . . What makes you so sure?"
> "Hey, are you sure your headlights are on?" Nately called out. (138-39)

The implication here is that it is the mens' own blindness which shakes their faith in God. The danger of "good vision", of being able to see the unfairness of the world and thus to react to it, is shown by Dunbar's experience:

> Yossarian no longer gave a damn where his bombs fell, although he did not go as far as Dunbar, who dropped his bombs hundreds of yards past the village and would face a court-martial if it could ever be shown he had done it deliberately. Without a word even to Yossarian, Dunbar had washed his hands of the mission. The fall in the hospital had either shown him the light or scrambled his brains; it was impossible to say which. (351)

Shortly after this, Dunbar is "disappeared".

There are many who "see", as Milo says he sees, without really

understanding (p. 70). It is not easy to see through the flies that dance in front of one's eyes to the lucid nature of reality itself. Things are not easily seen in Catch-22, and this "catch", this obscurity in things, is reflected by the remorseless immoral logic of the words themselves. The graceful and shocking, though obfuscating, form of the words, is best presented in the description of Catch-22 itself, which is in fact the primary symbol of Yossarian's world, a world in which freedom of choice is limited so severely as to be non-existent. The first mention of the "catch" is innocuously slipped in, in the description of Yossarian's censoring of the letters of the enlisted men: "Catch-22 required that each censored letter bear the censoring officer's name." (14). Because of the apparent symmetry and grace, as reflected in the high rhetorical style of the part in which the catch is fully explained (p. 53), it is not easy to notice how denying it is of freedom. Later, in a simple form, the lack of choice is more obvious:

> "No, you can't go home," ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen corrected him. "Are you crazy or something?"
> "Why not?"
> "Catch-22."
> "Catch-22?" Yossarian was stunned. "What the hell has Catch-22 got to do with it?"
> "Catch-22," Doc Daneeka answered patiently, when Hungry Joe had flown Yossarian back to Pianosa, "says you've always got to do what your commanding officer tells you to." (67-68)

The version of Catch-22 requiring Yossarian to fly briefly comes up again (p. 188). Later, the brutality with which the catch can be applied is demonstrated: Yossarian, on his last visit

to Rome, discovers that the whores have been chased away. Only an old woman remains. He asks her why:

> "What right did they have?"
> "Catch-22."
> "What?" Yossarian froze in his tracks with fear and alarm and felt his whole body begin to tingle. "What did you say?"
> "Catch-22," the old woman repeated, rocking her head up and down. "Catch-22. Catch-22 says they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing." . . .
> Yossarian left money in the old woman's lap——it was odd how many wrongs leaving money seemed to right——and strode out of the apartment, cursing Catch-22 vehemently as he descended the stairs, even though he knew there was no such thing. Catch-22 did not exist, he was positive of that, but it made no difference. What did matter was that everyone thought it existed, and that was much worse, for there was no object or text to ridicule or refute, to accuse, criticise, attack, amend, hate, revile, spit at, rip to shreds, trample upon or burn up. (430-32)

The catch itself is named one more time in reference to the odious deal that Yossarian almost makes with Colonels Korn and Cathcart; here, it would require him to collaborate with them.

What we are confronted with, then, is a catch which has no real raison d'être except for its own authority. Belief in the catch causes it to exist, just as acceptance of orders without personal assumption of responsibility gives authority to those who issue the orders. The awareness that the catch is grounded on itself is a part of the total vision that Yossarian develops, and will be discussed in the section dealing with his growing vision.

The catch is pervasive. It can even seem funny, as it is explained in terms of interconnected logic and an obfuscating style which exemplifies the difficulty of the catch itself. Yossarian's conversation with Luciana is an example of its

graceful obscurity:

> "Tu sei pazzo," she told him with a pleasant laugh.
> "Why am I crazy?" he asked.
> "Perchè non posso sposare."
> "Why can't you get married?"
> "Because I'm not a virgin," she answered.
> "What has that got to do with it?"
> "Who will marry me? No one wants a girl who is not a virgin."
> "I will. I'll marry you."
> "Ma non posso sposarti."
> "Why can't you marry me?"
> "Perchè sei pazzo."
> "Why am I crazy?"
> "Perchè vuoi sposarmi."
> Yossarian wrinkled his forehead with quizzical amusement. "You won't marry me because I'm crazy, and you say I'm crazy because I want to marry you? Is that right?"
> "Si." (172)

When used in this manner, the circularity of the argument becomes amusing and often causes us to forget that the situation may be serious. Almost all of the seemingly absurd events of the book may be explained in terms of the catch, from the fact that Major Major can only be seen when he is absent, to the bombing of the squadron by M & M Enterprises. The word "catch", then, is a generic term for any occasion where words are used to obscure rather than clarify. The "catchiness" of the words, and the purpose for which they are used, form another link with the disease imagery. The sickness of the world of Pianosa is paralleled in the sickness of the words themselves; they are used not to communicate but to obfuscate; to control others rather than to enlighten them. The twisted logic of words in Catch-22 is repeatedly invoked as a justification of whatever action is taken by those in power, to extend and consolidate that power. A close examination will show that Heller uses

almost every logical fallacy known,[15] and although not all of these fallacies are "catches", the relationship is obvious. For example, one common fallacy of discourse is "petitio principii" or begging the question, where the conclusion is used as one of the premises. The quotation just cited above is a perfect example of this; the conclusion (Yossarian can't marry Luciana) is implied at the beginning of the argument itself. It is, in fact, exactly the fallacy used when Catch-22 is invoked to keep Yossarian flying; if he asks to be taken off duty, he must be sane, and sane men must fly. Another fallacy is that of "post hoc, ergo propter hoc" where an action which follows another is considered to be the result of that prior action. Seeing a cause-and-effect link in Catch-22 where none really exists is common. The moving of the bomb line is perceived as a result of Allied troops' capture of Bologna, an event which does not occur in Catch-22. Still another fallacy is "ignoratio elenchi", or missing the point of the argument. This is the case when Yossarian is trying to find out why Orr walks around with crab apples in his cheeks:

> "Why did you walk around with crab apples in your cheeks?" Yossarian asked again. "That's what I asked."
> "Because they've got a better shape than horse chestnuts," Orr answered. "I just told you that."
> "Why . . . did you walk around with anything in your cheeks?"
> "I didn't," Orr said, "walk around with anything in my cheeks. I walked around with crab apples in my cheeks." (30)

More examples could be added, but the point is that Heller uses just about every type of fallacy known. He uses them for two reasons. The first is that, whereas among sane, rational people fallacies can be perceived as such and can be at least

kept to a minimum, here in the world of Catch-22 we are not dealing with sane men. Almost everyone is insane, and so their use of fallacious discourse is not only not perceived by most people, it arises naturally out of the alogical world with which we are dealing. When we view the events of the novel from the inside it makes perfect sense that fallacies proceed from the kind of world that Heller is exposing. But we may also view the events from the outside. In this instance we may ask what Heller's objective has been in creating this world where fallacies are normal. Heller is using the catch and related stylistic devices to connect Yossarian's patently absurd world with our own. The style thus serves to remind us of the relativity, subjectivity and eventual futility of words, to illustrate how obvious injustice and even crime can be made to seem all right. There is a catch in one's perception of reality. Even Yossarian's desire to "live forever or die in the attempt" (p. 37) takes the same zany form, and we are forced to laugh at it. Later the humour becomes darker.

Though the catch is only mentioned as such at seven points in the novel (p. 14, p. 54, p. 688, p. 117, p. 188, pp. 430-32, and p. 445), it is really present any time words are used to confuse and confound rather than clarify. The sudden reversals of logic and apparently contradictory turns of conversation display the catch just as much as any overt mention of the supposed army regulation. In using this "catchy" style, Heller is attempting

> to show how confused and feeble the mind can become, to show how much people live by their illusions and

> neuroses, to show that reality is subjective. He does this by giving a special kind of logic and coherence to the world he depicts -- a logic of madness, a logic that makes the world surreal. This is an authentic logic because it is similar to the way in which incongruities, absurdities, and illusions flit about in the everyday world . . .[16]

Thus it is as if we are seeing the world as it is, but through a magnifying glass, so that the paradoxes and contradictions of life are more obvious. Heller is making the point that

> our world is not neat and symmetrical, but bizarre and absurd; and that because of this it is impossible to make clear-cut distinctions between horror and humour. . . . Like all [modern writers], Heller's fundamental note is one of despair; and like all of these, Heller's despair wears an ironic grimace.[17]

I think in examining how Yossarian reacts to this world, and especially the justice of his reaction, it will be seen that Heller goes far beyond despair.

Finally, in discussing the implications of the style, the use of the word "catch" itself merits comment. Heller's novel is in its overall form a "catch-tale", a story in which "the manner of the telling forces the hearer to ask a particular question, to which the teller returns a ridiculous answer."[18] This happens at two levels at least. One is that of Yossarian, the questioner, whose questions are never answered as he would like, but who is constantly faced with absurdity. This has been discussed above. But at a deeper level, it is the reader who must ultimately ask the questions which the novel forces. Though Catch-22 itself, in keeping with the tradition of catch-tales, cannot answer the reader's questions with anything other than a ridiculous answer, we are not to assume that no answers

can be made. This study is an attempt to answer some of the questions that Catch-22 poses.

Faced with the points mentioned above -- the theme of injustice, the imagery of disease and madness, and the image of blindness, and the "no-choice" catch reflected in the twisted logic of the words themselves -- we must conclude that it is not only World War Two that is being treated by Heller. In fact his novel is about the possibilities "of survival in extreme situations, which includes not only wartime but just about all of modern life, for which the war is ultimately a metaphor."[19] The question is not whether World War Two was just, but whether life is just, and, if not, what can be done about it. The responsibility which needs to be assumed is not to fight the Germans for some ideal, since as Yossarian always says, "between me and every ideal I always find Scheisskopfs, Peckems, Korns and Cathcarts. And that sort of changes the ideal." (p. 469) The responsibility is to the cause of just, clear vision, and, this established, justice. As one critic puts it, "wartime on Pianosa is a replica of life within any organization."[20] In the final analysis, then, we see that Yossarian inhabits a world where "the word is often accepted as if it were the thing."[21] Not only are people really crazy or sick; not only is injustice rife; the worst is that most characters are not even aware of it, so skilfully is it hidden by the language.

In the second part of this chapter I shall examine Yossarian's character to see what there is about him which sets him apart from the crazy world he is in. I shall look closely

at the overall structure to see how it reinforces the properness of his escape, as his visual development proceeds. This development is accompanied by a gradual change of tone, which will also be examined; I hope by these examinations to show that Yossarian's escape is justified in terms of the novel's form.

Who exactly is Yossarian? What qualifies him as protagonist, as the man to lead the fight against injustice and to eventually serve as a model for the men on Pianosa? Early in the novel we are told how important Yossarian is:

> . . . he had a sound mind in a sound body and was as strong as an ox. They couldn't touch him because he was Tarzan, Mandrake, Flash Gordon. He was Bill Shakespeare. He was Cain, Ulysses, the Flying Dutchman; he was Lot in Sodom, Deirdre of the Sorrows, Sweeney in the nightingales among trees. He was miracle ingredient Z-247 . . . (27)

It is clear from this passage how exceptional, how far beyond the ordinary he is; he is the Crusader, the One Just Man who will serve as an example to others. Later in the same section we are given more information about the role he will play:

> "You're crazy," Clevinger shouted vehemently, his eyes filling up with tears. "You've got a Jehovah complex."
> "I think everyone is Nathaniel." (27)

The reference is to John I:43:

> The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. He met Philip, who, like Andrew and Peter, came from Bethsaida, and said to him, "Follow me." Philip went to find Nathanael, and told him: "We have met the man spoken of by Moses in the Law, and by the prophets: he is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth." "Nazareth!" Nathanael exclaimed; "can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, he said, "here is an Israelite worthy of the name; there is nothing false in him." Nathanael asked him, "How do you come to know me?" Jesus replied, "I

> saw you under the fig-tree before Philip spoke to you." "Rabbi," said Nathanael, "you are the Son of God; you are king of Israel." Jesus answered, "Is this the ground of your faith, that I told you I saw you under the fig-tree? You shall see greater things than that . . ."[22]

Yossarian thinks everyone is Nathaniel; he thinks that people's faith is grounded on what they are told they have seen. In other words, most people will accept the authority of others, who tell them to see in a certain way, without examining the reasons for their vision. Yossarian is indeed taking the role of Jehovah here, and even that of Christ. But because of the ironic tone of Catch-22 it is a very unusual Christ-role that he plays.[23] However, the reference to vision is important; the blindness of others and their acceptance of what they are told they see is contrasted to Yossarian's attitude and the clarity of his vision. Of all the characters in the book, Yossarian is the only one whose gaze is direct and whose vision is not infirm. He looks Major Major "squarely in the eye" (p. 115) as he demands to be excused from combat missions. He exhorts his colleagues to open their eyes (p. 136), to see what is really happening around them. His clear gaze even enables him, early in the book, to take a respite from the action:

> Yossarian could run into the hospital whenever he wanted to because of his liver and because of his eyes; the doctors couldn't fix his liver condition and couldn't meet his eyes each time he told them he had a liver condition. (179)

The point is, then, that Yossarian has a very special role. Endowed with a clearness of vision unequalled by anyone else in the book, it will be his task to use this vision to properly see the situation around him, to try to seek redress, and

to illumine those others who might be plunged in obscurity. His role is further clarified by his name. "Yoss" means "God" and "arian" reminds us of the Arian heresy in which Christ was considered as merely a man.[24] So Yossarian is a man, but one who is playing the role of Christ in showing us how to live. He uses his vision to aid him in his search, which is for justice. That he is interested in justice is established early, just as it is established early that he has the necessary equipment -- clear vision -- to find what he is looking for. He wants to know why some men are killed while others are spared, at first not concerning himself too much with the cause for which men have died. This quest for justice is demonstrated when Snowden is first mentioned:

> . . . then there was Yossarian with the question that had no answer:
> "Where are the Snowdens of yesteryear?"
> The question upset them, because Snowden had been killed over Avignon when Hobbs went crazy in mid-air and seized the controls away from Huple.
> The corporal played it dumb. "What?" he asked.
> "Where are the Snowdens of yesteryear?"
> "I'm afraid I don't understand."
> "Où sont les Neigedens d'antan?" Yossarian said to make it easier for him.
> "Parlez en anglais, for Christ's sake," said the corporal. "Je ne parle pas français."
> "Neither do I," answered Yossarian, who was ready to pursue him through all the words in the world to wring the knowledge from him if he could, but Clevinger intervened, pale, thin, and laboring for breath, a humid coating of tears already glistening in his undernourished eyes. (43)

The answer is not given, and in fact the impossibility of further questions of that sort is ruled out by Catch-22:

> Under Colonel Korn's rule, the only people permitted to ask questions were those who never did. Soon the only people attending were those who never asked questions, and the sessions were discontinued altogether,

> since Clevinger, the corporal and Colonel Korn agreed that it was neither possible nor necessary to educate people who never questioned anything. (43-44)

Yossarian remains undaunted. Unlike Daneeka, who resignedly bears "a compact kit of injustices" as a "perpetual burden"(p. 51), or Dunbar, who is content with a long, if boring, life, Yossarian wants more. The question that he poses, and that the novel itself asks, is Hamlet's:

> What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed?[25]

Yet at this early point of the action, he is still not able to perceive the root of the injustice that pervades the system. That the injustice is inherent in the system itself, which exists to "get ahead", to profit, is unclear to him. Like the others, Yossarian is somewhat blinded by words:

> Yossarian was still puzzled, for it was a business matter, and there was much about business matters that always puzzled him.
> "Let me try to explain it again," Milo offered with growing weariness and exasperation, jerking his thumb toward the thief with the sweet tooth, still grinning beside him. "I knew he wanted the dates more than the bedsheet. Since he doesn't understand a word of English, I made it a point to conduct the whole transaction in English . . . Don't you understand?"
> But Yossarian still didn't understand how Milo could buy eggs in Malta for seven cents apiece and sell them at a profit in Pianosa for five cents. (76-77)

But unlike the others, he does not compromise or capitulate. Yossarian sets himself apart from the others in that he cares what happens:

> He wants contact with another, which makes him appear insane to those around him, particularly to those who recognize and fear his intelligence, like Milo, Cathcart, and Korn. They know that Yossarian is intelligent, because he is capable of upsetting their plans. What bothers them is that he doesn't seem to want what they

> want, that he is not trying to con others, that he is honest, doesn't lie, and doesn't want to be like them.[26]

Given that it is established early in the novel that Yossarian is a special case, a "supraman" who is equipped to discover injustice and to become an example to others, I shall now turn to an examination of the overall structure of the novel to see how it reveals to us, and to Yossarian, the real nature of his world, so that desertion is a justifiable possible course of action for a sane man:

> Just about everything in Catch-22 is introduced as if one had seen it before, so one tries to trap and nourish impressions as they occur -- . . . Heller's . . . method forces the recurring images to accumulate meanings until their full significance, their essence, is finally perceived.[27]

The clue as to how the novel's structure works towards revealing to Yossarian (and to us) that he should desert lies in its "déjà vu" form. The chaplain's perception of events and his reaction to them is a focal point and for this reason I quote extensively:

> Outside the tent, Corporal Whitcomb snickered. The other man chuckled. For a few precarious seconds, the chaplain tingled with a weird, occult sensation of having experienced the identical situation before in some prior time or existence. He endeavoured to trap and nourish the impression in order to predict, and perhaps even control, what incident would occur next, but the afflatus melted away unproductively, as he had known beforehand that it would. Déjà vu. The subtle, recurring confusion between illusion and reality that was characteristic of paramnesia fascinated the chaplain, and he knew a number of things about it. He knew, for example, that it was called paramnesia, and he was interested as well in such corollary optical phenomena as jamais vu, never seen, and presque vu, almost seen. There were terrifying, sudden moments when objects, concepts and even people that the chaplain had lived with almost all his life inexplicably took on an unfamiliar and irregular aspect that he had never seen before and which made them

> seem totally strange: jamais vu. And there were other moments when he almost saw absolute truth in brilliant flashes of clarity that almost came to him: presque vu. The episode of the naked man in the tree at Snowden's funeral mystified him thoroughly. It was not déjà vu, for at the time he had experienced no sensation of ever having seen a naked man in a tree at Snowden's funeral before. It was not jamais vu, since the apparition was not of someone, or something, familiar appearing to him in an unfamiliar guise. And it was certainly not presque vu, for the chaplain did see him. (219-220)

He tries to find a fellow-soul in Yossarian, and he asks him (p. 286) whether a similar experience has ever befallen him. The excitement engendered by Yossarian's affirmative answer quickly palls when Yossarian explains to him in the grossest materialistic terms that

> déjà vu was just a momentary infinitesmal lag in the operation of two coactive sensory nerve centers that commonly functioned simultaneously. (286)

The chaplain's faith is strong, however; he is sure of the importance of what he has seen. The chaplain, in fact, is that character in an ironic comedy who plays the role of the

> refuser of activity . . . Such a character is appropriate when the tone is ironic enough to get the audience confused about its sense of the social norm: he corresponds roughly to the chorus in a tragedy, which is there for a similar reason.[28]

There are several important points raised in these passages. The chaplain knows that déjà vu is a form of paramnesia, "disordered or perverted memory, especially of the meaning of words."[29] This definition is important for two reasons. First, the idea of memory being distorted with regards to the meaning of words relates directly to the obscuring logic of Catch-22, discussed above, where words are used not to clarify but to hide, to prevent vision rather than illuminate. The

chaplain -- perhaps the only really developed character besides Yossarian who doesn't give in to the oppression of the society -- is subject, like Yossarian, to paramnesia. Perhaps the two men are sufficiently able to forget momentarily about the meaning of words, to see through the smoke-screen to the reality beneath, a reality which ranges from the comic to the tragic. Subject to paramnesia, and thus not so swayed by immoral logic as some of the others, each of these men acts in his own way to redress somewhat the patent injustice surrounding them.

The second and more common meaning of déjà vu bears directly on the overall structure of Catch-22. We experience events in Catch-22 repetitively, with information about the important events gradually accruing the more they are mentioned. This is the way that memory works. We look back from time to time on events in the past and assess their meaning and worth in the light of more recent events which have come about. Yossarian's memory is no different from any others, and we may be sure that the past events related in the book, the Great Big Siege of Bologna, his training in the USA, and that most important memory, Snowden's death, recur often, just as they are narrated to us. What sense he and we make of them will depend on other events that may have happened in the interim. Déjà vu usually refers to that strange feeling that all of us have when we see or hear an event which seems familiar to us, though we know it cannot be. The phenomenon of déjà vu is used as the basis of the structure of the book, so that by repetition the reader, as well as Yossarian, comes to see beyond the veil of words

to the truth:

> Déja vu . . . provides the basis for the method Heller uses to contrive the thematic patterns of the novel. He manipulates the characters, events and situations into elaborate parallels which, through comparison and contrast, clarify and illustrate the novel's central themes. He thereby gives the reader the sensation of seeing everything at least twice, of "having experienced the identical situation before" because it parallels other situations or is related to others thematically.30

Several incidents in Catch-22 are repeated, seen twice or even more than twice. They are usually seen from different angles in the light of new information. Thus we are told early about the fight in the mess which leads to the expulsion of the chaplain (p. 65), but it is not until much later, after the chaplain's character as well as that of Colonel Cathcart have been developed, that we find out the real motive for his expulsion: General Dreedle's embarassment at his sight (pp. 302-303). Similarly, the story of Nately's whore hitting Orr on the head makes no sense at first either:

> Yossarian . . . knew there was not a chance in hell of finding out . . . why that whore had kept beating him over the head with her shoe that morning in Rome in the cramped vestibule outside the open door of Nately's whore's kid sister's room. (31)

But at the very end of the book, both the reader and Yossarian find out why:

> "Because he was paying her to, that's why! But she wouldn't hit him hard enough, so he had to row to Sweden. Chaplain, find me my uniform so I can get out of here. (474)

So it is that

> the book becomes nothing but a series of flash-backs and flash-aheads, without any base from which to flash, although throughout the story there are hints that the time at which some future and important event will occur is the place in time from which the author is writing.31

It is important regarding the use of this technique that the real chronology of events, which many critics have spent so much time trying to sort out, is really relatively unimportant:

> . . . the mystifications about time are deliberate. For Heller, the war is an unchanging condition of absurdity and terror, and it would be a falsification to suggest that there could be an orderly development of this situation, in time, toward a resolution.[32]

The real development, or movement, in Catch-22 is in terms of Yossarian's visual development. He is already endowed with the tools to see. The repetitiveness of memory, when interpreted in the light of new events, shows him the injustice of the world. Thus, he sees too the responsibility to act as an example to the other men. The most important repeated incident pertains to Snowden, and it is as we learn more about his death that Yossarian does too, so that at the end his flight is fully understandable and justified. Snowden is first mentioned in a comic episode in which Yossarian is asking questions at information sessions (quoted above, p. 31). Yossarian, though his vision is clear, has not yet understood the import of Snowden's death. That the subject is presented in an ironic way is indicative of the lack of seriousness with which it is treated. We learn a little more about Snowden later:

> "Help him, help him," Dobbs sobbed. "Help him, help him."
> "Help who? Help who?" called back Yossarian . . .
> "The bombardier, the bombardier," Dobbs answered in a cry when Yossarian spoke. "He doesn't answer, he doesn't answer. Help the bombardier, help the bombardier."
> "I'm the bombardier," Yossarian cried back at him. "I'm the bombardier. I'm all right. I'm all right."
> "Then help him, help him," Dobbs begged. "Help him, help him."
> And Snowden lay dying in back.

Significantly and ironically, it is the bombardier, Yossarian, who needs "help", help to see the injustice which surrounds him and so understand Snowden's "secret". For a long period after this point, we learn nothing more about Snowden; Heller uses the opportunity to sketch in details of Yossarian's present situation. When we get through the first section of the novel, the part that concerns itself mostly with past events, we end up back in the hospital again at the chapter "The Soldier in White" and the action begins to move forward. Yossarian is in the hospital and he compares being there with being in the plane over Avignon with Snowden "dying in back" (p. 179). In the hospital, people did not

> blow up in mid-air like Kraft or the dead man in Yossarian's tent, or freeze to death in the blazing summertime the way Snowden had frozen to death after spilling his secret to Yossarian in the back of the plane.
> "I'm cold," Snowden had whispered. "I'm cold." (180)

At this point Yossarian's reaction to Snowden is one of disgust and shame that he chose to die with so much of that "crude, ugly ostentation about dying that was so common outside the hospital" (p. 180). Snowden's "secret" at this point is simply that Yossarian is personally threatened; he feels no responsibility to the others:

> There were too many dangers for Yossarian to keep track of. There was Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo, for example, and they were all out to kill him. . . .
> That was the secret Snowden had spilled to him on the mission to Avignon -- they were out to get him; and Snowden had spilled it all over the back of the plane. (186)

We are told a little more of the circumstances surrounding Snowden's death in "Milo the Mayor", a significant chapter in which Yossarian refuses to be a party to the killing of Colonel

Cathcart. Snowden is then mentioned again in the chapter entitled "Milo", and it is no accident that his death is associated with this character. Milo's presence at his funeral provides further evidence of his responsibility for the death, since it is the injustice of the profit-making society, and not really World War Two, with which the book is concerned. Though the funeral is an event in the past, Yossarian's conversation with the chaplain in which the former asserts that déjà vu can be explained on physiological grounds (p. 286), is in the course of the present action of the novel. Yossarian sees, but he still does not understand. Yossarian is wounded next, thinks that therefore he will be sent home, but forgets about Catch-22:

> "I'm nuts. Cuckoo. Don't you understand? I'm off my rocker. They sent someone else home in my place by mistake. They've got a licensed psychiatrist up at the hospital who examined me, and that was his verdict. I'm really insane.
> "So?"
> "So?" Yossarian was puzzled by Doc Daneeka's inability to comprehend. "Don't you see what that means? Now you can take me off combat duty and send me home. They're not going to send a crazy man out to be killed, are they?"
> "Who else will go?" (324)

Though he is at the point where he will do anything to protect his life, including marching backward with his gun on his hip (p. 415), it takes several more incidents until he is able to see his role clearly. Nately's whore acts as "an allegorical projection of Yossarian's own conscience, which will not let him come to terms with any form of exploitation." [33] She stabs him to remind him that "every victim was a culprit, every culprit a victim" (p. 429), and the stab helps Yossarian

to begin to undertake responsibility for others. He refuses a deal whereby he would only fly milk runs, interesting himself more and more with the cause of justice:

> "Pilchard and Wren said they'd arrange things so that I'd only go on milk runs."
> Havermeyer perked up. "Say, that sounds like a pretty good deal. I wouldn't mind a deal like that myself. I bet you snapped it up."
> "I turned it down."
> "That was dumb." Havermeyer's stolid, dull face furrowed with consternation. "Say, a deal like that wasn't so fair to the rest of us, was it? If you only flew on milk runs, then some of us would have to fly your share of the dangerous missions, wouldn't we?"
> "That's right." (424)

Not until his walk through the dark streets of Rome -- his journey through Hell -- does he come to see how unjust the world is. The use of visual images in this chapter to portray Yossarian's ultimate vision is of paramount importance:

> The broad, rain-blotched boulevard was illuminated every half-block by short, curling lampposts with eerie, shimmering glares surrounded by smoky brown mist. (437)

At this point,

> Yossarian, no longer the observer, no longer passive, challenges the world around him in a last appeal for justice and order, for the vindication of humane ideals.[34]

He encounters a demon who assures him that he has Yossarian's pal (p. 456). Yossarian wonders who his "pal" was; it remains for us to infer that, since all his old pals are dead, the vision refers to Yossarian's responsibility to those left alive. The devil may have his pals, but Yossarian is still alive, and finally, in the last recounting of Snowden's death, he sees the secret. This is the climactic scene of the book, and so I quote extensively:

> . . . Snowden kept shaking his head and pointed at last, with just the barest movement of his chin, down toward his armpit. Yossarian bent forward to peer and saw a strangely colored stain seeping through the coveralls just above the armhole of Snowden's flak suit. Yossarian felt his heart stop, then pound so violently he found it difficult to breathe. Snowden was wounded inside his flak suit. Yossarian ripped open the snaps of Snowden's flak suit and heard himself scream wildly as Snowden's insides slithered down to the floor in a soggy pile and just kept on dripping out. A chunk of flak more than three inches big had shot into his other side just underneath the arm and blasted all the way through, drawing whole mottled quarts of Snowden along with it through the gigantic hole in his ribs it had made as it blasted out. Yossarian screamed a second time and squeezed both hands over his eyes. His teeth were chattering in horror. He forced himself to look again. Here was God's plenty, all right, he thought bitterly as he stared -- liver, lungs, kidneys, ribs, stomach and bits of the stewed tomatoes Snowden had eaten that day for lunch. Yossarian hated stewed tomatoes and turned away dizzily and began to vomit, clutching his burning throat. The tail gunner woke up while Yossarian was vomiting, saw him, and fainted again. Yossarian was limp with exhaustion, pain and despair when he finished. He turned back weakly to Snowden, whose breath had grown softer and more rapid, and whose face had grown paler. He wondered how in the world to begin to save him.
>
> "I'm cold," Snowden whimpered. "I'm cold."
>
> "There, there," Yossarian mumbled mechanically in a voice too low to be heard. "There, there."
>
> Yossarian was cold, too, and shivering uncontrollably. He felt goose pimples clacking all over him as he gazed down despondently at the grim secret Snowden had spilled all over the messy floor. It was easy to read the message in his entrails. Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret. Drop him out a window and he'll fall. Set fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret. Ripeness was all.
>
> "I'm cold," Snowden said. "I'm cold."
>
> "There, there," said Yossarian. "There, there." He pulled the rip cord of Snowden's parachute and covered his body with the white nylon sheets.
>
> "I'm cold."
>
> "There, there." (463-464)

The significance of Snowden's name enters here. In one sense, it reinforces his continual plaint, "'I'm cold'". But the reference to the whiteness of snow also conjures up ideas

of purity, chastity and innocence, just as Nately's name (newborn) refers to the same qualities. Both boys die fighting, but in terms of the novel they are fighting less for their "country" than for something which has superseded the idea of nationality: M & M Enterprises. The boys, innocent and thus blind to the realities for whose cause they are dying, are sacrificed for Milo and for profit; that this is so is emphasized in the passage detailing Snowden's death, in which morphine syrettes have been taken, and a note left reading "What's good for M & M Enterprises is good for the country. Milo Minderbinder." (p. 460) What is important to note is that when capitalism loses its human face, when it ceases to regard the individual as valuable, then it becomes nothing more than money-worshipping. What good does it do Snowden to be reminded of the necessity of furthering M & M Enterprises' profits, and thus (supposedly) the welfare of his country? What country is worth dying for if it forgets the individuals for whom it has ostensibly been created? Again, Heller is using the image of the war to warn us not only about what is, but what might be.

Snowden's name has deeper significance than that, however. We have already been made aware of the allusion to Villon's poem "Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis" (p. 43, where Yossarian laments the Snowdens of yesteryear). Snowden's death reminds Yossarian of his own mortality, of the fact that all men must die, and that if he wants to do something to act out his convictions, then the time has come. Like Hamlet, he comes to the

realization that life is too short to delay action any longer.

The realization that man is matter recapitulates the chaplain's thought, "If they pricked him, didn't he bleed? And if he was tickled, didn't he laugh?", which is a reference to Shylock's speech.[35] The message is that all men are the same, they all fear pain and death, and that all are responsible to all. It now remains only for Yossarian to renounce the odious deal he had made with Colonels Korn and Cathcart, the deal whereby he would have gone back to the States in return for endorsing their policies. Yossarian has already made up his mind to desert in the chapter that bears his name; the news of Orr's desertion only hastens his decision to run <u>to</u> his responsibilities:

> . . . [one] can only achieve salvation by recognizing evil and resisting or overcoming it. It is obvious how appropriately this describes Yossarian's progress in the novel, . . . [his] departure for Sweden is the concrete external representation of his spiritual renewal that expressed itself first in his recognition of man's nature and in his subsequent refusal of the "deal".[36]

Orr, the only major character in <u>Catch-22</u> who does not have his own chapter, may be seen as an alternative rather than as a real person. He represents the choice that Yossarian is to make, and his escape foreshadows Yossarian's. Yossarian decides to pursue this option, to show the world that there <u>is</u> a choice beyond the strict limits of Catch-22:

> The structure of <u>Catch-22</u>, broadly, derives from Yossarian's struggle to detach himself in order to survive to a realization that his detaching himself has a larger meaning. The process of disengaging himself from the institutions which threaten to victimize him leads him to his total moral engagement with others. He accepts his guilt . . . and he refuses the sure but immoral survival offered by Korn and Cathcart in favor of a

> much less certain but at least morally acceptable survival on his own terms.[37]

Viewing the novel from the vantage point of the last chapter, we see that Yossarian's desertion is the end result of a process begun early in the book, a process whereby he arrives at a full vision of the injustice of the world, as well as the part he plays by being irresponsible. He escapes from "the frightening world in which he finds himself,"[38] when he flees from the hospital and his sickness.

Reinforcing the inevitability of Yossarian's desertion as evidenced by the déjà vu form, a form which exhibits structurally what happens on the level of the plot as well as Yossarian's improving vision, is the change of tone which takes place over the course of the novel. Even in the tone

> there is a steady progression toward human commitment. The first seventy pages or so are high jinks in which Heller carefully accustoms us to the pseudo-logic of Catch-22 and the comedy of confusion, but once his tone and method are firmly established, his humour is gradually transformed into a weapon -- a method of criticism and a new kind of radicalism.[39]

An examination of the way humour is used will show how this is so. Although the early tone of the novel is definitely funny, the seriousness of the situation is touched on as early as the first chapter. Together with Yossarian and Dunbar in the hospital is a colonel:

> The colonel was in Communications, and he was kept busy day and night transmitting glutinous messages from the interior into square pads of gauze which he sealed meticulously and delivered to a covered white pail that stood on the night table beside his bed. The colonel was gorgeous. He had a cavernous mouth, cavernous cheeks, cavernous, sad, mildewed eyes. His face was the color of clouded silver. He coughed quietly, gingerly, and dabbed the pads slowly at his lips with a distaste that had become automatic. (21)

The colonel is dying, and in the presence of the fun and laughter of the rest of the chapter, we find the colonel as a reminder that death is omnipresent, that man is matter. The tone becomes light again immediately afterward, as we proceed in a back-and-forth way through the incidents that comprise the first part of the book, up to the point where Yossarian finds himself in hospital in "The Soldier in White". This humorous tone is brought about by the catchiness of the style, as well as the patently absurd events that occur which make us laugh. Reminders about Snowden's death are present, however, to inject a note of seriousness now and then. But the tone remains mostly funny, and even the grossly unjust trial of Clevinger is told in an amusing way, again because of the catchy language:

> " . . . I said that I didn't say that you couldn't punish me."
> "Just what the hell are you talking about?"
> "I'm answering your question, sir."
> "What question?"
> "'Just what the hell did you mean, you bastard, when you said we couldn't punish you?'" said the corporal who could take shorthand, reading from his steno pad.
> "All right," said the colonel. "Just what the hell <u>did</u> you mean?"
> "I didn't say you couldn't punish me, sir."
> "When?" asked the colonel.
> "When what, sir?"
> "Now you're asking me questions again."
> "I'm sorry, sir. I'm afraid I don't understand your question."
> "When didn't you say we couldn't punish you? Don't you understand my question?"
> "No sir. I don't understand."
> "You've just told us that. Now suppose you answer my question."
> "But how can I answer it?"
> "That's another question you're asking me."
> "I'm sorry, sir. But I don't know how to answer it. I never said you couldn't punish me."
> "Now you're telling us when you did say it. I'm asking you to tell us when you didn't say it."
> Clevinger took a deep breath. "I always didn't say you couldn't punish me, sir." (87)

In the second part, the tone begins to get a little more serious. The obvious injustice of the world (here it is apparent that we are not only concerned with World War Two) is emphasized in Yossarian's discussion with Mrs. Scheisskopf:

> ". . . Why in the world did [God] ever create pain?"
> "Pain?" Lieutenant Scheisskopf's wife pounced upon the word victoriously. "Pain is a useful symptom. Pain is a warning to us of bodily dangers."
> "And who created the dangers?" Yossarian demanded. He laughed caustically. "Oh, He was really being charitable to us when He gave us pain! Why couldn't He have used a doorbell instead to notify us, or one of His celestial choirs? Or a system of blue-and-red neon tubes right in the middle of each person's forehead. Any jukebox manufacturer worth his salt could have done that. Why couldn't He?"
> "People would certainly look silly walking around with red neon tubes in the middle of their foreheads."
> "They certainly look beautiful now writhing in agony or stupefied with morphine, don't they? What a colossal, immoral blunderer! When you consider the opportunity and power He had to really do a job, and then look at the stupid, ugly little mess He made of it instead, His sheer incompetence is almost staggering. It's obvious He never met a payroll." (194)

The tone becomes more and more serious, and is reinforced by the musings of the chaplain -- still funny, but mixed with seriousness. This is still more developed by the references to Milo, at first a comic figure, but more and more a demonic one. Humour, at first used to delight us, is now juxtaposed with horror to shock our sensibilities. The horror takes the major key now, and is relieved only slightly by amusing notes, as in this episode where Milo is bombing his own troops for profit:

> Newspapers inveighed against Milo with glaring headlines, and Congressmen denounced the atrocity in stentorian wrath and clamored for punishment. Mothers with children in the service organized into militant groups and demanded revenge. Not one voice was raised in his defense. Decent people everywhere were affronted, and

> Milo was all washed up until he opened his books to the public and disclosed the enormous profit he had made. He could reimburse the government for all the people and property he had destroyed and still have enough money left over to continue buying Egyptian cotton. (276)

As Yossarian's friends one by one are killed, "disappeared", or desert, the tone becomes more intently serious, although still mixed with a note of absurdity to remind us of the craziness of things. In the last mention of Snowden there is a reference to the stewed tomatoes he had for lunch, which slide out with his guts on to the floor; the effect is tragically gruesome.

In this change of tone throughout the novel we see a parallel to the development of Yossarian's vision which strengthens and reinforces the development, so that by the end of the book we are not surprised when he deserts from a situation which was at first funny, but is at last deadly:

> The progression and development of Catch-22 are to be seen in this gradual transformation of its sense of comedy, and not, where some critics have tried to find them, in a mechanical advance of incident and plot. . . . the mystifications about time are deliberate.[40]

Catch-22 expresses, in terms of the plot, the development of the imagery, and by changes in tone, an affirmation that the individual can escape from a world which he finds threatening and absurd, and that, in so doing, he can become an example to others. The world does not seem amenable to change, so the way in which Yossarian's story is treated must be ironic, since in a classical sense comedy can only be possible when a new society is instituted to replace the old. In Catch-22 the old society remains but Yossarian gets away.

The escape he makes is implied by certain formal features such as those discussed above, and as protagonist and leader he undertakes certain responsibilities. His escape declares that a choice is possible, that it is not necessary either to submit to injustice or to compromise oneself in "selling out". The ending is not "tacked-on" but is implied by the déjà vu structure of the book which reflects the way Yossarian gradually learns to see, then to understand, so that he may act in a just way, a way that is consistent with his role as "supraman". What Yossarian expresses in his final choice is human freedom, no matter how qualified.

NOTES

1. Both quotes are from Jerry H. Bryant, The Open Decision (New York: Free Press, 1970), pp. 159-160.

2. Bernard Bergonzi, The Situation of the Novel (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), p. 85.

3. Thomas LeClair, "Death and Black Humour", Critique, 17 (1975), 15; Sanford Pinsker, "Heller's Catch-22: The Protest of a Puer Eternis", Critique, 7(1965), 161; Raymond Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 110.

4. Stephen A. Shapiro, "Man the Ambivalent Animal", The Centennial Review, 12 (1968), 16.

5. Critics who agree that the ending is justified include: James Mellard, "Catch-22: Déjà Vu and the Labyrinth of Memory", Bucknell Review, 16 (May 1968), 29-44; Minna Doskow, "The Night Journey in Catch-22", Twentieth Century Literature, 12 (January 1967), 186-193; Vance Ramsay, "From Here to Absurdity: Heller's Catch-22", in Seven Contemporary Authors, ed. Thomas B. Whitbread (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1966), pp. 97-118; Brian Way, "Formal Experiment and Social Discontent: Joseph Heller's Catch-22", Journal of American Studies, 2 (1968), 253-270.

6. Two critics who attempt unsuccessfully to recount the events of the plot chronologically are: Jan Solomon, "The Structure of Joseph Heller's Catch-22", Critique, 9 (1967), 46-57, and Doug Gaukroger, "Time Structure in Catch-22", Critique, 12 (1970), 70-85.

7. Joseph Heller, Catch-22 (London: Corgi Books, 1964). All references to Catch-22 are to this edition, and the page number is given in parentheses after the quotation.

8. William George Clark and William Aldis Wright, eds., The Plays and Sonnets of William Shakespeare (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952, 2 vols.), III.iv.152, II, 265. All references to Lear are to this edition, and the citations are by act, scene and line number.

9. Lear V.ii.10.

10. Lear I.i.284.

11. Disease imagery links us with Hamlet, too; the use of this play as one source for imagery and theme is discussed in a later footnote.

12. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J.: The Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 223, 224.

13. Frye, pp. 180, 229.

14. W.K. Thomas, "The Mythic Dimension of Catch-22", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 15 (Spring 1973), 189-198. Thomas does more work on the use of names in Catch-22 than any other critic I have read, but he himself realizes the limitations of this technique, remarking that "the whole exercise may well be a booby trap for overly ingenious scholars." (195).

15. J. L. Mackie, "Fallacies", in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: MacMillan & Company, 1967), pp. 169-178.

16. Douglas Day, "Catch-22: A Manifesto for Anarchists", The Carolina Quarterly, 15 (Summer 1963), 90-91.

17. Morris Dickstein, "Black Humour and History: Fiction in the Sixties", Partisan Review, 43 (1976), 200.

18. Stith Thompson, A Motif Index to Folklore (Bloomington, Indiana: The Indiana University Press, 1955), vol. V, p. 240.

19. Michael R. French, "The American Novel in the Sixties", The Midwest Quarterly, 9 (July 1968), 370.

20. Frederick R. Carl, "Joseph Heller's Catch-22": Only Fools Walk in Darkness", in Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), p. 135.

21. Burwell Dodd, "Joseph Heller's Catch-22", in Approaches to the Novel, ed. John Colmer (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), p. 77.

22. The New English Bible (London: The Oxford University Press, 1961).

23. A Christian interpretation of Catch-22, in which Yossarian is Christ and every character has an allegorical role in the Passion, is given by Eric Solomon, "From Christ to Flanders in Catch-22", in A "Catch-22" Casebook,

ed. Frederick Kiley and Walter McDonald (New York: Thomas Crowell Co., 1973), pp. 94-101. It seems a little forced.

24. Thomas, p. 193.

25. Clark & Wright, p. 317 (Hamlet iv. 32).

26. Gerald B. Nelson, Ten Versions of America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 175.

27. Mellard, 31.

28. Frye, p. 176.

29. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 712.

30. James L. McDonald, "I See Everything Twice! The Structure of Joseph Heller's Catch-22", The University Review (Kansas City), 34 (March 1968), 177.

31. Dodd, p. 74.

32. Brian Way, "Formal Experiment and Social Discontent: Joseph Heller's Catch-22", Journal of American Studies, 2(1968), 267.

33. Victor J. Milne, "Heller's 'Bologniad': A Theological Perspective on Catch-22", Critique, 12 (1970), 61.

34. Doskow, p. 191.

35. Clark & Wright, p. 115 (Merchant of Venice III.i.63).

36. Doskow, 193.

37. Ramsay, p. 114.

38. Dodd, p. 75.

39. Way, 265.

40. Way, 267.

SOMETHING HAPPENED

Something Happened seems much less expressive of affirmation than Catch-22. The world that Bob Slocum inhabits, though less absurd and more easily recognizable than Yossarian's, is, if anything, more hostile and threatening than the zany world of Pianosa. The hostility and threat posed by Slocum's world present themselves insidiously and in such a way that the distinction between the world and the striving individual is much harder to make.[1] Also, the opportunity for freedom of action on the part of the protagonist seems much less. It would, in fact, be fairly easy to make the observation that Bob Slocum is beyond hope[2] and that he is totally conditioned by his past and present life to the point that he cannot break away from the lifestyle he finds himself living. Even the plot seems to imply that his range of choice is so limited and the inimical world so much a part of himself, that an escape such as Yossarian's is simply out of the question.

To what degree can it be said that the novel Something Happened expresses the triumph of the individual over the threat inherent in his world? It is plain that if we view only Bob Slocum as expressing this triumph, our answer to that question may be somewhat depressing. For this is

> the satire of the low norm. It takes for granted a world which is full of anomalies, injustices, follies, and crimes, and yet is permanent and undisplaceable. Its principle is that anyone who wishes to keep his

> balance in such a world must learn first of all to keep his mouth shut . . . And however good or bad expertly conventional behaviour may be thought to be, it is certainly the most difficult of all forms of behaviour to satirize . . .[3]

Only by a consideration of the protagonist's mistakes and follies are we able to infer that the author does not fully believe that this is the only type of world possible. Were it not for the existence of Bob Slocum's boy, who exemplifies some of the more affirmative facts of existence, we would be entirely confined to having to find affirmation in an ironic reading. This would present certain difficulties, and even given the presence of the boy and his obvious traits of goodness, generosity, and freedom, we still must face certain problems in a criticism of the novel. How successful is the ironic mode which Heller has chosen? Are we forcing the reading of the book somewhat in inferring even the limited affirmation about the individual's worth and freedom that we do? Why has the author chosen this form instead of a more straightforward, obviously "happy" ending, as in Catch-22?

The reaction of many readers to a first reading of Something Happened is one of depression; one critic sums up the feeling of many readers in his commentary:

> [Heller's] talent is for the bizarre, not the humdrum. This failing is reflected in the style, which Heller has tailored to suit his protagonist. Because Slocum is unsure of himself, a chronic worrier, he is constantly putting sentences, even paragraphs, in brackets. To almost every thought there is an afterthought. There are times when reading this becomes as tedious as listening to a stammer.[4]

In Slocum's neurotic bewailing of his fate and his helpless

floundering in the face of the ravages of the world, many readers see little if any indication of a suggestion that man is free, that he can escape an odious situation and control his life to some extent at least. Northrop Frye has said in this regard, "if any literary work is emotionally 'depressing' there is something wrong with either the writing or the reader's response."[5] I am inclined to think that at least part of the reason why the book does have just this effect is that there is a failure in the writing. One of the difficulties with ironic writing in general and with the use of an unreliable narrator in particular is that too often there is not enough warning that irony is at work.[6] This results in too close an identification or sympathy with the narrator, making it difficult for him to be seen as a <u>persona</u> behind whom the implied norms or values of the author are present.[7] Though any author will feel it necessary to have an empathy of some kind built up between his protagonist and his readers, the reliability or unreliability of the protagonist must be quite clear to avoid any depressing response. It is clear that Heller does not entirely succeed in doing this:

> We have seen that inside views can build sympathy for even the most vicious character. When properly used, this effect can be of immeasureable value in forcing us to see the human worth of a character whose actions, objectively considered, we would deplore; . . . But it is hardly surprising that works in which this effect is used have often led to moral confusion.[8]

We do sympathize with Bob Slocum and his very human neuroses, and in his blackest thoughts we find a little of ourselves, but the clues that are given are not frequent enough nor

consistent enough to allow us to keep our distance. That we are to look for formal features and/or other characters to infer the author's norms is not completely obvious, and most readers would require a second reading of the novel to see this. Many would not bother, which is probably why the book has not had the kind of commercial success of Catch-22, nor as much critical commentary. Once, however, the features examined above are considered, it becomes more apparent that the author is doing more than just writing an epic of neurosis and a condemnation of modern life. "The satirist has to select his absurdities, and the act of selection is a moral act."[9] Heller has selected certain absurdities to satirize in order to offer some alternatives after knocking down what he feels are some destructive elements of our society.

After briefly recounting the plot of Something Happened, I will examine the way Heller has selected his absurdities, discussing both positive and negative aspects in terms of formalist features. By "negative" I mean those aspects of the book which point away from freedom of the will, and which imply that the world is a hostile and threatening place, a place where conformity to the norm offers more ease than living up to one's own personal values in the face of such a world. In Something Happened the negative aspects are reflected in the description of the world which Slocum inhabits; the characterization of Slocum; the plot itself; and by various stylistic and formal devices such as use of the present tense, parenthetical remarks, etc. Then in the second part of this chapter I will discuss

those elements which may offer some "affirmation". By this I mean features which express the ability of the individual to overcome the perceived threat, or at least to strive against it without capitulating, thus showing a certain measure of freedom. In discussing these affirmative elements, I will consider the formal representation of a dichotomy in Something Happened between the inner, subjective world and the outer, objective one; the degree of reliability of the narrator; the possibility of affirmation arising from an ironic reading of the novel; and to what extent other characters might affirm. Finally, I will discuss why this form was used by the author, and to whom Slocum's monologue is directed.

In spite of the length of the book itself, the plot of Something Happened can be recounted fairly simply. It is the story of Bob Slocum, a company executive in his forties, who, though relatively dissatisfied with the type of work he does, finds he is being considered for a promotion. His present job in Market Research consists to a large degree in finding out what reality is, then disguising it.[10] In his new position he would be head of the Sales Department, although his job would be managing, not selling. However, both jobs are recognized as unimportant. When he announces to his family the news of the possible promotion, it is met with mixed reactions. His daughter doesn't like the idea of his being a salesman, but he denies that his new job will involve any more selling than in the past. His boy, nine years old, is unsure of the implications. His wife is pleased at the idea of his making more money but she is not aware that his getting the job

would mean someone else's getting fired.

A subplot develops with Slocum's son, who is doing poorly in gym class. Slocum has to go to his son's school to make life a little easier for the boy, and he succeeds, at least for a while. After many soliloquies, ruminations, and fantasies, he gets the job he has been hoping for. His wife reacts negatively when she finds that the person whom he is replacing will be fired. His children withdraw more and more from him, and then suddenly, his boy is injured in an automobile accident. Though only slightly hurt, his screams of distress so upset Slocum that he hugs his boy close to his body, smothering him. Nobody in his family or at work finds out that he has killed his son. He takes on the responsibilities of the new job with ease and confidence, and everyone is impressed with how well he has taken command.

Looking now more closely at the form of the novel, we can see that the ideas of a hostile, threatening world and a limited or non-existent freedom of choice and action are expressed in four basic ways: by the description of the world that Slocum lives in, both at work and elsewhere; by the characterization of Slocum; by the plot itself; and by certain stylistic or formal devices independent of those already mentioned. A more thorough examination of these four points will show how self-affirmation and self-fulfilment are apparently denied in the novel.

Slocum works for a company that makes "things" -- what kind of things is never quite clear, nor is it very important.

The second chapter of the book describes the company in detail. It is held together by lines of fear which resemble the lines on a flow chart:

> In the office in which I work there are five people of whom I am afraid. Each of these five people is afraid of four people (excluding overlaps), for a total of twenty, and each of these twenty people is afraid of six people, making a total of one hundred and twenty people who are feared by at least one person. Each of these one hundred and twenty people is afraid of the other one hundred and nineteen, and all of these one hundred and forty-five people are afraid of the twelve men at the top who helped found and build the company and now own and direct it. (9)

The company, headed by twelve men (who seem dead) can be imagined as a parody of the Christian church. Fear, instead of love, holds it together, and its raison d'être is making money rather than saving souls. Although it is described in the vaguest terms, the power structure is quite clearly elucidated and the lines of control are distinct. It is the ultimate organization, existing primarily to serve itself, and insisting on the anonymity and unimportance of its employees to do so. Thus it is "benevolent" (p. 14) but like the "nice" people and "convivial" atmosphere, the benevolence is superficial. It is important to the company that one look good, as Slocum's advice to Kagle reminds us (p. 50). The multinational company encourages uniformity of appearance to the point that the appearance is the reality. In other words, in spite of Slocum's dreams, anxieties, infidelities, deteriorating jawbone, obsession with the past, and whatever else, what is important to the company is that he present a front of coolness, wear the right clothes, do the right things at the right time, socialize in a

certain manner, and so on. When Slocum asks Arthur Baron, his superior at the company, to come for dinner, it is the "right" thing to do, since it creates the right impression:

> The evening went marvellously indeed, but it was written in the atmosphere -- and my wily sixth-sense tells me it is still there -- that we were not to invite him again for a long time, though it was much more than just okay to have done so then. (495)

Crazy people, that is, those whose inner life extrudes from time to time upon their overt behaviour, are not liked by the company. Emotional behaviour is not liked:

> (The company takes a strong view against psychotherapy for executives because it denotes unhappiness, and unhappiness is a disgraceful social disease for which there is no excuse or forgiveness.) (500)

This is why Martha, the crazy typist, will eventually have to be fired, even though her job is relatively unimportant, and why Slocum is not seeing a psychiatrist (p. 378). Insanity is distasteful to the company, because it implies that there are those who cannot peacefully fulfil the roles given them, and that there is something deeper going on than surface behaviour.

The company keeps its executives and employees performing in two ways: through the threat of social disapproval and loss of security, or through ignoring them. Small, relatively insignificant acts of minor sabotage, such as spindling, folding, tearing or defacing a paycheck don't really matter:

> What would happen, I speculate gloomily every two weeks or so as I tear open the blank, buff pay envelope and stare dully at the holes and numbers and words on my punched-card paycheck as though hoping disappointedly for some large, unrectifiable mistake in my favor, if I did spindle, fold, tear, deface, staple, and mutilate it. (It's my paycheck, isn't it? Or is it?) What would happen if, deliberately, calmly, with malice aforethought and obvious premeditation, I disobeyed?

> I know what would happen: nothing. Nothing would happen. And the knowledge depresses me. (14-15)

Larger acts of rebellion (refusing a promotion, going crazy) are actively discouraged. The company offers security (p. 26) and reinforces the desire for security by encouraging fear of the unknown, and fear of loss of job (meaning loss of socially acceptable role). It encourages moving up the social ladder of success, and so when Slocum is offered Kagle's job there is really no question of his turning it down, even if he does not want it. It will offer more security, more power, more money, more control. And since there is for Slocum really nowhere else to go, he stays with the company, conforms to its rules, and gets the appropriate reinforcement:

> It's a wise person, I guess, who knows he's dumb, and an honest person who knows he's a liar. And it's a dumb person, I guess, who's convinced he's wise, I conclude to myself (wisely), as we wise grown-ups here at the company go gliding in and out all day long, scaring each other at our desks and cubicles and water coolers and trying to evade the people who frighten us. We come to work, have lunch, and go home. We goose-step in and goose-step out, change our partners and wander all about, sashay around for a pat on the head, and promenade home till we all drop dead. (26)

The image is one of a square dance, a type of dance in which the movements are called by a "controller" whose instructions are followed by the dancers. This reminds us just how conditional and controlled the world of Slocum is, especially that part of it which pertains to the company. The "dance" that he does really comprises his whole behaviour at work, and, to a lesser extent, in his whole life, since everything he does is done with a mind to keep up appearances. As far as the company is concerned, inner feelings, motives and thoughts

have little or no importance as long as they remain unexpressed. The importance of keeping control, therefore, is brought up early.

Just as Heller used the war as a metaphor for modern life in Catch-22, he uses the multinational corporation as an "objective correlative" for a world that is much more threatening, because of its subtlety, in Something Happened. The multinational serves as the image of our time, because so much of modern life in Western Civilization and particularly North America revolves around it. Conformity to and compromise with the rules of the corporation -- whether a true corporation or the society which fosters the growth of such conglomerates -- will get you what you need: a home in the suburbs, lots of material gadgets, and 2.5 children, just as Bob Slocum has (the .5 is his idiot son, Derek). Though a great deal of repression and suppression of inner feelings may have to be made, still, the results are worth it, or at least they are to Bob Slocum. The company, then, represents that part of society to which surface appearance, conformity and compromise are important. Although the company does not approve overtly of extra-marital sex, in fact it is quietly condoned, because the ethos on which the company operates is one of a male-dominated society which approves of the "traditional" values of male polygamy and female chastity. In a way, then, the company's society is even more conservative than the surrounding culture. Nevertheless, it is not only the multinational companies, but all aspects of our culture which demand uniformity of deed in return for security,

that are being portrayed. The fact that true, inner security cannot be bought at so cheap a price is forgotten in the plethora of material advantages which accrue from wealth. The threat from this type of society is very different from the one posed by society in Catch-22. Slocum is not threatened by physical death by the corporation; he is instead offered the illusion of life in exchange for his freedom and authenticity. The company kills, but its threat is not so easily perceived because it kills the spirit and not the flesh. It is, in fact, possible to envisage the ultimate result of the mind-destroying mediocrity and conformity it encourages without even being aware of one's own personal responsibility for it. Slocum is not conscious of how many of the woes that he enumerates are caused by him and people like him:

> Dirty movies have gotten better, I'm told. Smut and weaponry are two areas in which we've improved. Everything else has gotten worse. The world is winding down. You can't get good bread anymore even in good restaurants (you get commercial rolls), and there are fewer good restaurants. Melons don't ripen, grapes are sour. They dump sugar into chocolate candy bars because sugar is cheaper than milk. Butter tastes like the printed paper it's wrapped in. Whipped cream comes in aerosol bombs and isn't whipped and isn't cream. People serve it, people eat it. Two hundred and fifty million educated Americans will go to their graves and never know the difference. (I wish I could get my hands on a good charlotte russe again). That's what Paradise is -- never knowing the difference. (454)

Slocum is unable to see that "what happens at work is the production of a tremendous amount of junk . . . instead of something that is necessary for survival and well-being."[11] He is as much responsible for the gradual running-down of society as anyone, because his job as a market researcher or

salesman (for products so unimportant they are never named) contributes to the production of this junk and the attachment thereto which is one of the hallmarks of our culture. The world is described as decadent in terms of edibles, particularly the substitution of ersatz foods for the real thing. The image of taste gives us a very real feel for the process of substitution of realities by counterfeits described here. The tone of humour associated with the passage constitutes an affirmative note that will be discussed later.

Besides the insidious and subtle threat made against the individual by the corporation-society, there is another locus of hostility which must be confronted in Something Happened. It can be called the threat of an indifferent universe. The first clue we get that the universe may present us with situations that upset and disarray our carefully constructed world is the title itself, deliberately vague in both noun and verb. The point is that some things happen which have no cause, are merely random "flukes" of nature, and their effects can be as easily harmful as beneficial. In discussing Black Humour Robert Scholes says this:

> Some accidents are so like jokes that the two are indistinguishable . . . the joke is on us every time we attribute purpose or meaning that suits us to things which are either accidental, or possessed of purpose and meaning quite different from those we would supply.[12]

Cerebral Vascular accidents, like the one which incapacitated Slocum's mother, the fluke of nature which resulted in one of his children being born an idiot, the incredible number of automobile accidents recorded in dead records in the office in which Slocum used to work, even the day-to-day occurrence of

random events -- all pose a threat to security and order:

> Last week, another man was shot to death in the park, and no one knows why. The week before that, another man was shot to death in the park, and no one knows why. Every week a man is shot to death in the park. No one knows why. (324)

In the end, even the death of his boy is triggered by an accident. This world of happenstance impinges itself on Slocum as a threat, but a threat which is different from the kind of menace exhibited by the corporation. It is ubiquitous and ever-present, and indeed there is nothing he can do to prevent random events from happening. His reaction to them is one of gloom and despair. It is as if, in confronting a dragon, he gives up before even trying to fight it:

> Who is the dragon? He is the oldest <u>other</u>. . . . He is . . . the baffling, insurmountable fact that <u>things happen</u> and that we have no control over their happening. When you make love for the first time, when your car, unbelievably, collides with <u>that</u> car you previously accepted as a harmless part of the landscape, when war is declared or someone you love dies, then you are face to face with the dragon in his oldest, most threatening, and most mythic aspect . . . [He] is a figure of unwilled impingement upon your illusion of centrality and control.[13]

Slocum does not take the position of defiance or even flight (as Yossarian takes both of these) against the occurrence of random events. He floats, instead, letting them wash over him, like "algae in a colony of green scum" (p. 286), preferring to follow the crowd here, too, as in his relations with the company. That "happen" and "happy" are related etymologically[14] never occurs to him. Chance events can just as easily signal good luck as bad. His preference for dwelling on the bad luck that befalls him rather than the good will be

seen as important in a later discussion of his point of view as narrator.

Turning now away from this hostile world to the characterization of Slocum himself, I will investigate more deeply his involvement with the company-society, as well as with his own self, to see to what degree his freedom of action seems denied.

"How long," Wylie Sypher quotes James Thurber, "can the needle of the human gramophone stay in the rut of Angst without wearing out and ending in the repetition of a ghoulish gibbering?"[15] This question is a particularly apt one in reading Something Happened in which at times it is felt that we come close to just this sort of gibbering. Bob Slocum's extremely fertile imagination offers no end of worries and ruminations over the condition of modern-day man in a mechanized, "wasteland" world. Though in one way he is able to preoccupy himself with getting a promotion, he is, on the other hand, quite aware of the meaninglessness of his situation when seen in its entirety. He is thus in some ways the kind of functionary described by Sypher in Loss of the Self. He is contingent on his environment for his definition because he cannot find any definition himself:

> His existence is negative because he has been completely available to others, to causes, to events and forces, as if he were a kind of liquid capital. He is extremely disposable . . . [the lives of such men are] lived at the level of policy -- policy made by intrigue within committees where each member is willing to manipulate others but where final decisions are detached from any individual responsibility. These new men are available and disposable; they are lonely and thwarted; they do not communicate partly because they cannot. Their true being is official -- so official that their private

> selves are only a hindrance to the larger operation of the policies they formulate.[16]

Thus he is totally alienated from the type of work he does; it means nothing to him at all. He drifts along with the others at work, allowing events to shape him:

> I am a broken waterlogged branch floating with my own crowd in this one nation of ours . . . I float like algae in a colony of green scum . . . (284-286)

He is not aware that by his relationship to the company and the waste that it spawns, he is adding to the garbage that gets spewed out over the land:

> I've got bad feet. I've got a jawbone that's deteriorating and someday soon I'm going to have to have all my teeth pulled. It will hurt. I've got an unhappy wife to support and two unhappy children to take care of. (I've got that other child with irremediable brain damage who is neither happy nor unhappy, and I don't know what will happen to him after we're dead.) I've got eight unhappy people working for me who have problems and unhappy dependents of their own. I've got anxiety; I suppress hysteria. I've got politics on my mind, summer race riots, drugs, violence, and teen-age sex. There are perverts and deviates everywhere who might corrupt and strangle any one of my children. I've got crime in the streets. I've got old age to face. My boy, though only nine, is already worried because he does not know what he wants to be when he grows up. My daughter tells lies. I've got the decline of American civilization and the guilt and ineptitude of the whole government of the United States to carry around on these poor shoulders of mine.
>
> And I find I am being groomed for a better job.
> And I find -- God help me -- that I want it. (61-62)

Although the guilt that Slocum carries is to some extent rightfully his, because he accepts and takes part in the system that causes the problems, it would be an oversimplification to say that he is a wholly contingent man as in Sypher's definition. To some extent he is contingent, reacting to those situations that surround him in a plastic way that reveals little inner certitude or character. For example, he takes

on people's characteristics when he is in their company (p. 65); he is willing to undertake a promotion to a job he doesn't really want (p. 141); he sees himself floating in a current of time (p. 284); he is a "nothing" (p. 393). What makes him different from the standard picture of a contingent self is his awareness of it, his consciousness of himself allowing himself to be "sculpted" (p. 400) or formed by events. This consciousness of his plight which forms part of his positive qualities is in itself a sort of affirmation.

Bob Slocum seems unaware of the fact that his refusal to accept responsibility, his definition of himself as contingent to the company he serves as well as on the other processes around him, brings him to constant failure in his relationships with others. Since he is entirely a function of his environment, he finds it impossible to decide what he really wants. "I wish I knew what to wish", he says to himself (p. 125) in a characteristic lament. He doesn't even really want the job promotion, but he feels he must accept it anyway as otherwise he would have no goals, no reason for going on (p. 141). Though realizing that his behaviour is one of merely "keeping up appearances, going through perfunctory routines"(p. 169), he seems powerless to inject meaning into his life. Wherein can it be found? Certainly not in his job, which he frequently perceives as meaningless, nor apparently in most of his family relationships which consist mostly of circular arguments about trivial topics.

Bob Slocum is so devoid of personality that he consciously or unconsciously mimics others' characteristics in order to

give himself some kind of superficial character to relate to the world. Thus his handwriting is not his own; it is copied from Tom, the office boy, with whom he worked when he was nineteen. His wife remarks that each time he talks with Kagle, who limps, he limps himself. Kagle limps because he is not whole; he has a malformation which keeps him from walking purposefully to his destination. But Slocum affects Kagle's limp; he takes it on, thus surrendering his own ability to walk upright. He wants Kagle's job and must in the end be prepared to take on certain characteristics as the price of the new job:

> I've got Kagle's job.
> "You were with Andy Kagle today," my wife says.
> "How can you tell?"
> "You're walking with a limp. Is his leg getting worse?"
> "No, why?"
> "His limp is worse than ever. You're almost staggering."
> (505)

In the end Slocum "becomes" Kagle, taking on fully the role of a crippled man, becoming crippled himself not only in his gait but also in his vision. He has thus surrendered a little more of himself to "get ahead" in the company. He has given up a little more of his wholeness and integrity, adopting a partial (crippled) vision to fit into the mold offered him by the company.

Although his assumption of Kagle's personality is perhaps the most important piece of role-playing he performs, in terms of the events of the plot, it is not the only one. It happens with many others too, in fact, with almost everyone with whom he spends some time:

> I often wonder what my own true nature is.
> Do I have one?
> I always dress well. But no matter what I put on, I always have the disquieting sensation that I am copying somebody. The problem is that I don't know who or what I really am. (65)

This happens too with members of his family. His wife is an aspect of himself that he mimics; in fact, he created her (p. 116). His daughter, too, is an aspect of himself (p. 121), as is his elder son (p. 146) and even his idiot son, Derek (p. 366). "I am all their ages," he says, "they are me." (p. 375).

The importance of Slocum's inner life, wherein he thinks about almost every conceivable aspect of his existence, is underscored by its relative length in comparison to the actual plot of the novel or the lengths of the conversations. It is in these parts that we are permitted a glimpse into the mind of this man, to see how he views himself in relation to his own life and past. And in fact we are tempted to react in a hopeless way. Time and time again we are assailed by diatribes on the fixity of his position. His reaction to the situation in which he finds himself can be described by two words: fear and control. The fear that he has for the unknown (all of the future) is outlined in the first paragraph of the book:

> I get the willies when I see closed doors. Even at work, where I am doing so well now, the sight of a closed door is sometimes enough to make me dread that something terrible is happening behind it, something that is going to affect me adversely; if I am tired and dejected from a night of lies or booze or sex or just plain nerves and insomnia, I can almost smell the disaster mounting visibly and flooding out toward me through the frosted glass panes. My hands may perspire, and my voice may come out strange. I wonder why. (1)

Slocum, like all of us, realizes that the future is a vast

unknown, and he reacts to it as he would to a threat:

> It's just that I find it impossible to know exactly what is going on behind the closed doors of all the offices on all the floors occupied by all the people in this and all the other companies in the whole world, who might do or say something, intentionally or circumstantially, that could bring me to ruin. (11)

He tries to control his life so that any change will be foreseen, but of course all his attempts are doomed to failure, because of the impossibility of being everywhere at once. Though continually assailed by what seems to him to be an ungovernable existence, he attempts to get it under control. When he fails he ends up reacting to it in a way that leaves him just a little short of being the contingent man described above by Sypher. It is his awareness that he really cannot control it, even though he tries, that separates him from this description. It is as if there were a part of him which does not respond to the commands of the ego, a part that escapes his desire to form and control his world, and thus mockingly embarasses him. But it is not only his thoughts which escape his attempts at control; so do other people. Though he would like them to be under his command, they are not. His son is the prime example of this. If his son can be thought of as the image in the book of that squirming, unpredictable thing we call life, then some sense can perhaps be made of what happens at the end of the book. The only way Slocum can control life is to end it. He is passive with regards to the series of events that occur in his outer life (he gets the promotion by waiting). When he does act, it is to preserve stasis, to keep things from changing too much. This is almost a negative

activity since it is a denial of change and life. He is controlled by the "dance" at the company, and he tries to maintain the same control over life that the company does over him. Just as his job is killing him, driving him mad with boredom (p. 169), so he, in attempting to control the vicissitudes of life, succeeds only in freezing it, by stopping it. Life goes on out of his control, or not at all.

Turning, then, to the plot, we see that it apparently offers no more reason to believe in the affirmation of the individual than Bob Slocum's world and his character. Slocum smothers his son because he can't bear to see him "suffering such agony and fright" (p. 534). But on a deeper level, he sacrifices his son, his only option for life and love, because the option does not fit in with the other role he has chosen: his new job. In doing so he confirms the idea that the appearance of reality is more important than the reality itself, to him. The death of his son represents a coming-together of all the negative aspects of the book. His son is hurt in an automobile accident, the symbol par excellence of a randomly maleficent world. This fact, that things happen in a random and ungovernable way, is the antagonist of the novel, the dragon, as it were, that in an affirming book the hero would be expected to slay.[17] Slocum does not slay it; he cannot cope with it at all. All his most horrible fears about what is happening behind the closed doors of the future are concretized in the injuring of his innocent son. Yet his son is not killed in the accident; he has been only superficially injured. Slocum kills him. Why? Because his killing him is consistent

with his desire for control. He tries to stop the screams of agony of his son by smothering him. (It is, after all, the surface reality which is more important to Slocum.) His son has also represented life, love, a peacemaker, a deeper reality than that which Slocum serves from day to day. It is no "accident" that his son's death comes at a time when he is about to take over the responsibility of his new job. To do so, to be able to function even more on a level of meaninglessness and superficiality, he must sacrifice a little more of his deeper self which his son represents. The desire to save the appearances, not to let his wife nor anyone else know the implications of his choice of a meaningless job over a role which could have led to greater authenticity, is shown in his words "Don't tell my wife" (p. 525). Echoing the words of his brother, "Don't tell Mom" (p. 3), the message is that it is only that which is known, not what really is, that is important. He goes on to assume the responsibilities of his new job, even to the point of insisting on the call reports, though he has told us before that "most of the knowledge on which [decisions are based] . . . is composed of lies" (p. 46). He is now the one who is responsible for getting rid of crazy people, and he does it with such adroitness that "Everyone seems pleased with the way [he has] taken command" (p. 530). Whether or not Slocum's killing of his son is conscious is not revealed. In fact, Heller deliberately leaves it ambiguous, an especially interesting ambiguity since it is one of the few in the novel. Most of the time we can admire Slocum for his candour and self-

honesty, and his relating of his story to us is like that of a patient to his psychiatrist. Here, however, we are left without a clue as to whether the killing was intentional or not. The ambiguity reflects the vagueness of a world where norms are far from clear, where the very threat against which the individual is seen to be striving is only indistinctly seen.

Three aspects of the form of the novel itself contribute to the impression of Heller's world-view as a hostile, threatening one offering no opportunity for freedom and fulfilment. These are, the protagonist's use of the present tense in the narration of the story; the pattern of memories which he evokes in an attempt to discover who he was and what "happened" to him; and the use of parentheses.

The action of the novel, that is, everything that "happens" as opposed to memories of past events, is recounted in the present tense. Though there is a progression of action from the early part of the book to the later, we see events not from the point of view of the protagonist looking back on what happened. Rather, we are swept along with the narrator who lives every event as it happens. Even conversations with others are usually given in the present tense. The effect of this technique is that we feel, with the narrator, that we are walking a knife-edge of happenstance. All events are seen from an eternal <u>now</u>, so that there is a feeling of being cut off from the past and unrelated to what may happen in the future. Paradoxically, however, this transient present is so small that in order to stay within its boundaries, Slocum must somehow

"freeze" time, somewhat like a snapshot. As soon as he allows forward motion, things begin to slide away from the fixity he must have in order to know what is going on. The action is recounted in the present tense since that is the way Slocum would like reality (not the way it <u>is</u> in <u>Something Happened</u>): like a microscope slide or still picture, examinable, analyzeable, quantifiable. He tries to make himself, and life, stand still so he can grasp it:

> I have had to stand still for the longest time now, it seems. Nearly every time I search back I come upon myself standing still inside some memory, sculpted there, or lying flattened as though by strokes from the brush of an illustrator or in transparent blue or purple stains on the glass slide of a microscope or on the single frame of a strip of colored motion picture film. (399)
>
> I have this unfading picture in my mind (this candid snapshot, ha ha), and it can never be altered . . . of this festive, family birthday celebration in honor of my little girl at which my old mother and my infant daughter are joyful together for perhaps the very last time. And there I am between them, sturdy, youthful, prospering, virile (fossilized and immobilized as though between bookends . . .) (194)
>
> I have my wife, my daughter, and my son for reference: I am all their ages. They are me . . . The tableau is a dream. The scene is a frieze.
> "Freeze."
> None of them moves. All of them sit like stuffed dolls. And I can perceive:
> "This is how I am when I was then."
> And:
> "That was how I will feel when."
> Now they can move.

Note the confusion of tenses in the last quotation. Past, present and future all run together and are frozen into a momentary now. Life, however, once so fixed, is seen as not going on; in effect, not living. This use of the present tense and its implications is perfectly in accord with the

concept of the contingent self discussed above, as it shows us the protagonist in constant relation with the world around him on a moment-to-moment basis, but apparently not able to gain any real learning from a fixed past nor any solace from what might have been a promising, hopeful future. He is indeed conditioned by past events in that his present situation in life has been affected by them, but he is unable to move out of what is a relatively static situation to move forward to a new future. Slocum must live in the present, because to him the past is not his own, and the future is only to be feared as something which is happening behind closed doors, being unknown. He is the man who

> waits, impatiently, or indifferently, for something to happen, someone to turn up. Having decided that life must finally come to him, not he to life, he has so misconceived the requirements of his structure of care that he knows something has gone wrong. But what is wrong is not that something has not happened, but that he will not move out of his way station into a future, taking the initiative to make things happen. Fatigue or failure, of course, may excuse his attitude, but it is more likely that he has enjoyed the easy cost of justification by misery. And so he drifts, bored, miserable, uncertain of everything except that nothing worthwhile depends on himself.[18]

Indeed nothing does depend on him because, cut off from the past and fearing the future, frozen in the present, he is unable to act, unable to realize that possibly his vision is not a whole one. Finally when he assumes the new position of power, a promotion which has come to him because of his waiting for it to happen rather than because of his active manipulation, he seems once again cut off from all the events that went before:

> I meet a much higher class of executive at Arthur Baron's now when he has us to dinner. I play golf with a much better class of people. (Swish.) (529)

Thus the entire thought process of Bob Slocum is reflected in a prose that flows on from moment to moment, even the recollection of past events being not true flashbacks, but mere remembrances seen safely from the vantage point of the present. His saga is interspersed with all kinds of memories, but there are several recurring ones, which must be examined thoroughly for some sense to be made of them.

The most common and perhaps most important of these concerns his work in an automobile casualty insurance company, where he worked at the age of eighteen, and where he became infatuated with twenty-one-year-old Virginia Markowitz, who is always visualized sitting under a Western Union clock. The callowness of his youth prevents him from seducing Virginia, though she is apparently willing. All he is able to do is to meet her temporarily in the storage room downstairs where dead records are filed, for a quick necking session, before their tryst is interrupted by her saying "someone's coming." The first time he remembers her at length (p. 69ff.) is when he is reminded of how he developed his handwriting by mimicking the handwriting of another person in the office. This is significant because we are reminded one more time of his role-playing behaviour, a behaviour that he follows when attempting to seduce Virginia:

> She kept asking me to get a room. I didn't know how. I asked Tom how to go about renting a hotel room, and he told me, but even after he told me, I still didn't feel I knew how. (77)

Slocum relives the memory of Virginia with regret, but he still does not realize that it was his own inauthenticity which made it impossible for him to seduce her, and his own inability to see the connectedness between the memory of Virginia and his present life which leads to his present blindness:

> I do not always feel securely connected to my legs or to my own past. The cable of continuity is not unbroken; it is not thick and strong; it wavers and fades, wears away in places to slender, frayed strands, breaks. Much of what I remember about me does not seem to be mine. Mountainous segments of my history seem to be missing. There are yawning gulfs into which large chunks of me may have fallen. (472)

For him, Virginia is a dead record, filed away in the corridors of his mind. Like many of his memories, she is a dead record because, though aware of her, she has no apparent effect on his present life. The image of her beneath the Western Union clock, its hands fixed in a static and hopeless frieze, communicating only fixedness and death, is an apt one because we are reminded of Slocum's constant attempts to reduce every living process to a system of logic (a dead record) which would accommodate his vision. This happens not only with Virginia but with other memories, as well as the present processes of life (his son) which do not exhibit enough fixity to be filed away. His repeated descent into the storage room, an image which reminds us of the hero's descent into the underworld, does not result in his bringing anything back into the upper world, that is, the world of the present, in order to revivify and rejuvenate it; he returns empty-handed and is compelled to make the same trip over and over again in a vain attempt to discover that lost part of himself that was left behind.

He sees himself fixed in the present, trapped between the past and the future. Though he feels he would like "another chance" he doesn't really think things could have been any different:

> I could not have done anything different. I did what I could. Given this circle, no part could be different. Given these parts, the circle was inevitable. (376)

Besides that of Virginia, Slocum feels conditioned by another frequently-recurring memory, that of his dying mother. She died of a stroke, a cerebral vascular accident, an interesting juxtaposition of images in a book which is concerned with accidents and flukes of nature, and whose tale is told through the mind of one narrator. His mother's last words affect him profoundly:

> "You're no good," she said. There was no voice. It was more a shaping of the words with her lips and a faint rustle of breath. I was surprised, and I bent forward over the cavity of her mouth that I was no longer able to look at straightly and asked her to repeat what she had said. "You're just no good."
> Those were the last words I think I heard her speak to me. If I live to be a hundred and ninety years old, I will never hear any more from her. If the world lasts three billion more, there will be no others. (510)

He repeatedly tries to save the appearances by not admitting to his mother the seriousness of her disability (p. 95, p. 169). He himself is aware of the importance of his mother's words, but not of the effect they have had in shaping his mind, an effect as great as the meninges which surround his brain (p. 511). Thus he is indeed conditioned by and connected to his past although he tries not to be. Apart from the content of the memories dwelt upon so unsuccessfully, their form also reveals that this is so. The pattern of impingement of memories on his present life is done in a mosaical way, suggesting

a constant dipping into memory by one part of his psyche, while the rest stays firmly anchored in the present. The memories of his mother, of Virginia, and of himself are visited again and again but all this while Slocum is living in the "now", making the same mistakes and viewing the world from the only vantage point he feels he could have had. At no time are we presented with a memory entire of itself. Rather, the memory is touched on, left, returned to again, and finally worked over several times from different angles (the same technique as in Catch-22), until it paradoxically wends itself into the fabric of day-to-day life, still partly unknown to Slocum. Memories are stated and then developed contrapuntally like the themes of a musical fugue,[19] thus suggesting by their form the ever-impinging presence and effect of the world of happenstance. Their content -- Slocum's declarations -- would have us believe in their relative unimportance, but their form says otherwise. One critic says in talking about the form of Catch-22 that

> The ultimate effect of this technique is one of stasis; there is no sense of a Joycean character always moving through the present, carrying the past with him; the effect is of an eternal now -- a fixed, cruel cosmos filled with the fixed venality of the aggressors . . . [20]

This comment applies just as well to Something Happened, except that the "fixed venality of the aggressors" shows up in the later novel in the malign indifference of the world around Slocum, the eternal now paralleling the reduction of his range of choice to the present.

Another formal device used to imply the non-affirming

qualities of the world of Something Happened, and especially the vision we get of that world as filtered through the mind of Bob Slocum, is the use of parentheses to include side-thoughts. Slocum is intelligent, and he wants to use his intelligence to cover every eventuality before it occurs. His anxious attempts at foreknowledge, his overwhelming desire to control and know everything, lead him to use parentheses to indicate a thought of lesser importance which must, however, be thought about, so that no possibility is left unexplored. The use of parentheses expresses not only the insecurity and anxiety of the "hero", but also his attempt at control, to gather together all the strands of his life and to take command of the situation. It is as if the parentheses were used to set aside a thought momentarily until it can be more fully explored later. The control which he attempts is admittedly futile. Even he refers to reality as an "ungovernable whirl" (p. 134) and he often feels he really has no control.

I will discuss now the aspects of the novel which I feel affirm, in that they present a benign or even benevolent world, a world in which freedom of choice is possible, as well as a portrait of the individual who is able to react against this world even when it is threatening and hostile, so as to grow, fulfil himself, and affirm his own worth.

If we are to infer any positive values at all in this book, any expression of human freedom and worth, it must be in the form of the novel. An examination of the basic patterning of Something Happened will reveal that there are really two types of things going on, an inner and an outer narration, each

characterized by a particular style and form. An examination of this dichotomy will reveal how its formal features relate to a division between reality and appearance. Next, an examination of the reliability of the narrator himself will be made, to determine whether he can be considered a spokesman for the norms and values of the author; then I will consider whether these norms can be better ascertained in an ironic treatment of Slocum's narration, and/or in a consideration of other characters who might possibly express them. Finally, if Slocum himself is not a mouthpiece for self-affirmation and self-fulfilment, I will try to discover what role he does play, and assess possible difficulties of the technique of unreliable narration.

The history of the novel has shown a shift away from an emphasis on external reality and events in the outer world to a focussing of attention on the thoughts and feelings of the characters and their inner reality, at the expense of the traditional "story". Thus recent literature has been described as a mimesis of subjective, internalized reality, and language itself a means of exposition of the internal world of the writer.[21] The shift of importance away from action to thought, as it were, is readily apparent in Something Happened, where dramatic interludes, conversations, and plot development play a far smaller role quantitatively than do the worries, ruminations, thoughts and memories in the mind of Bob Slocum. As mentioned above, the entire plot can be recapitulated in a few pages, although Something Happened is by no means a short book. In the chapter entitled "The Office in Which I Work"

only fourteen of the fifty-three pages constitute conversation, and even some of the conversation is imaginary in that it exists only in the mind of the protagonist, and has no link with external reality. The proportion is approximately the same for the rest of the book. We are, then, presented with what amounts to a vast prose soliloquy of the narrator, briefly interrupted here and there by plot action and conversation. This division of the novel into interior-exterior reality parallels the thematic dichotomy of reality-appearances with which the book is concerned and which has been discussed above. Though on the one hand Slocum is very much a man of the surface, relating to both his fellow employees and his family in a superficial way, we, the readers, are permitted to peer inside his head to observe what goes on there. We are even allowed to see into his dreams, and it is particularly in regard to them that we see what to him is most real, for he tells us that when confronted with unpleasant, exterior reality he represses it:

> . . . we will have to send Derek away early to a home for retarded people and never look at him again. We will erase him, cross him out, file him away -- even though we go to visit him two or three times the first year, one or two times the second year, and after that perhaps not at all, we will never really look at him again. We will put him out of sight, think of him less and less. He will visit <u>us</u>, maybe, in dreams. (118)

> I will not let myself cope with such human distress; I refuse to accept such reality; I dump it all right down into my subconscious and sit on it as hard as I can. Let it all come out in bad dreams if it has to. I forget them anyway as soon as I wake up. (95)

The last part of this reflection on dreams is untrue, since there are many occasions throughout the book where he not only

remembers and recounts his dreams, but allows them the quality of being the most real of all his behaviour:

> Dreams, even very bad, weird dreams, are my only contact with reality when I sleep . . . (157)

> It is there in the darkness of sleep, when no one is looking, not even ourselves, that our true rudimentary spirits emerge. (489)

Given that dreams, then, are one of the chief sources of reality for Slocum, what do they reveal about him? First of all, his immobility:

> (I have dreams, unpleasant dreams, that relate, I think, to my wanting to speak at a company convention, and they are always dreams that involve bitter frustration and humiliation and insurmountable difficulty in getting from one location to another.) (26)

Fixed as he is in a contingent present and unable to see any way out of his plight, he feels powerless and out of control, no matter how much he tries to take "command" at any point of the narration. The reality of the case is that he has little control, little say over his destiny or fate; he is almost completely controlled by factors impinging on him from his past or present situation. He is powerless to act, as the dream about castration shows (p.148). The threat made against him by family or work translates itself into a strange black male with murderous intent:

> . . . a strange man is entering illegally through the door, which I have locked, and drawing near, a burglar, rapist, kidnapper or assassin; he seems to be Black but changes; I think he is carrying a knife; I try to scream but can make no sound. (155)

That he is <u>not</u> in control is a point to be remembered as it affects his reliability as a narrator. Secondly, his identification with his boy, already fairly clearly established in

other ways, is made even more firm by the fact that he and his son are equated in dreams: "He perishes, but the tragedy, in my dreams, is always mine." (146)

For Slocum, then, reality is found not in the exterior world of action, but inside, and particularly in dreams. Though he will allow exterior reality to influence him enough to wear the right clothes and put on the correct mask, its relative unimportance is shown not only in the scarce treatment of it in the novel but also in the way in which he reacts to the offer of a job promotion rather than acting on his own initiative, and by his own admission that this side of things is trivial:

> I am lacking in sequence for everything but my succession of jobs, love affairs, and fornications; and these are not important; none matters more than any of the others; (123-124)

Paradoxically, however, it is to this superficial, quotidian reality that he eventually submits in order to keep up appearances.

The style with which the few encounters with external reality are treated is usually flat and laconic, as opposed to the more generous and occasionally flamboyant way in which inner reality is treated. An example of each type will illustrate this. First, the prosaic style used in conversation:

> "What the hell am I supposed to do?"
> "I'm better than you," she tells me.
> "You want a new house, don't you? You liked the idea that I was getting a better job, didn't you?"
> "I used to think I wasn't," she continues, "But I am. You like to think you're better than me. But you're not. I'm the one who's better."
> "Yeah? And you'd be better still if you'd lay off the wine in the afternoon."
> "Your mother was right."
> "Leave her out of it."
> "You're just no good."

"I told you to leave her out of it."
"I never thought I was."
"You're always bothering me about money, aren't you?"
"No, I don't."
"The hell you don't."
"And neither do they. We don't bother you about money that much."
"And you wonder why I don't tell you I love you, don't you?"
"I never thought I was good at anything." There is undisguised scorn, calm, measured contempt that I've never seen in her before. "You don't help much there."
"Kagle isn't sore at me. Why are you?"
"Isn't he?"
"No. In fact, he's the one who recommended me to replace him."
"No, he didn't," she jeers, with a curling lip and a belittling shake of her head. "You knew months ago. He just found out."
"You're getting good at this."
"You taught me."

Though emotions are running high here, we do not get any idea of Slocum's inner feelings except those which we infer from the conversation itself and the limited commentary thereon. In fact, there is little if any communication here, even between the speakers. It is ritualized dialogue, a "dance" of sorts like the kind of dance Slocum does to the tune of the "caller" at work. As the last line indicates, it is a dance that he knows very well, having taught his wife. The dialogue is not supposed to reveal inner thoughts and feelings; it serves rather to mask and disguise them, just as Slocum's ostensible behaviour at work is supposed to disguise reality. Compare the above with the following, a reflection on Derek, his idiot son:

> Derek can't say anything. I wonder what impressions flow through his mind (he does have one, I must force myself to remember, and ears and eyes that see and hear) and what sense he is able to make of any of them. I would not care to wiretap <u>his</u> head. I would hear much crackling, I think. I think of him as receiving stimuli linearly in unregulated currents of sights and sounds streaming into one side of his head and

> going out the other into the air as though like radio signals through a turnip or through some finely-tuned, capstan-shaped, intricate and highly sensitive instrument of ceramic, tungsten and glass that does everything but work. (381)

Here the author is using not only a vastly larger vocabulary but also a couple of metaphors (electronic device, vegetable) that convey succinctly the feelings that Slocum has about his son. Though of course such commentary and diction would look out of place in a conversation, a commentary <u>on</u> the conversation, either during or after it, could have been made, but was not. The impression is that Slocum's consciousness is zeroed in on itself rather than facing outward. One critic comments apropos of this inward-facing attitude;

> One need not be a Jungian in order to see how important it is for a man to face his "shadow" . . . if a man does not acknowledge the dark in him in order to struggle with it, he will become its victim.[22]

Though Slocum does indeed face his shadow in dreams, the knowledge thus discovered is never brought to the surface, to the external world, in order to change it. Just as his descent into the storage room in the automobile insurance company results in no discovery, no fertilization or revivification of the upper world, so is his descent into dreams unproductive.

This split between exterior and interior reality, between two different ways of looking at things, is reflected by another formal device which occurs repeatedly in the novel. By reminding us that there are always at least two ways of looking at things, juxtaposition makes us aware of an alternate vision. This device usually works by juxtaposing two opposed statements in a short, terse manner. It sometimes occurs as two paragraphs

as in the following example:

> Who cares if I get Kagle's job or not? Or if I do get into young Jane in the Art Department's pants before Christmas or that I was never able to graduate myself into laying older-girl Virginia on the desk in the storeroom of the automobile casualty insurance company or in a bed in a hotel, although I did squeeze her good tits many times and feel the smooth inside of her thighs?
> I care. I want the money. I want the prestige.. I want the acclaim, and congratulations . . . (124)

However the technique is much more effective when used as a summing-up of a point which was made before, as the following examples illustrate:

> [My daughter] does not yield so readily to emotion when my fight is with her. When my fight is with her, she tries (with fortitude, perversity, with face-saving spite) not to let me make her cry (not to give me the satisfaction of seeing I can affect her even remotely. I am a matter of "supreme indifference" to her), as though that is what I want to do. (It often is.) I always desist as soon as I see I can, curbing my own spiteful intentions and drawing back from her mercifully.
> (Nothing is suppressed in our family.)
> (In our family, everything is suppressed.) (240)

> "Be good," we fire at [our son]. "Don't be afraid. You can do it. Try. Try harder. You can be anything you want to be. Don't do that. You're getting me angry."
> (Maybe it is for his own good.)
> (And maybe it isn't.) (242)

> (There are nights after drinking a lot or thinking very hard about matters at the office that I am unable to turn off my mind for hours or even slow down to a governable tempo the free-flight of disjointed ideas from all sources that go racing through my brain. I never think of anything good. I sometimes think of something good.) (489)

> By now, my wife and I have had our fill -- are sick and glutted to the teeth -- of psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists, neurosurgeons, speech therapists, psychiatric social workers, and any of all the others we've been

> to that I may have left out, with their inability to help and their lofty, patronizing attitudes that we are not to blame, ought not to let ourselves feel guilty, and have nothing to be ashamed of. All young doctors, I'm convinced, strive to be beetle-browed, and all older ones have succeeded.
>
> "Prick!" I have wanted to scream at them like an animal. "Prick! Prick! Prick! Prick! Prick!Prick!" I have wanted to shriek at all of them like a screech owl (whatever that is, including the two I went to see briefly in secret about myself). Why can't the simple-minded fools understand that we <u>want</u> to feel guilty, <u>must</u> feel guilty if we're to do the things we have to?
>
> Unperturbed, they would answer equably that my screaming at them was a way of trying to relieve myself of blame and call the repetition <u>perseveration</u>.
>
> And they would be right.
>
> And they would be wrong. (497)

> Every river in the world, without exception, flows from north to south as it empties into the sea. Except those that don't, and the laws of the conservation of matter and energy stipulate harshly and impartially that energy and matter can either (sic) be created nor (sic) destroyed. (493)

This device is used for two reasons. One is, as I have mentioned, to illustrate to us that there is always more than one way to construe reality; events can be interpreted differently by different minds. Though Slocum is able to look at reality in different ways, it is apparent that the relative importance of his inner world, the world of dreams and imaginings, is more "real" and important to him than the exterior world, the world of disguised reality and ritualized behaviour. However, to safeguard his inner world, to keep it hidden behind "closed doors" and under control, he must eventually capitulate to the "outer" world, accepting the job offered him in exchange for a piece of himself -- his son. Only thus can he remain safe in his thoughts, in "control" of the world

inside his head, not letting the company suspect that he might be a little crazy, and thus unsuitable for his work.[23] Though admitting by the use of the juxtaposed phrases that there is an alternative -- an alternative further made clear by the son-Derek choice -- he is not able to put this knowledge into practise. His viewpoint of life is too narrow; he concentrates on the inner reality, obsessing himself with all kinds of horrible imaginings, at the expense of the world outside and the people in it.

The device of juxtaposition does more than this, however. It also serves to remind us that reality itself is shaky, often only a "saving of appearances" or a convenient model agreed upon by a large number of people in order to get on with business. That this is so is particularly exemplified by the last quotation given, in which "rules" of geography and physics are shown for what they are, models to help us understand reality, and not reality itself. Thus, as implied in the quotation, every scientific rule is "true" or "real" until superseded or disproved. This use of radical juxtaposition

> . . . is a dominant characteristic of the modern fictional sensibility [which] has become a structural principle in the novel.[24]

What this means is that when we ask the question about the dichotomy of the book, "which is real?", we are asking a question which admits of no answer because of the way it is phrased. Neither is real, or at least, neither is more

important than the other; both ways of seeing things, both inner and outer vision are necessary to a complete cognizance of the world, or at least as complete as we can possibly get. Since we are part of the world we are thus unable to see it as something completely other than ourselves. The world in its entirety, which Slocum is continually trying to grasp or control, is as unknowable as what goes on behind closed doors. The use of juxtaposition in Something Happened not only presents us with the possibility of a choice, although Slocum does not always make the right one; it also tells us something about his reliability as a narrator. If there are (at least) two ways of looking at every issue, one of which is chosen by the mind telling the story, then we may ask why a particular point of view has been taken, and what does it tell us about the narrator? Slocum consistently chooses an obsessive, worried, inner-oriented point of view throughout the novel. His obsession with his image, with what people will think about him, with all the sordid and inane games he plays with people, is an incomplete point of view at best, and at worst a failure or refusal to live. In desperately examining and re-examining each event, in worrying about every unknown or closed door, Slocum refuses to be spontaneous, to allow life to surprise him, to feel joy. His most common reaction to life is "so what?", a cynical remark expressive of an exhausted spirit. We, the readers, must be aware where he is not, remembering that there are other ways of seeing and being. There are, in fact, ironies that even Slocum is

not aware of. He is an unreliable narrator; that is, we cannot necessarily believe that what he says is really what happens. We must try for ourselves to discover what really "happened" in Something Happened, using clues such as irony and the negligible contribution of other characters to do this.

The division of the novel into two different styles, reflecting the reality-appearance dichotomy, and the reinforcement of this division by the use of juxtaposed paragraphs and phrases, are not the only clues we get that Slocum's vision is inexact. He himself tells us as much in describing his job:

> People in the Market Research Department are never held to blame for conditions they discover outside the company that place us at a competitive disadvantage. What is, is -- and they are not expected to change reality, but merely to find it if they can and suggest ingenious ways of describing it. To a great extent, that is the nature of my own work . . . (24)

He spends most of his time disguising reality, to himself as well as to others, and as Arthur Baron tells him, he does his job well (p. 54). It is surely no exaggeration to say that he not only fools himself most of the time, but the reader too, if he is not very careful. Yet we may infer that it is not the author's intention that we ascertain his norms through Slocum. The opposite is indeed the case, and we are left with the impression that our narrator is not reliable, maybe even obsessed to the point of insanity. This impression is reinforced by three things: the frequency of brain-damage imagery; the narrator's identification with Derek, his idiot son; and

his own suspicions that he is mad.

Of the many recurring images in the book (closed doors, dead files, bodily injury, frozen time), the ones relating to mental retardation, cerebrovascular accidents, and the anatomy of the brain are among the most common. Slocum repeatedly harps on the brain damage of his son, Derek, the "brain tumours and cerebral hemmorhages" he gets from arguing with his family (p. 143); his mother's stroke (p. 228, inter alia); his worries about "brain tumours, the thirteenth largest killer of undivorced men [his] age in Connecticut with three children, two cars, and an opportunity for a better job" (p. 420); meningitis and encephalitis (p. 379), etc. His mother's stroke and the delicate tissues of the brain are touched on poignantly and brought together on the last page of a chapter which starts off with a resolution to put his son in a home. The irony is perfect and here it is conscious:

> The linings of my brain. (The linings of my brain, they give me such a pain.) The linings of my brain are three in number and are called collectively the meninges. They surround it on the outside. The innermost is called the pia mater. It is a delicate, fibrous, and highly vascular membrane (gorged with veins and capillaries, I suppose). I feel pressure against it from inside. Things bubble and shove against it as though they might explode. It reminds me at times of a cheese fondue. The pia mater, reinforced by the two supporting layers, the arachnoid and the dura mater, holds fast against the outward expanding pressure of my brain, pushes back. At times, there is pain. The name pia mater derives from an imperfect translation into Latin of Arabic words that meant (ha, ha) tender mother. (511)

The irony is that it is his mother's last words to him ("You're just no good") that have haunted him, that have become one

of the things that have happened, conditioning his reaction in the present.

These disorders of the nervous system are all indicators that Slocum becomes less and less reliable as a narrator as the book progresses. In the end he kills his healthy son and manages to "keep Derek longer" (p. 527). Thus he chooses the brain-damaged son over the healthy one. Unable to control the world and the people in it, especially his son, who is too vital and alive to be subjected to the fixity of Slocum's vision, he must destroy what he cannot control. Though this is not a conscious choice, it is unconsciously expressive of his desire to control. This is the ultimate action of the book, the "happening" which is not happenstance at all, but the last action of a man who is trying to govern an existence which he perceives as threatening, but to which he finally surrenders. But what a surrender! The dry, laconic style of the last chapter "Nobody Knows What I've Done" has the bizarre tone of a schizophrenic's narrative, one who is desperately repressing all emotions and memories to hold on to the last traces of reality. For Slocum it is too late. Instead of choosing to emulate his boy, the "peacemaker" (p. 101), the "Socrates" (p. 286), the giver, he eventually "becomes" brain-damaged Derek, who he has always felt has had an "incrimining resemblance to a secret [him]" (pp. 365-366). Derek is really very much a part of our "hero" ("I swear to Christ I imagined him into existence" [499]), and in the end

we see the resemblance.

Finally, an even more direct indicator that Slocum's perceptions cannot be trusted occurs toward the end of the book, when he tells us directly that his mind is failing him:

> . . . I am more and more prey to weird visions and experiences. (Some tickle my fancy. Some do not.)
> The day before yesterday, I walked into a luncheonette for a rare roast beef sandwich on a seeded roll and thought I found my barber working behind the counter.
> "What are you doing in a luncheonette?" I asked.
> "I'm not your barber," he answered.
> I was afraid I was losing my mind.
> A week ago I looked out a taxi window and saw Jack Green begging in the street in the rain, dressed in a long wet overcoat and ragged shoes. He was a head taller, thinner, pale and gaunt. It wasn't him. But that's what I saw.
> I was afraid I was losing my wits.
> Yesterday I looked out the window of a bus and thought I saw Charlie Chaplin strolling along the avenue and believed I knew him. It wasn't Charlie Chaplin and I didn't know him. (517-518)

What is the purpose of using the technique of an unreliable narrator? Wayne Booth has suggested several reasons why an author would choose to create such a persona. One among these, the use of irony, is possibly the most important to a reading of Something Happened:

> In the irony with which we are concerned, the speaker himself is the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in collusion, behind the speaker's back, agreeing on the standard by which he is found wanting. . . . What all this amounts to is that on this moral level we discover a kind of collaboration which can be one of the most rewarding of all reading experiences. To collaborate with the author by providing the source of an allusion or by deciphering a pun is one thing. But to collaborate with him by providing mature moral judgement is a far more exhilarating sport.[25]

But Slocum is aware of some ironies. Much of the novel's humour and thus its affirmation comes from the laughter pro-

voked by the reader's willing collaboration with the narrator, laughing at the world with him. The parenthetical "ha, ha", so often repeated in Something Happened, is the epitome of the conscious irony of the narrator. It occurs every few pages, but only a few examples need be cited here to illustrate its use as an ironic choral device:

> I can out-ail any of [my family] at anything but hysterectomies if I want to make the effort, any of them but Derek, who begins with certain congenital handicaps that are impossible for me to overcome. (Ha, ha.) (424)

Here the irony derives from his laughing at himself -- so desperately trying for control, but quite unable to do anything about his son's idiocy.

> Three layers of tissue envelop my brain and spinal cord and are called, collectively, meninges. I was delighted to find out I had three. I didn't know I had any. Meningitis, then, is an inflammation of the head. Meningitis appears frequently on military installations. Civilians get encephalitis, which is an inflammation of the substance of the brain and is often mistaken for sleeping sickness. People doze off into paralysis. It is another good cure for insomnia. I have grown too old now to worry foolishly about meningitis. I don't have chest pains yet. I have exchanged my infantile fears of meningitis for more adult infantile fears. I never give meningitis a thought anymore. (Ha, ha.) Meningitis kills. So do bullets in the head. (379-380).

Here the laughter, apart from that inspired by the little joke about insomnia, is caused by the transparent lie about not worrying about meningitis. Apart from the lengthy section quoted, evidence enough that the disease worries him, there are many other references in the book to not only meningitis but a host of other nervous system disorders. What the "ha, ha"

serves to do generally, then, is to remind us just to what extent Slocum is aware of his obsessions, fears, problems -- even of his one-sided vision. His awareness of himself, his attempt to force everything into consciousness (to see behind closed doors), is one of the aspects of his personality which makes him attractive to us and thus more than just a straw man to be knocked down or laughed at. Maybe he is even aware just how close he treads to the limits of sanity, which would explain why he says he has visited psychiatrists or psychiatrist-like people in the past (p. 497). He is very much more real as a character than Yossarian, even, and the criticism of "flatness" which has been applied to characters in Catch-22 certainly does not pertain to him. Indeed part of the affirmation expressed in Something Happened is to be found in the complexity, depth, and likeableness of Slocum, who voices for us many of our own unconscious fears and obsessions. Slocum is even conscious of his own unconscious, and so much of the irony of the book is conscious too. And it is in this conscious irony that a lot of the humour is found, humour that is affirming in that it allows the narrator at least momentarily to be free of the shackles of his world, to stand apart from what is smothering him and laugh at it. Though the laughter may be dark, it does allow some fleeting wisdom. "How shall I die? Let me count the ways," he says (p. 411), and we and he laugh at the implied comparison between death and love. He is aware, too, of the phoniness of much of his surface behaviour

(even his initials represent "bullshit") and he is just as able as we are to laugh at the baloney he hands out in this conversation with a prostitute:

> She was relieved I wasn't angry.
> "You're all right down there too," she complimented me.
> "I know. You can keep the money. I enjoyed it."
> "Did I show you a good time? Was I really good?"
> "As good as the best. And I've been to Paris."
> "Really?"
> "I've even been to Bologna."
> "I don't know about that."
> "That's where they really know how to slice it." (404)

It is not necessary to quote further examples of the ironic use of humour; the book is replete with it, and it sets the basic tone. This humour, the ability not to take himself seriously, is one of the greatest points of affirmation in the novel. By standing apart from himself and his situation, the narrator is telling us that all is not lost, the situation is not hopeless, some part of life is still, at least, funny. Interestingly, the tone of humour, sustained almost throughout the book, ends at the death of his son; the last chapter is narrated in a flat, deadpan tone. Some things are not to be laughed at.

This leads us into unconscious irony. Slocum repeatedly fears for his son's life, but it is he who kills him. He does this not consciously and deliberately, but unconsciously by denying life, change, and spontaneity; the death of his boy is a symbol for the death in himself of that last chance to live. Up until that point he is potentially "alive":

> There is always at least one second of awe, of raw curiosity in which I am breathless at the possibilities of what is about to be disclosed and offered me. (349)

But the events of the plot as well as the change in style at the end of the book indicate that a process of death is complete. Slocum is as dead as his son, only a zombie who will go through the motions of being "in command". He has said before in referring to Martha, the typist, that "maybe in every company there is always at least one person who is going crazy slowly." (p. 17). In the end we wonder if he isn't the one.

It seems apparent, then, that we are to take what affirmative norms we can from the irony in this novel. If, because of the clues presented above (unreliabliity of narrator both implied and expressed, his link with brain disorder, his association with Derek and his choice of him over his healthy son), we must treat his narrative and behaviour as unhealthy, then the author's norms can be inferred from the ironic denial of Bob Slocum's half-vision. Slocum is always trying for control, a control and knowledge which kills, and we may infer from the way this is portrayed as impossible and even deadly in the novel that life cannot be controlled, that human personalities are not so easily known and fixed as Slocum would have them. The mystery of life and of another person's being flourishes regardless of our attempts to quantify and know it, and in the end we are reduced to merely disguising reality when we try to pin it down. Furthermore, an ironic reading of Some-

thing Happened would lead us to believe that the author is implying that some kind of marriage of the inner and outer lives must be made, that our inner world of memories, dreams and reflections can only make sense insofar as our beliefs and desires impinge themselves on reality. This is the antithesis of Slocum's failure to bring back something from the world of dreams, or from the not-so-dead records in the storage room. We are being made aware that a joining of the two visions, the inner, subjective one and the outer, more commonly accepted reality, is necessary for a healthy, whole life. Furthermore, exterior reality itself must be shaped so that it approximates as closely as possible the realization of our inner desires. The synthesis of these apparent opposites must be effected; a kind of union or "mysterium conjunctionis" is needed. This, of course, is just what Bob Slocum does not do. The operation of his daily life as far as quotidian reality is concerned is, as shown above, largely a matter of fate and happenstance. If, as he says, he realizes the stupidity and futility of his job and the inanity of his life, and if he feels powerless to alter it, then the antithesis of this would be that he does have the power to change it, by welding together his split consciousness. In other words, interpreting Slocum's plight ironically, we see him as a kind of Hamlet (without the tragic proportions) who spends too much time thinking about acting and not enough time doing it. He is in-sane, that is, not healthy, because split into two apparently

opposed worlds, which really should be unified. His superficially correct behaviour is ironically seen as incorrect, as it is in fact a symptom of the split that he embodies. And finally and perhaps most importantly, as an unreliable narrator, the choice he makes for Derek is the wrong one. His other boy is the one he should have chosen to become.

This book is a satire, falling into Frye's Phase I of comedy or satire, in which there is no displacement of the satirized world, and in which the irony tends toward tragedy because of the main character's being in a lower state of freedom than the reader.[26] Thus in Something Happened the degree of irony is far greater than in Catch-22, lending to Bob Slocum something of the air of a stoic, whence comes much of our admiration for him. The stoicism is of the type that maintains that "the practical and immediate situation is likely to be worthy of more respect than the theoretical explanation of it."[27] The closeness with tragedy is felt when we listen to this lonely man's Job-like lamentations, and see him struggling to understand a puzzling and painful world. We must admire him, and even though we may deprecate his day-to-day methods, we are impressed by the way he keeps on.

Slocum himself, then, is an ambiguous figure, who at once repels and attracts us. An examination of his older son may give us some information on what affirmative norms the author is espousing, for if he represents the choice that Slocum should have made, then, in a way, he is the "tragic hero" of

opposed worlds, which really should be unified. His superficially correct behaviour is ironically seen as incorrect, as it is in fact a symptom of the split that he embodies. And finally and perhaps most importantly, as an unreliable narrator, the choice he makes for Derek is the wrong one. His boy is who he should have chosen to become.

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the book, except that his death redeems no one, save perhaps the perspicacious reader. He is indeed a peacemaker, the one who brings the family together when they fight (p. 101). Not only does he bring them together; he transports them (p. 152), and by so doing evokes and stimulates that love which they all have hidden inside them. He teaches like Socrates ("know thyself"), but his lessons go unheeded; and like Socrates and Christ, he is put to death by an agent of that society which he would have redeemed. His principal lessons seem to be "better to give than to receive" (this is the point of the long episode concerning his giving away nickels) and "better to play and enjoy life than to compete and fight" (his experiences at summer school). By his death it seems we are being told that such attitudes are anomalous in our society and, as with Yossarian, the only way to save oneself from the threat or danger of the world is to flee from it. The boy is so full of life and love that he represents life itself, and when Slocum kills him he snuffs out his own life and his last chance for change. The boy, when faced with a menacing or hostile environment, turns his other cheek and shows it his love; and in doing this he manifests his freedom. He is a Christ-figure (although because of the ironic mode in which the book is written he does not save anyone in the world of the novel); he is, as Christ was, in the world, but not corrupted or tainted by it. Perhaps this is why he has to die; just before his death he is showing signs that the world of Bob Slocum may be making inroads even on

him (p. 512ff.) He is having trouble coping with the demands of modern life, worrying about assignments and responsibilities, when all he really wants to do is celebrate the "miracle of his survival" (p. 201). He is finally unable to become a miniature Bob Slocum, maybe because he is too full of life to capitulate so soon.

Finally, it must be remembered that all we see of Bob Slocum's boy is filtered through the narrator's eyes. Perhaps it is somewhat idealized. One wonders how valid his creation of his son is, whom he sees as a Lilliputian Jesus Christ and/or Socrates; is it, as is everything else in the novel, a reflection of himself and an idealization, a frantic grasping for stability in a world full of chaos?

I have tried to show in this section that there is some limited affirmation in Something Happened, and that it can be found in an examination of certain formal features of the novel, namely, the external-internal dichotomy; the unreliability of the narrator; positive qualities of Bob Slocum himself; and in an ironic reading of the novel, involving both unconscious and conscious irony, and the humour connected with it; and the affirmation offered by the other characters in the book. I will turn briefly now to a consideration of the questions, to whom is Slocum speaking? What is the reason for his monologue? And finally, why has Heller chosen this type of narration?

Bob Slocum's narration is an attempt, like all of his behaviour, to find out what is going on behind closed doors. It is a bringing-to-consciousness of his unconscious mind,

a verbalization of the mysteries which lie within, perhaps a relation to us, his psychiatrist. Perhaps it is necessary for him as a catharsis, a coming to terms with those inner events which do so much to shape his life. To a large extent, however, the attempt fails, and at the end of the book the changed style, serious and laconic, betrays a lapse back into that day-to-day reality which forms the lesser important part of his reality, but to which he defers in order to preserve the other. But something really has happened. We feel that he is even less able to hope, to free himself from the sterility of the company and the obsessions to which he is prey, than he was at the beginning. In his preoccupation with himself and the orderliness of his own world, he seems to care little about anything as long as it does not disturb his carefully wrought vision, a vision which approaches at times the limits of sanity. Even his son, with whom he feels the closest tie and for whom the most love, a point that makes us really like Slocum and perceive him as human -- even his son is expendable. In the last chapter his boy rates only four words ("I miss my boy"[p. 529]). The thought surfaces only to be suppressed at once. In the last analysis, "when his wife and children try to appear as <u>persons</u> -- with ambivalent motives and needs -- he retreats to his mental office. He shuts the door on them."[28] So the attempt to bring to consciousness the unconscious world, to weld together the two in a unity, fails.

We listen, drawn not only by the suspense about "what will happen", but by the clever humour and the revelation of

elements of an unconscious which are common to all of us. This is why we read on. If Slocum is not aware of creating art, Heller is, and though we may not like what we see, we do recognize a lot of Slocum in ourselves. We, looking at the novel from outside, may at least be in a position not to repeat Slocum's mistakes.

Finally, in answering why the author has decided to write this type of novel rather than allowing Slocum to "escape" as Yossarian did, I think the answer can be found in a consideration of much of the critical commentary which attended the ending of Catch-22. In creating Bob Slocum, Heller is showing us what Yossarian would have become if he had not chosen to escape to Sweden. Bob Slocum is the man who does not choose to escape, who allows himself to remain in a society which demands outer conformity at the price of inner death. In staying, he surrenders to that society, in the end losing even his ability to laugh at it. He is too much a part of what is going on to stand aside any more.

NOTES

1. Heller says: "I think one difference between the two books is that Catch-22 is concerned with physical survival against exterior forces or institutions that want to destroy life or moral self. Something Happened is concerned very much with interior, psychological survival in which the areas of combat are things like the wishes a person has, whether they are fulfilled or not, the close intimate situations we have with our children when they're small and as they grow older -- these are some of the areas of disturbance in Something Happened. George Plimpton, "Joseph Heller: The Art of Fiction", Paris Review, 15,(Winter 1974), 141.

2. Joseph Heller, interviewed by Stephen Banker, on "Nightcap", CBC-AM radio, Nov. 10, 1977, 11:30 p.m.

3. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 226.

4. Joseph Mellors, "What Happened?", The Listener, October 24, 1974, p. 551.

5. Frye, p. 226.

6. Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 316.

7. I use the word "norms" in the same way as Booth (p. 73), to mean the values or ideals which the author holds.

8. Booth, pp. 378-379.

9. Frye, p. 224.

10. Joseph Heller, Something Happened (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), p. 24. All references to Something Happened are to this edition, and the page number is given in parentheses after the quotation.

11. William Braden, The Age of Aquarius (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), p. 132.

12. Robert Scholes, The Fabulators (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 45.

13. Frank McConnell, "The Corpse of the Dragon: Notes on Postromantic Fiction", Triquarterly, 33 (Spring 1975), 287.

14. The Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 1254.

15. Wylie Sypher, Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 6.

16. Sypher, pp. 10-12 passim.

17. McConnell, 287.

18. Ralph Harper, The Existential Experience (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), p. 55.

19. Heller's "Nightcap" interview.

20. Jesse Paul Ritter, "Fearful Comedy: Catch-22 as Avatar of the Social Surrealist Novel", in A Catch-22 Casebook, ed. Frederick Kiley and Walter McDonald (New York: Thomas Crowell and Co., Inc., 1973), p. 79.

21. Myron Greenman, "Understanding New Fiction", Modern Fiction Studies, 20 (Autumn 1974), 315.

22. Scholes, pp. 72-73.

23. For a discussion of Slocum as an insane protagonist, see Edmund Fueller, "Heller's How Glum Was My Valley", The Wall Street Journal, November 18, 1974, p. 22.

24. Ritter, p. 81.

25. Booth, pp. 304, 307.

26. Frye, pp. 221, 226.

27. Frye, p. 238.

28. Irvin Malin, "Something Happened", Commonweal, 20 December 1974, pp. 270-273.

C O N C L U S I O N

Mathew Winston, writing about Black Humour literature in general, asks: "Are these books merely destructive? Why do they abuse us? Do they give us anything to build on? Are they in any manner, shape or form ethical?"[1] These are the essential questions which must be answered in a criticism of Joseph Heller's first two novels. An examination of the general formal features of each, and the way in which they compare and contrast, will help us to see how they are ethical, that is, how they express the human condition in such a way that the reader's response is hopeful.

One of the features that this study has examined is characterization. Yossarian and Slocum are similar as protagonists; each finds himself in a situation that he does not like, and reacts to it. Most of Catch-22's development is concerned with Yossarian's learning the horror of his situation, until he is finally forced to act, making a moral choice which will, for better or for worse, change things. In acting, he is conscious of what influence his choice may have on others in the same predicament. A certain growth in character is shown, because his responsibility for others at the end of the book is greater than at the beginning. During the course of events, he is vociferous in his repugnance for the established order; he is very much inclined to speak out against oppressive actions. Slocum, on the other hand, confides his secrets to us, but not, apparently, to others. Even his wife and other members of his family seem to be unaware of his really intimate thoughts. And in the last

chapter, after the death of his boy, we, too, seem cut off from his feelings, as he only mentions him in one brief sentence. These two protagonists are both faced with a threatening world, but they respond differently to it. Our sympathy goes out to both of them, but more to Yossarian than to Slocum, and we feel in response to these books that to act is better than to remain inert. These two characters, then, seem to illustrate two different "solutions" to the same problem.

The problem -- that of a world or society whose aspirations are different from the protagonist's -- is the same in each novel. Heller's world-view seems to have changed very little from Catch-22 to Something Happened. In each case we have a faceless, bureaucratic company or syndicate which exists to further itself, by using the men and women who work for it mercilessly. All the things that happen in these books revolve around the company. In Catch-22, the war ultimately becomes a fight for profits and monopolies, a poignant satire on the fact that all wars are, to some extent, a struggle for the control of trade routes. In Something Happened the company helps Slocum to become a robot, fully in "control" of himself and others in the last chapter, to the point that he no longer seems human. In the obvious satire of Catch-22 and the more subtle ironic tone of Something Happened, Heller seems to be pointing out to us the danger of allowing our lives to be run by corporations (bodies) which have no soul. His world-view has hardly changed; he has, however, in each of the novels, explored different ways of dealing with the threat. In each

book the satiric, ironic tone is still present, though in Something Happened we must read carefully to be aware that much of the irony escapes even the narrator. This irony countervails what would otherwise be a negative feeling as a result of the events of the plot in this novel. A resolution is not provided by events, as it is in Catch-22, but we realize that it is at least partly the narrator's fault that this is so; in his constant attempts at "control", he misdirects events so that, in the end, no escape is possible for him.

In what way do these novels answer Winston's questions? Frye describes the ethical purpose of a liberal education as "to liberate, which can only mean to make one capable of conceiving society as free, classless, and urbane."[2] How do the formal features examined above do this? Firstly, the portrayal of a self so imprisoned in a faceless society may allow us to see what directions should be taken. The characterization of Yossarian is fairly clear-cut, as is the dilemma with which he is faced. His struggle for freedom, and his achievement of it, as shown by the development of imagery relating to vision, the déjà vu structure of the novel, and the tonal change from comic to serious, appeals to us and makes us feel that an individual can do something to help bring about the kind of society of which Frye speaks. Slocum's own blindness, his inability to conceive of this sort of society, is expressed in the very form of the novel itself, a solipsistic lament from inside the prison of his psyche. The first person account, the large proportion of the text devoted to thought and not to action,

and finally the horrendous impingement of the exterior world upon his carefully contrived reality -- all the more horrible because it happens by chance -- these all work to show us, on the one hand, how limited his freedom is, and, on the other, how much of that limitation is self-imposed.

Both novels remind us that the struggle for freedom, for self-affirmation, for liberation, must always be fought and re-fought. A free, classless and urbane society may be idealistic, but failure to strive for it leads to the kind of dull, quotidian existence that Slocum bewails. This struggle takes the form of a dialectic between chance and self-assertion; a dialectic which is reflected in the form of Catch-22 (the portrayal of the world vs. Yossarian's developing vision of that world) and in Something Happened (inner thoughts vs. outer reality, the imagery of chance events vs. attempts at control reflected in the style). This struggle "ends" with Yossarian's escape in Catch-22, but we feel sure it will continue as long as he seeks an ethical purpose. It remains unresolved in Something Happened, where it is only the reader who feels called to action.

In Catch-22 Yossarian is willing to be a victim of anything but circumstance; he refuses to accept the fact that things may threaten him and even kill him just by chance, merely because he happens to be there. The title as well as the content of Something Happened reveal the same preoccupation with this phenomenon. But obviously in the former book, and to a lesser extent, though still noticeably, in the latter, the protagonists

survive this threat, in the first to escape to what must be a saner world, and in the other, not to escape, but at least to go on with a stoical determination. Chance may, we feel, snuff us out at any time, but we are made to feel that our best attitude to it is to laugh at it or to ignore it -- hence the humour in both books. It seems that in reading them we are reminded that the "only way of living with [psychological nihilism] is, paradoxically, not to take it too seriously."[3] Ultimately, beyond the affirmation of whatever social norms or moral codes we may try to find, these novels proclaim the "bare, necessary and simple affirmation of life over death."[4] Whether it is the simple action of escape that Yossarian takes, or the resigned determination to carry on which is Slocum's choice, the point seems to be that life is too vast to be known; it can only be lived. Yossarian learns this; Slocum does not. We feel that he will always go on analyzing, trying to grasp reality on terms favourable to himself. In response to Winston's questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, then, we can say that these books are not merely destructive. They protest against the absurdity of the human condition even in picturing it, and in the very creation of their art they proclaim meaning.[5] They abuse us to make us see, to make us question our existence, to shock and wound our sensibilities so that we may live all the more profoundly therefore. They are indeed ethical in the way that Frye means. The portrayal of the struggle that the individual must make to liberate himself is a measure of the quality of affirmation in Catch-22 and Something Happened.

NOTES

1. Mathew Winston, "The Ethics of Contemporary Black Humour", Colorado Quarterly, 24 (Winter 1976), 272.

2. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 347.

3. Ralph Harper, The Existential Experience (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), p. 77.

4. Raymond Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 7.

5. Charles Glicksberg, The Ironic Vision in Modern Literature (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 222-223.

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