THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANTI-HERO IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL: 1883-1962

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Roger D. Harms

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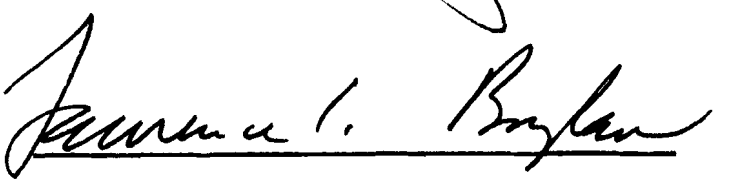

PREFACE

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R. D. H.

August, 1965
Kansas State Teachers College
Emporia, Kansas

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CHAPTER I

THE HERO AND THE ANTI-HERO

The character of the anti-hero has played an important part in the development of the American novel. A desire to show the world, society, and life as they really are, without illusions, motivated the American novelists to effect the development of the anti-hero. Its creators wanted to show that this is not the best of all possible worlds, a world, they believed, to be even uglier than one would like to imagine it to be. Thus the philosophy of the anti-heroic novel, though varied and of many strains, is basically pessimistic. It is not without some hope, but it strives to be void of all false hopes.

In order to define "anti-hero," it is first necessary to define "hero." Northrop Frye in his essay, "Fictional Modes" defines five classes or modes of the hero: the first is the mythical hero, who is god-like, superior in kind to both his environment and other men; the second is the romantic hero, who is superior in degree both to other men and to his environment; the high mimetic hero is superior in degree to other men but not to his environment; the low mimetic hero is superior neither to other men nor to his environment; and last is the ironic hero, who is inferior to other men and to his

environment.[1] Throughout the history of literature, the hero has successively taken these forms, from the mythical down to the absurd hero. Each mode was more realistic than its predecessor. Through time the hero has diminished in stature from a god-like man to one who is inferior to the average man, as measured by cultural standards.

The meaning of the word "hero" has changed as one mode was forgotten and a new one adopted. As time passed, the term has labeled such diversified characters as Achilles, Sir Gawain, Macbeth, Tom Jones, and Don Quixote. Many people today would hesitate to call Tom Jones or Don Quixote heroes, because the new modes are not universally accepted. W. H. Auden says that heroes are conventionally divided into three classes, the epic hero, the tragic hero, and the comic hero.[2] Auden's epic hero would correspond to Frye's mythical and romantic modes, the tragic hero would correspond to the high mimetic mode, and the comic hero would correspond to the low mimetic and absurd modes. The low mimetic, absurd, and comic classes of the hero would not be included if the hero were defined in a traditional sense.

Traditionally, the word "hero" has two inherent meanings: he must in some way be better than the average person; and

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[1]Northrop Frye, "Fictional Modes," Approaches to the Novel, Robert Scholes (ed.), pp. 31-32.

[2]W. H. Auden, "Ironic Hero: Some Reflections on Don Quixote," Horizon, XX (August, 1949), 86.

since he must be a hero to someone, he must reflect the values of his society. The traditional hero must personify the socially accepted conventions, manners, and values. For the average middle-class American citizen, the iconoclast would not be labeled a hero because his values are not socially acceptable. A hero for this group of people would be the man who, starting with nothing, becomes a millionaire in ten years. It is the members of society who define the hero; they are the average and they determine who is better than average. The hero, then, in the traditional sense, is a social hero. Sean O'Faolain conceives of the word and the idea of "hero" as a social creation; the hero represents a socially approved norm.[3] In order to be a hero, one must first meet the approval of society.

However, such a definition of the word "hero" is not the only one possible. Edith Kern defines him simply as the book's leading character.[4] W. H. Auden has only two requirements of the hero: he must be interesting, and for clearness, his character, motives, and actions must be revealed to the reader.[5] These definitions suggest merely the central figure of a novel. The word "hero" implies much more. To define it as

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[3]Sean O'Faolain, The Vanishing Hero, p. xii.

[4]Edith Kern, "The Modern Hero: Phoenix or Ashes?" Comparative Literature, X (Fall, 1958), 333.

[5]Auden, op. cit., p. 86.

representing merely the central figure would make nonsense out of the term "anti-hero," and such a limitation is not useful to this investigation.

The anti-hero did not appear over-night; he developed over a long period of time. According to Northrop Frye, the middle-class culture introduced the low mimetic hero as it introduced the novel.[6] In this same period, David Dauches notes the emergence of a new kind of hero, one who sought safety rather than glory, of whom Robinson Crusoe was the first.[7] The early novel introduced the low mimetic hero and broke with the established tradition of heroes. The hero became more realistic and more "average." Becky Sharp, the central character in Thackeray's Vanity Fair, which has as a subtitle, "A Novel without a Hero," is also a forerunner of the anti-hero. Harry Levin, speaking of Thackeray and other Victorian novelists, says that their protagonists are heroes only in a technical sense; their bourgeois environment offered little room for action on the epic scale.[8] This type of protagonist may be properly labeled as a "non-hero," but not as an "anti-hero." The non-heroes could be classified under Frye's low mimetic mode; the anti-hero is more

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[6]Frye, op. cit., p. 33.

[7]David Daiches, "Possibilities of Heroism," American Scholar, XXV (Winter, 1955-56), 96.

[8]Harry Levin, "From Prian to Birotteau," Yale French Studies, VI (1950), 76.

closely related to Frye's absurd mode. The eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists neutralized the heroic character of the traditional hero to produce the non-hero; the modern novelists continued the trend and reversed the heroic character to produce the anti-hero.

Inasmuch as the "hero," then, has been defined as one who represents socially approved norms, perhaps the anti-hero is best defined as a character who reacts _against_ the norms and conventions of society. This reaction is highly varied, but it is characteristic of the anti-hero. Although the anti-hero is just the opposite of the conventional hero, he is not a villain. To call him a villain, just because he is anti-social, would be to assume that society is an omniscient law maker, perfect and infallible. Sean O'Faolain makes this point clear when he says that society is ready to accept anyone as hero who acts bravely in its cause, but not one who acts bravely in some contrary cause; therefore the word "hero" has little moral content, for a public hero may be a private villain.[9] Since the hero is defined by society, the true hero, in a false society, must be an anti-hero.

The concept of the anti-hero, then, is part of the tradition which attempts to puncture holes in society's illusions about life. Voltaire's _Candide_ deflates the illusion that "this

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[9] O'Faolain, _op. cit._, p. xxvi.

is the best of all possible worlds," just as Jonathan Swift, in Book IV of Gulliver's Travels, mocked society's illusion that man is inherently good and noble. Orvin E. Klapp calls this instrument to puncture illusions a "corrupted" hero: ". . . too good to be a villain, too bad to be a hero, too serious to be a mere clown, too interesting to forget."[10] The anti-hero is not so much a character as he is a finger of accusation pointing at society.

The anti-hero, at maturity, is characterized by alienation from the modern society. He is a truth-seeker who finds no place in a society concerned only with material things. Such a society is an intolerant, closed system, looking unfavorably at people who disrupt its careful balance of illusions. The truth-seeker is often excommunicated from the mass of complacent status-seekers. If the anti-hero is violent in his opposition to the conventions of society, he is often put away, in a prison or a mental hospital, where he will do no harm. But more often, the anti-hero will cut himself off from the hypocritical world. The whole concept of the anti-hero is allied with the philosophy of existentialism. But this concept, like that of existentialism, has many branches and few unifying themes. The theme of alienation, however, is common to all anti-heroes. Robert E. Jones speaks of the alienation of modern heroes: the modern hero is

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[10]Orvin E. Klapp, Heroes, Villains, and Fools, p. 147.

lonely; he is not well adjusted to the conventions and values of modern society, and he expresses his alienation by being anti-social.[11] The anti-hero does not belong with those who do not question their values; he is by definition anti-social.

In order to seek the truth on any level and in any area, it is first necessary to rid oneself of all pretensions, conventions, and all old habits of thinking and living which are part of a closed, intolerant system, and would, therefore, hinder the search for truth. Frederick J. Hoffman notes that the hero sees social structures being built and strengthened which do not leave room for the individual; and the hero then either deliberately withdraws from society, or violently asserts his opposition to it.[12] Speaking of the anti-heroes in modern French drama, Robert E. Jones notes that they often exile themselves from society because they will not accept the laws and conventions which make an orderly but mediocre world.[13]

The anti-hero, then, is one who sees the falseness of a society pretending to have found order and meaning in a world he knows by experience to be chaotic, absurd, and irrational. He is too honest to pretend that everything is orderly when he

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[11]Robert E. Jones, The Alienated Hero in Modern French Drama, p. 6.

[12]Frederick John Hoffman, The Mortal No: Death and the Modern Imagination, pp. 24-25.

[13]Jones, op. cit., p. 4.

can see the chaos. He will not accept a happiness that is brought about by delusion. And he will not and can not remain a member of a society of people who are so busy chasing happiness that they have no time to stop and question the validity of their position. The anti-hero may not know the right answers, but at least he knows which answers are wrong.

The anti-hero cuts himself off from pretense in an attempt to discover some meaning in life. Hoffman pictures him as an isolated intelligence, associated with no system of values, with little prospect of salvation, looking hopelessly upon the wasteland.[14] The anti-hero is a complex character; he is alone, yet he is not always sure just why. Sean O'Faolain says the modern protagonist is sometimes weak, brave, or foolhardy, but he is always on his own.[15]

Sometimes the alienated anti-hero just sits, inactive, in a corner, but not often. More likely, he is an active rebel. In the 1920's, Sean O'Faolain writes, the anti-heroes were urged by personal sincerity and truthfulness to make some gesture of defiance against the hypocritical world.[16] The anti-hero is a rebel, not without a cause. He is against all the self-deception for which modern society seems to stand. Leslie Fiedler

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[14] Hoffman, op. cit., p. 17.

[15] O'Faolain, op. cit., p. xxx.

[16] Ibid., p. xxxi.

comments that the modern hero is not a lazy person who wants to stay out of trouble, but a rebel who opposes society in an attempt to make his existence meaningful.[17] The anti-hero rejects the conventions and values of society as an attempt to impose a false meaning and order on an irrational and absurd world. Any man less brave or less sincere would take the easy way out and conform to the system. The anti-hero does not give in, but then he is lost, for he knows no right way. He ends, a lonely disillusioned rebel, knowing what is wrong, but not knowing what is right.

The social hero is the person who claims the top position in a world built upon a very shaky and false foundation. Blessed with an unquestioning mind, he can settle down to an easy life with other organization men. He thinks he knows where he is, and he pretends to know where he is going, because this is the socially expected attitude. He has his values defined for him by society, and he has but one responsibility--to conform. The anti-hero is not nearly so smugly content. His thinking mind plagues him by questioning the system and the thin cover of imposed order veiling the chaotic world. Sean O'Faolain well describes his position:

> The anti-hero is a much less tidy and comfortable concept than the social hero since--being deprived of social sanctions and definitions--he is always trying to define

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[17] Leslie A. Fiedler, No! In Thunder, p. 15.

> himself, to find his own sanctions. He is always represented as groping, puzzled, cross, mocking, frustrated, isolated in his manful or blundering attempts to establish his own personal suprasocial codes.[18]

The social hero is well defined (although he is defined by a false system), and he need not worry about Socrates' adage, "Know Thyself." But the basic problem of the anti-hero, as John L. Longley points out, is self-definition: he must know who and what he is.[19] Hence, the search for oneself is a central part of the anti-heroic novel. Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye, spends the entire novel trying to find himself amidst the disorder and confusion of a modern city.

In order to discover himself, the first step the anti-hero must take is to strip himself of all illusions. Joseph De Falco says that one must first become independent, and free of all former crutches before he can hope for self-discovery.[20] Stripping off all illusions and aids to security is a painful process, but one which is necessary for full maturation. R. B. Salomon says after life is stripped of romance, one comes face to face with the mundane and tiresome reality of existence.[21]

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[18] O'Faolain, op. cit., p. xxix.

[19] John Lewis Longley, The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes, p. 234.

[20] Joseph De Falco, The Hero in Hemingway's Short Stories, p. 39.

[21] R. B. Salomon, "Realism as Disinheritance: Twain, Howells, and James," American Quarterly, XVI (Winter, 1964), 539.

Illusions are comforting, and the man without illusions is lonely and often frightened. Robert E. Jones says that the world is either unaware of the anti-hero or hostile toward him.[22] The anti-hero, stripped of illusions, aware of a false society, and alienated from it, is a lonely man with no barriers between himself and the truth, and no barriers between himself and nihilism.

Confronted by all the false ideals and rampant ideologies, a man often feels that the only safe thing to do is to reject all ideals. Sean O'Faolain makes this clear: in our time, a man can be a hero when he is brave in his own cause, but when he is brave for an ideal he may end up as a war criminal.[23] Robert Jones points out that because the modern hero believes that there is nothing left worth saving, he often seems impotent to act.[24] Since he does not want to act in behalf of the wrong ideals, he may, through lack of courage, not act at all.

The anti-hero is disillusioned as to the ideals of his fathers. As John L. Longley points out, it is impossible to be heroic in a world where totalitarianism, prejudice, nihilism, the threat of the atomic bomb, apathy, the fear of freedom, and

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[22]Jones, op. cit., p. 4.

[23]O'Faolain, op. cit., pp. 144-145.

[24]Jones, op. cit., p. 18.

the lust for irresponsibility are all rampant.[25] Heroism in this world would be quixotic. Yet in a way this role is that of the anti-hero. He is a modern Don Quixote searching for meaning in a meaningless and hostile universe.

The anti-hero is alienated from a hypocritical society, and he is disillusioned by an irrational world; consequently, his very existence seems absurd. John L. Longley states this point emphatically:

> The modern tragic protagonist . . . must use all his intelligence, his strength, his luck, merely to travel the tightrope between Cosmic Chaos on the one hand and Cosmic Absurdity on the other. He can trust in nothing, hope for nothing, and accept nothing at face value until he has tried it on the test of his own pulses.[26]

The anti-hero believes that existence precedes essence. He tries things out before he places a value on them. The social hero is just the opposite; he acts on the belief that essence precedes existence, and he trusts the values given him by his own culture and then acts accordingly. In a world where values and actions are accepted just because "everybody does it," the anti-hero is forced to be skeptical. Robert Jones realizes that when distrust is so prevalent, nothing is noble or significant and everything becomes merely absurd.[27] When conformity

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[25]John Lewis Longley, The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes, p. 18.

[26]John Lewis Longley, "Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXIII (Spring, 1957), 238.

[27]Jones, op. cit., p. 5.

becomes a way of life, the person who acts in accordance with an ideal finds himself in an absurd world.

The anti-hero realizes that the social order in the world is a false and imposed order. Yet, as David D. Galloway writes, man feels that he must oppose such an imposed order, even though his demands for a true order will make him absurd.[28] Richard Chase notes that when the anti-hero enters the "reality" of the social world, his "divine-insanity" asserts itself.[29] As long as the anti-hero remains on the fringe of society, he is merely eccentric, but when he, like Don Quixote, dons his armor and enters the world to combat social pretension and hypocrisy, he is called insane. Insanity is that which is abnormal, and if the actions of those people in society are normal, then the anti-hero is insane. And as John L. Longley reflects, "In a cosmos where the only constants are absurdity and instability we have the right to expect anything except rationality."[30] The predicament of the anti-hero in the modern society is similar to that of a man who can see, living in a world of blind people. The society of blind people try to impose their values, conventions, and way of life upon him,

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[28]David D. Galloway, "The Absurd Hero in Contemporary American Fiction: The Works of John Updike, William Styron, Saul Bellow, and J. D. Salinger," p. 19.

[29]Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition, p. 167.

[30]John L. Longley, "Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXIII (Spring, 1957), 246.

but he can see that they are not right. He refuses to conform and he is hated by all. His position becomes ridiculous and absurd. Society calls the anti-hero insane, but if the society itself is insane, then the anti-hero is a sane man trapped in an insane world.

The anti-hero, after finding himself in this position, must decide what to do. The possible reactions are many and varied. Robert E. Jones says that generally the modern heroes run and hide from their situation.[31] Some do run; others may seek to impose yet another order on the universe; some compromise with the system and seek social acceptance, realizing the fruitlessness of fighting; and still others fight back and are overcome by an intolerant society.

The possible reactions of the anti-hero to his predicament seem tragic. But just as the emergence of the anti-hero changed the concept of the hero, so have the concepts of tragedy and comedy been transformed.

The traditional tragic hero, as defined by W. H. Auden, must move from glory to misery, and must suffer in order to learn.[32] Joseph Wood Krutch adds the one other essential characteristic: the concept of tragedy is inseparable from, and cannot exist without, the idea of nobility.[33] The tragic hero

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[31]Jones, op. cit., p. 7.

[32]Auden, op. cit., p. 87.

[33]Joseph Wood Krutch, The Modern Temper, p. 122.

is better than the average man; he rises to the summit and then he falls, and in the suffering, he learns. At the end of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, Oedipus is not in despair, but he is ready to come once again to his rightful place as a leader of men. J. W. Krutch points out that tragedy is essentially an expression of triumph over despair and of confidence in the value and nobility of man.[34] Krutch concludes that tragedy is not an accusation against the world but a justification of that world.[35] Tragedy is an affirmation of a valid universal law of justice and order inherent in the world, and an affirmation of the inherent nobility of man. The anti-hero is then anti-tragic. He doubts the existence of a world of law or order, let alone a just world. And, as Krutch again says, he often doubts that man has anything of nobility in his nature.[36] Finally, the anti-hero is anti-tragic because he does accuse the world of being false; in no way does he attempt to affirm the laws of the social order, or justify the world as it is.

If man is to be tragic, he must be noble. Orvin E. Klapp reveals the ignobility of the typical modern social hero:

> The celebrity cult celebrates the triumph of ordinariness-charm without character, showmanship without ability,

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[34] Ibid., p. 123.

[35] Ibid., p. 138.

[36] Ibid., p. 137.

> bodies without minds, information without wisdom. Hero-worship looks horizontally, even downward, to a 'man like myself.'[37]

Today the noble man is something one remembers or reads about; he is rarely seen.

Can the absurd man living in a chaotic universe devoid of noble men, hope to become a tragic figure? Not, obviously, in the traditional concept of tragedy. The anti-hero has nothing of nobility except that he is a human being seeking the truth. Like Don Quixote, he is more pathetic than tragic. And yet, if the anti-hero does not give up, if he believes that underneath all the false conventions and pretense man has something of nobility, he is, in a sense, tragic. To reject the idea that mankind is finished, says John L. Longley, is a noble undertaking.[38] Wallace Fowlie defines tragedy as commitment, that which follows contemplation.[39] The anti-hero contemplates this absurd world, and if he is brave (or foolhardy) enough to commit himself to some ideal he is, in a sense, a tragic figure. But few anti-heroes commit themselves to any ideal; they are too disillusioned with the world. Only the courageous and hopeful anti-hero is a tragic hero, and even then, not tragic in a traditional sense.

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[37]Klapp, op. cit., p. 144.

[38]John L. Longley, The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes, p. 19.

[39]Wallace Fowlie, "Swann and Hamlet: A Note on the Contemporary Hero," Partisan Review, IX (1942), 202.

Often the position of the anti-hero in the absurd world appears comical to the reader, but it is a "sick-joke," a pathetic comedy. Leslie Fiedler says the anti-heroic novel is very often terrifying and dreadful, yet not without some humor.[40] In the end result, the novel of the anti-hero is neither comedy nor tragedy, but a pathetic and bitter accusation against a cruel and lawless world.

In one respect the anti-hero is in the tradition of the "traditional" hero: they are both inner-directed. The traditional hero, before the advent of the mass, middle-class society, did personify socially accepted conventions, manners, and values, but he had an inner conviction that he was right. It was more or less an accident that society's values corresponded with his. John W. Aldridge asserts that the hero has been inner-directed since the beginnings of literature.[41] Today the anti-hero also lives according to his inner convictions. The difference is that the anti-hero finds himself in modern society, which is other-directed. Perhaps it is not so much the hero who has changed, as the society which defines him; in its war on non-conformists society has all but exterminated the inner-directed man. The other-directed man seeks only peer-approval. He is too lazy to take the time and make the effort

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[40]Leslie A. Fiedler, No! In Thunder, p. 16.

[41]John W. Aldridge, In Search of Heresy, p. 113.

to question his values; he would rather do what others do and accept the values of others. The other-directed man does not care whether he does the right thing; he only wants to do what other people think is the right thing. Nor is he worried about what he is; he only cares about what his public image is. John Aldridge points out that the individual who seeks only peer-approval will never be motivated to self-realization.[42] In the day of the traditional hero, society, in general, was inner-directed; hence the hero could follow his inner-conviction and still be accepted by society. Today, in the mass culture of our time, the hero who follows his inner-convictions finds himself in violent opposition to a mass of social-conscious and society-dominated people.

The honest, sincere, truth-seeking man appears absurd to the role-playing, status-seeking mass of other-directed people to whom conformity has become a way of life. The herd of other-directed people accept first the essence (the values handed them by society) and then they exist within this framework. The anti-hero exists first and then determines his values by experience. J. L. Longley asserts that the anti-hero takes this existential stance, which makes him totally free and also totally responsible.[43]

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[42] Ibid., p. 115.

[43] John L. Longley, "Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXIII (Spring, 1957), 238.

The very existence of an inner-directed man is painful to an other-directed society. If the anti-hero makes no point of hiding his inner-direction, he will find himself in violent opposition to the herd. Joseph De Falco states this idea succinctly:

> Those who adhere to the ideal of self-fulfillment are in a minority, and their very existence becomes intolerable to the majority who follow another course. The outcome of such a situation is always the same: persecution of those who hold the individual ideal.[44]

The anti-hero often has to choose between grasping the ideal and following it through to its fatal conclusion, or recognizing the hopelessness of the situation and compromising with the system, concludes De Falco.[45] In the first instance he would be a tragic figure; in the second he would be the disillusioned hero who would say as Leslie Fiedler has put it: ". . . no cause is worth the death of a man, [sic] no cause is worth the death of me!"[46]

The anti-hero has many poses and many roles, but consistently he is alienated from a false society, disillusioned with seemingly worthless ideals, absurdly placid in relation to an irrational world, neither tragic nor comic, but pathetic--an

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[44]De Falco, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

[45]Ibid., p. 219.

[46]Leslie A. Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p. 30.

inner-directed man left stranded in an other-directed world. In the anti-heroic American novel the predicament of the anti-hero remains fairly consistent, but his reaction to his predicament varies according to the time the novel was written and the thinking of the author.

CHAPTER II

THE ANTI-HERO FROM 1883 TO 1925

The following are the five novels covered in chapter two: Huckleberry Finn (1883) by Mark Twain, The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896) by Harold Frederic, The Wings of the Dove (1902) by Henry James, Jennie Gerhardt (1911) by Theodore Dreiser, and Barren Ground (1925) by Ellen Glasgow. Each novel was picked for this investigation because it contained some sort of anti-hero.

Huckleberry Finn (1883) does not actually belong where it must, chronologically, be placed; it is a novel written ahead of its time. In this novel the anti-hero is fully developed, whereas in the other four novels the development is only partial.

Tom Sawyer is the hero of this novel and Huck the anti-hero. When Huck meets Tom at the Phelps farm, they both agree to free Jim, yet their respective motives for doing so reveal the difference between the hero and the anti-hero. Tom is a member of a society which practices slavery, and when Tom agrees to help Huck free nigger Jim from slavery, Huck is shocked.

> Well, I let go all holts then, like I was shot. It was the most astonishing speech I ever heard--and I'm bound to say that Tom Sawyer fell considerable in my estimation.

> Only I couldn't believe it. Tom Sawyer a nigger-stealer![47]

Huck knew that Tom was an accepted member of the Southern society, and he cannot visualize Tom's breaking one of this society's strongest laws.

Tom personifies socially accepted values; he would not think of rejecting the mores and laws of his society. If Jim had been really a slave Tom would never have agreed to free him; but Tom knows that Miss Watson had set Jim free--and there was nothing wrong about setting a free "nigger" free. Tom agrees to help free Jim merely for the adventure of it. In the wild and over-elaborate escape, Tom gets shot in the leg and he is a "hero."

Leslie Fiedler's terms, the "good-good" boy, the "good-bad" boy, and the "bad-bad" boy, apply to the figures of Sid, Tom and Huck respectively. Tom fits exactly the figure of the social hero, even to his "playing hooky" from school. As a "good-bad" boy he is perfectly acceptable to society. His mischievousness makes him even more attractive to society, and Aunt Polly cannot help loving the "good-bad" boy (Tom) more than the "good-good" boy (Sid). That Tom accepts all of society's values and laws as his own is clearly shown in his remarks as to what he would do if Jim were really a "run-a-way nigger." "If I was to catch a nigger that was ungrateful

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[47]Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 226.

enough to run away, I wouldn't give him up, I'd hang him."[48] This, too, would add to Tom's stature as a social hero.

While Tom is a "good-bad" boy and socially acceptable, Huck is a "bad-bad" boy and a social outcast. Tom frees Jim for the adventure of it, whereas Huck frees Jim because he knows that Jim has an inalienable right to freedom and because he has learned to love him. Although Huck has lived on the fringes of society, he knows what it thinks of "nigger-stealers." He knows that if he is caught, he will be hanged to death and damned to hell for eternity. In order to help Jim, Huck must utterly oppose the society he has lived in. Carson Gibb points out that at the beginning of the novel, Huch childishly wanted to go to hell with Tom, rather than to heaven with Miss Watson; when he must make a real choice, he has to choose hell without Tom but with the other social outcasts.[49] The first decision is a juvenile thought; the second decision is a full-fledged anti-hero.

When Huck is first faced with this decision, he tries to escape the responsibility of being free. He writes a letter to Miss Watson in an attempt to appease his society-orientated conscience. But the letter did not appease his own nature. He knew he had to choose between the two alternatives:

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[48] Ibid., p. 238.

[49] Carson Gibb, "The Best Authority," College English, XXII (December, 1960), 183.

> It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: "All right then, I'll go to Hell"--and tore it up.[50]

Huck's final decision is in violent opposition to society's laws and values. Having made his choice, Huck qualifies as a mature anti-hero.

In Huckleberry Finn, says James Hiner, the whole world is ambivalent and absurd.[51] Everything on the shore is absurd: the widow Douglas who tells Huck not to smoke and yet takes snuff herself; the Grangerfords and the Sheperdsons who attend a sermon on brotherly-love on Sunday, and then on Monday continue their bloody and absurd feud. The core of this society, the code of Southern honor, is by its very nature absurd. The whole business, especially Buck's death, makes Huck sick. "I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them . . . ."[52] Perhaps the ultimate example of the absurd world is Miss Watson's act of setting Jim free in her will. Robert Ornstein agrees that it is a selfish and greedy act, designed to make the best of both

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[50]Twain, op. cit., p. 214.

[51]James Hiner, "Mark Twain: Ambivalence not Disjunction," American Quarterly, XVI (Winter, 1964), 621.

[52]Twain, op. cit., p. 115.

worlds.[53] She sets Jim free in her will so that she could profit from his slavery while she is still on earth, and profit from his freedom while in heaven. Huck cannot belong to this society. His mind has not been "civilized" enough so that he can accept the absurdity of its values and conventions. He is alienated from the absurd shore, and he is always glad to get back on the river, where he is free.

At the end of the novel, Huck is again face to face with his mortal enemy--society. He decides to run. ". . . I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before."[54] Morris Wright is of the opinion that Huck, after looking for his territory, would have come to consider himself a vagrant, cut off from all social ties, and left to wander alone.[55] Huck will never be able to out-run civilization; he will always meet social convention, and he will always feel alienated from it. As long as Huck continues to act as he believes, he will be denied the false, yet comfortable, security of belonging to a society. If he ever again tries to free another slave, he will probably be hanged, as Jim had prophesied. Huck is in an absurd position;

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[53]Robert Ornstein, "The Ending of Huckleberry Finn," Modern Language Notes, LXXIV (December, 1959), 700.

[54]Twain, op. cit., p. 293.

[55]Morris Wright, The Territory Ahead, pp. 81-82.

he is an inner-directed person trapped in an other-directed world.

The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896) by Harold Frederic, is a novel about an anti-hero who tried to turn himself into a socially acceptable hero.

At the beginning of the novel, Theron is an honest, simple, hard-working Methodist minister. He is young and therefore has to content himself with the poorer churches. He has a beautiful wife, whom he loves dearly. They work together to make ends meet and their life is happy. But the most amazing thing about Theron is that he was satisfied. He did not particularly want a bigger church, and a better salary. He pursued his work with a zeal, but he did not lie and scheme to work his way up in social position. He did not seek social acceptance or social values. Celia Madden describes the early Theron: "You are full of poetry, of ideals, of generous, unselfish impulses. You see the human, the warm-blooded side of things."[56] Theron was naive, innocent and opposed to the competitive society, but he was not conscious of his position; he was, unconsciously, an anti-hero.

Celia Madden was one of three new friends Theron met; the others were a Roman Catholic priest and an atheistic doctor. They liked Theron for his simple honesty; Theron, on the other

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[56]Harold Frederic, The Damnation of Theron Ware, p. 150.

hand, envied their intellectual sophistication. Theron says:

> Evidently there was an intellectual world, a world of culture and grace of lofty thoughts and the inspiring communion of real knowledge, where creeds were not of importance, and where men asked one another, not "Is your soul-saved?" but "Is your mind well furnished?"[57]

In relation to the society of the crafty, sly, and dishonest world of "go-getters," Theron was technically, because of his position, an anti-hero. But when Theron is made conscious of the difference between himself and others, he forsakes his private ideals and embraces the smart, "accepted," social values of others. He copies his three sophisticated friends. He becomes more practical and less idealistic, more sophisticated and less naive, more shrewd and less honest, more successful in business negotiations and less kind-hearted with his parishoners. At the end, he summarizes his "gains":

> I've learned to be a showman. I can preach now far better than I used to, and I can get through my work in half the time, and keep on the right side of my people, and get along with perfect smoothness. I was too green before. I took the thing seriously, and I let every mean-fisted curmudgeon and crazy fanatic worry me, and keep me on pins and needles. I don't do that any more. I've taken a new measure on life. I see now what life is really worth, and I'm going to have my share of it.[58]

Theron Ware throws away his youthful innocences as something

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[57] Ibid., pp. 198-99.

[58] Ibid., p. 373.

useless. He changes into something not quite human, a social hero. The particular irony of this situation is that the society which admired the simple, warm-hearted Theron, is bored by the sophisticated, cynical Theron.

As Theron loses his innocence, the once lovely relationship he had with his wife turns sour, as does his whole life. At the end of the novel, Theron realizes that he has not only compromised his position, but has thrown it away. He clearly sees what has happened:

> Six months ago I was a good man. I not only seemed to be good, to others and to myself, but I <u>was</u> good. I had a soul: I had a conscience. I was going along doing my duty, and I was happy in it . . . . You see me here six months after. Look at me! I haven't got an honest hair in my head. I'm a bad man through and through that's what I am . . . I just walked deliberately down-hill, with my eyes wide open. I told myself all the while that I was climbing up-hill instead, but I knew in my heart that it was a lie.[59]

Theron fails in his attempt to become a social hero. Afterward, he realizes his mistake, but it is too late to recall his lost innocence.

Theron represents the character of the anti-hero at a very early stage in the anti-hero's development. By transforming himself from an anti-hero to a social hero, he shows, it is true, the contrast between the anti-hero, who is in opposition to the sophisticated society, and the social hero, who conforms to the

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[59] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 498.

status-seeking society. But Theron is not a mature anti-hero because he is unconscious of his position in relation to society. He is an anti-hero by accident. As soon as he becomes conscious of his position, he rejects it. He ends a broken man, totally lacking in courage, and heeding only the false values of others.

The Wings of the Dove (1902) by Henry James is a novel of an anti-hero, Milly Theale. Milly is in many respect similar to Theron, at the beginning of that novel. Like him, she is quite naive, simple, honest, and kind-hearted. But unlike Theron, she is conscious of her innocence and deliberately remains innocent throughout the novel.

James describes Milly with his usual care:

> [She was] . . . slim, constantly pale, delicately haggard, anomalously, agreeably angular, young person of not more than two-and-twenty . . . . She was alone, she was stricken, she was rich, and, in particular, she was strange . . . .[60]

Milly was strange. She did not fit in with the "crowd." Unlike Theron Ware, she was rich. James says, ". . . the girl couldn't get away from her wealth."[61] And yet William Dean Howells accurately notes that Milly is unconscious of material environment.[62]

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[60]Henry James, The Wings of the Dove, p. 93.

[61]Ibid., p. 104.

[62]William Dean Howells, "Mr. Henry James' Later Work," The Question of Henry James, Frederick W. Dupee (ed.), p. 9.

She is like a flower, full of nectar, with bees swarming around her, and she is unaware that it is the nectar which brings them. Since she is young, wealthy, and attractive, Milly, unlike Theron, could have successfully become a social hero. But Milly rejects the value which society places upon her money and her social position; she holds firmly to her inner-convictions and opposes the false society.

In the novel, Milly goes to England, where Mrs. Lowder seizes upon her and adds Milly to her collection of social gems. Aware of all the attention Mrs. Lowder lavishes on her and on her traveling companion, James has Milly decide, "It was as if she really cared for them and it was magnificent fidelity . . . ."[63] Milly feels that she is alienated from the members of the London social set, although they evidently treasure her presence. She feels that she is separated from Lord Mark, Mrs. Lowder, Kate Croy, and Merton Densher by something more than the fact that they are English and she is American. Milly wonders if,

> She might learn from <u>him</u> [Lord Mark] why she was so different from the handsom girl [Kate Croy]--which she didn't know, being merely able to feel it; or at any rate might learn from him why the handsome girl was so different from her.[64]

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[63] James, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 126.

[64] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 125.

Although Milly is to a certain extent naive, she can sense the vast difference between the social hero and herself. James makes a point of bringing this awareness out:

> Here, again, for instance, was a pertinent note for her: she had, on the spot, with her first plunge into the obscure depths of a society constituted from far back encountered the interesting phenomenon of complicated, of possibly sinister motive.[65]

Like Theon Ware, Milly is hardly conscious of this other world of deceit, treachery, and the mad struggle for social success. Milly suspects deceit only after she has been deceived; she is alienated from this type of society. As James comments: ". . . Milly was for ever seeing things afterwards . . . ."[66] It is Lord Mark who tells her, ". . . nobody here, you know, does anything for nothing."[67] And it is Milly's traveling companion who finally tells her, "It's you, my dear, who are not the same as any one else."[68] James clearly sets Milly Theale apart from the rest; she is in opposition to the English society.

As an anti-hero in the English society, Milly doesn't rebel against it; she merely teaches a few of its members a lesson. Kate Croy and Merton Densher want to marry, but Kate's

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[65] Loc. cit.

[66] Ibid., p. 126, (Italics mine).

[67] Ibid., p. 130.

[68] Ibid., p. 314.

aunt, Mrs. Lowder, wants her to marry into money. At this point, Kate and Merton learn of Milly's fatal disease and Kate plots that Merton should marry Milly--then when she dies, he will be rich enough to marry her. Milly learns of the plot, and does not marry Densher. Then, in order to punish her deceivers, she wills her money to Densher anyway. When she dies, it is Densher's turn to struggle with his conscience. Because of Milly's act, he is forced to examine the values by which he lives; he refuses the money and refuses to marry Kate. By being totally unselfish and loving her enemies, so to speak, Milly breaks the false society apart and forces Densher and Kate to define themselves. Milly is the anti-hero; she is inner-directed and opposed to the false society. She not only opposes it but conquers it as well. Morton D. Zabel observes that to conquer, Milly must retreat from the privileges of emotional and social conformity, modern sophistication, tradition, and current liberalism, and thus have the courage to be herself.[69] In other words, Milly must reject the stance of the social hero and act as she believes--as an anti-hero.

Milly Theale as an anti-hero has developed from Theron Ware. She is conscious of her opposition to society, while Theron is not. Milly makes a conscious decision to be herself; she decides not to play the role of a social hero, a role in

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[69]Morton D. Zabel, "The Poetics of Henry James," The Question of Henry James, Frederick W. Dupee (ed.), p. 216.

which she is so naturally cast. She refuses the easier path, and takes the right one. Theron convinced himself that he was right when he knew in his heart he was wrong. Milly had the courage to follow her inner-direction, even in the face of death.

In Jennie Gerhardt (1911) by Theodore Dreiser, the anti-hero is Jennie Gerhardt. In most novels of the anti-hero, the author contrasts the anti-hero with a social hero in order to make his point emphatically clear. In Dreiser's novel, Jennie Gerhardt is contrasted to Lester Kane, who begins the novel as an unconscious anti-hero, much like Theron Ware. And like Theron, Lester lacks the courage to be a true anti-hero, and changes his position to become a social hero.

Jennie is a girl of a very poor family who lives, unmarried, with Lester for many years. She agreed to this arrangement for two reasons: he was well-to-do and would help her poverty-stricken family, and she loved him. Dreiser describes Jennie as being

> . . . natural, sympathetic, emotional, with no schooling in the ways of polite society, but with a feeling for the beauty of life and the lovely things in human relationships which made her beyond question an exceptional woman.[70]

Like Milly, Jennie is completely unselfish; she is a woman of real virtue. But virtue, Dreiser says, ". . . is that quality

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[70]Theodore Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt, p. 381.

of generosity which offers itself willingly for another's service, and, being thus, it is held by society to be nearly worthless."[71] Society regards anything free as worthless. Jennie is a perfectly good woman, but unlike Milly, she is poor and is placed at the very bottom of the social ladder. Jennie knows what she is, and her inner-direction puts her in a position opposed to society. But she does not rebel; she remains passively in her position.

The real struggle between inner-direction and society is objectified in the personality of Lester Kane, and thereby becomes more intense and dramatic. Lester is basically a sensitive and honest man. It is only natural that he should fall in love with a woman like Jennie. Lester's father is the head of a big wagon factory, and, after learning about Lester's relationship with Jennie, he adds a clause to his will which gives Lester his rightful share of the family fortune if he leaves Jennie, 10,000 dollars a year if he marries her, and nothing whatever if he refuses to change the relationship. Lester's father, and everyone else in Dreiser's world, lives by the rules of his peers. It is a totally other-directed society, with few inner-directed people, and most of those are failures in business. Dreiser is clear in his charges against this other-directed society:

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[71] Ibid., p. 93.

> Society, in the mass, lacks woefully in the matter of discrimination. Its one criterion is the opinion of others. Its one-test that of self-preservation . . . . Only in rare instances and with rare individuals does there seem to be any guiding light from within.[72]

Those rare individuals with an inner-light are anti-heroes. Lester, like Jennie, was one, but he let his light burn out. He sold out his ideals and his conscience for his father's fortune and the improved public image. Lester did not want to do it, but as Dreiser puts it, "He was virtually an outcast, and nothing could save him but to reform his ways; in other words, he must give up Jennie once and for all."[73] Lester thought he could resist the social pressure and have his own way in the world. But,

> . . . the organization of society began to show itself to him as something based on possibly a spiritual, or, at least, superhuman counterpart. He could not fly in the fact of it. He could not deliberately ignore its mandate.[74]

Dreiser goes so far as to animate the spirit of society, calling it the ". . . race spirit, or social avatar . . . ."[75] This spirit is a power which dictates every proper action, every proper convention, and all acceptable values. Lester finally

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[72] Loc. cit.

[73] Ibid., p. 290.

[74] Ibid., p. 374.

[75] Loc. cit.

succumbs to this spirit, although he realizes that he is a coward. Dreiser comments: "He was feeling that he had been compelled to do the first ugly, brutal thing of his life. Jennie deserved better of him. . . . Truly she had played a finer part than he."[76] She did. She had the inner-direction and the courage to fly in the face of the social convention. Jennie retains her integrity; all the social pressure in the American business world fails to budge her from her convictions. She is consciously and determinedly opposed to her society, which is a more mature attitude than that of Theron Ware.

Barren Ground (1925) was written by Ellen Glasgow. Dorinda Oakley is the anti-hero of this novel, and the society she opposes is not sophisticated and hypocritical, but stubborn and fatalistic. Dorinda lives on a farm near Pedlar's Mill, Virginia. The land is covered with a grass which the inhabitants call "broomsage." Old Matthew says, "Broomsage ain't jest wild stuff. It's a kind of fate . . . ."[77] And later on, he explains, "If you stay here long enough, the broomsage claims you, and you get so lazy you cease to care about what becomes of you. There's failure in the air."[78] Old Matthew is not describing the broomsage as much as he is describing the society

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[76] Ibid., p. 324.

[77] Ellen Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 4.

[78] Ibid., p. 115.

of apathetic and fatalistic farmers. Every year they plant tobacco, and only tobacco; and every year the harvest becomes smaller and smaller. Glasgow comments that ". . . the one thing that seemed for her immutable and everlasting, was the poverty of the soil."[79] The land seemed fated to be poor, and, therefore, the farmers seemed fated to be poor. Dorinda thought, "God! what a country! Nobody seems to ask any more of life than to plod from one bad harvest to another . . . ."[80] As Dorinda grows up, she watches her father and her brothers give their lives to the soil and get nothing in return. She wonders if there is not more to life:

> Suddenly the feeling came over her that she was caught like a mouse in the trap of life. No matter how desperately she struggled, she could never escape; she could never be free. She was held fast by circumstances as by invisible wires of steel.[81]

But something does happen to release the trap; Dorinda falls in love. She clutches to her new love as an avenue of escape from the curse of the broomsage. But a few days before the wedding day, her fiancé leaves her, pregnant and disillusioned.

Dorinda leaves Pedlar's Mill and goes to New York. There she contemplates her life so far:

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[79] Ibid., p. 11

[80] Ibid., p. 31.

[81] Ibid., p. 57.

> All her trouble, she felt, had come to her from trying to make life over into something it was not. Dreams, that was the danger. . . . She had tried to find a door in the wall, an escape from the tyranny of things as they are . . . .[82]

She decides to stop trying to escape life and start trying to conquer it.

After a few years' experience and some new ideas, Dorinda comes back to Pedlar's Mill to challenge the soil and the fatalistic society. She turns a deaf ear to her neighbors, for she is inner-directed. Glasgow writes, "Although it seemed to her that she had grown wiser with the years, she had never entirely abandoned her futile effort to find a meaning in life."[83] Dorinda borrows money and starts a dairy; she soon has the best-producing farm in the county. She works day and night, and sometimes she wonders, for what?

> She was suffocated, she was buried alive beneath an emptiness, a negation of effort, beside which the vital tragedy of her youth appears almost happiness. Not pain, not disappointment, but the futility of all things was crushing her spirit. . . . Youth can never know the worst, she understood, because the worst that one can know is the end of expectancy.[84]

All her life, Dorinda dreams and hopes to bring meaning into her futile environment. At her death, she comes to this

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[82] Ibid., p. 187.

[83] Ibid., p. 473.

[84] Ibid., p. 521.

conclusion: "Endurance. Fortitude. The spirit of the land was flowing into her, and her own spirit, strengthened and refreshed, was flowing out again toward life."[85] Finally, all one can do is endure. Dorinda, following her inner-direction and actively rebelling against the fatalistic society, is the first anti-hero who really lives her anti-heroism. As soon as Dorinda stopped trying to escape from life, and started to face reality, she conquered. She learned that one must eliminate all false hopes in order to rid life of disillusionment. Dorinda overcomes her false hopes, the opinions of her society, and, finally, conquers the land itself. As a successful anti-hero, she endures.

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[85] Ibid., p. 524.

CHAPTER III

THE ANTI-HERO FROM 1933 TO 1962

Between 1933 and 1962 the anti-hero becomes a dominant figure in the American novel. Five novels which illustrate this fact are: Miss Lonelyhearts (1933) by Nathanael West, The Gallery (1947) by John Horne Burns, Catch-22 (1955) by Joseph Heller, Rabbit, Run (1960) by John Updike, and One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962) by Ken Kesey. The anti-hero reaches maturity in these five novels. After the depression, World War II, and the insecurity of the atomic age, society has become less tolerant of the individual. When mass communications dominate a culture, conformity becomes a way of life, and the anti-hero becomes the prevailing figure of literary protest.

Miss Lonelyhearts (1933), by Nathanael West, is a short novel about an anti-hero in the skeptical, disillusioned, cynical society of the depression years. Miss Lonelyhearts, a middle-aged man, is given the job of writing an advice-to-the-lovelorn column in a New York newspaper. Shrike, his editor, places this prayer on his desk:

> Soul of Miss L, glorify me.
> Body of Miss L, nourish me
> Blood of Miss L, intoxicate me.
> Tears of Miss L, wash me.
> Oh good Miss L, excuse my plea
> And hide me in your heart,

> And defend me from mine enemies.
> Help me, Miss L, help me, help me.
> In sæcula sæculorum. Amen.[86]

Shrike thinks the whole business is very funny, for he believes that Miss Lonelyhearts is the only Christ possible in this world. Miss Lonelyhearts, too, considers his job as a big joke. But after a while, the real suffering evident in the letters breaks through his calloused skin, and he begins to pity his readers. Malcolm Cowley writes that when Miss Lonelyhearts realizes his readers are taking him seriously, he is forced to reconsider his advice and to examine the values by which he lives.[87] For the first time he realizes that one can not simply laugh life off or reduce it to nothing with skepticism. He realizes that something is missing from life, some salve to relieve the misery and the heartache.

For a while he puts off pleas for help with sugared philosophy. He writes to his suffering readers:

> "Life is worthwhile, for it is full of dreams and peace, gentleness and ecstasy, and faith that burns like a clear white flame on a grim dark altar." But he found it impossible to continue. The letters were no longer funny. He could not go on finding the same joke funny thirty times a day for months on end.[88]

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[86]Nathanael West, Miss Lonelyhearts, p. 5.

[87]Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction to Miss Lonelyhearts," p. iv.

[88]West, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

He searches his own values for an answer, but sees nothing there. He then searches the physical world for some order and meaning. James F. Light calls Miss Lonelyhearts a quester, vainly searching for unity; he has a tremendous need for order and he tries desperately to re-make the mutable world into a permanent one.[89] But, needless to say, Miss Lonelyhearts can not find order or meaning in this irrational world, and all his attempts to create order come to nothing. West describes his search:

> He fled to the street, but there chaos was multiple. Broken groups of people hurried past, forming neither stars nor squares. The lamp-posts were badly spaced and the flagging was of different sizes. Nor could he do anything with the harsh clanging sound of street cars and the raw shouts of hucksters. No repeated group of words would fit their rhythm and no scale could give them meaning.[90]

Everywhere he looks, he fails to find a logical explanation for the misery and chaos of the world.

Miss Lonelyhearts stops looking for an answer in the physical world, and enters a spiritual dream world. In his first dream, he finds himself in a dead world of doorknobs.

> . . . he found himself on the stage of a crowded theater. He was a magician who did tricks with door-knobs. At his command, they bled, flowered, spoke.

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[89]James F. Light, Nathanael West: An Interpretive Study, pp. 54-55.

[90]West, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

> After his act was finished, he tried to lead his audience in prayer. But no matter how hard he struggled, his prayer was one Shrike had taught him and his voice was that of a conductor calling stations.[91]

Even his dreams fail him. For, as James F. Light writes, "In this world of decay and violence man is able to exist only through dreams, but dreams have been commercialized and stereotyped and weakened."[92]

Miss Lonelyhearts can no longer laugh off all the suffering in the world. The fact that he is forced to dream in order to find meaning in life, is an indictment against a meaningless and irrational world. Miss Lonelyhearts is caught in a trap with no way out. He tries to get fired by recommending suicide in his column, but all Shrike said was, "Remember, please, that your job is to increase the circulation of our paper. Suicide, it is only reasonable to think, must defeat this purpose.[93] Miss Lonelyhearts is the victim of a joke. Nothing makes sense; everything is merely absurd. He turns once again to his dreams, and soon identifies himself with Christ. West writes:

> For him, Christ was the most natural of excitements. Fixing his eyes on the image that hung on the wall, he

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[91] Ibid., p. 17.

[92] Light, op. cit., p. 77.

[93] West, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

> began to chant: "Christ, Christ, Jesus Christ. Christ, Christ, Jesus Christ." But the moment the snake started to uncoil in his brain, he became frightened and closed his eyes.[94]

And later, the identification becomes complete.

> He was conscious of two rhythms that were slowly becoming one. When they became one his identification with God was complete. His heart was the one heart, the heart of God. And his brain was likewise God's.[95]

Miss Lonelyhearts becomes convinced that he is the new Christ sent to earth to save the suffering. At this point, Doyle, a cripple, comes up the stairs, carrying a gun wrapped in a newspaper. Miss Lonelyhearts runs to embrace him, to heal him. Doyle shouts a warning, but all Miss Lonelyhearts can hear is a cry for help from the suffering masses. As he leaps upon Doyle, he is killed.

Miss Lonelyhearts is an effectual anti-hero for he reveals the emptiness of his society, the lack of order in the world, the absurd position of the individual who pursues an ideal, and the ineffectuality of one man against the world. He is not a tragic figure, but a comic-pathetic one--the sacrificial victim of a disillusioned and hollow society. He is a believer in a world of disbelief.

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[94] Ibid., p. 17.

[95] Ibid., p. 94.

Miss Lonelyhearts rebels against an empty, deluded society. The profound pleas for help break his protective shell and he must face the world naked, without the protection of his skepticism. He looks desperately for security, order, and a meaning in life, but finds none. He lacks the courage to face life without security, and he retreats into his dreams to find a brief moment of security in his self-identification with Christ. Because Miss Lonelyhearts ends in an act of madness, he fails as a mature anti-hero. But he does reveal the absurd world which was to engender future anti-heroes.

The Gallery (1947), by John Horne Burns, is a piece of fiction about the American soldiers in Naples during World War II, which anticipates, in many aspects, the ideas published eight years later by Joseph Heller in Catch-22. One might hesitate to call The Gallery a novel; it is a series of nine portraits, separated by eight "promenades." The Gallery depicts the same hollow society that is found in Miss Lonelyhearts, but the absurdity of living and dying is heightened by the immediacy of war.

The first portrait in the gallery is of Michael Patrick. He was just like thousands of other soldiers in Naples except, ". . .They had the ability, in place of his tired negation, to dramatize themselves for the appropriate minute. They hadn't yet seen the pointlessness of

themselves."[96] Michael Patrick is the tired GI--tired of all the pointless killing and, what is more, the pointless living. He is the anti-hero of World War II, who thinks that perhaps there is some meaning to life, but can not see it because of the overwhelming absurdity of the war.

Michael slowly gets drunk and then goes to an opera where he cries. Burns says:

> It was okay to cry because he knew with clarity and brillance exactly why he was crying. For his own ruined life, for the lives of millions of others like him, whom no one had heard of or thought about. For all the sick wretchedness of a world that no one could, or tried to, understand. For all who passed their stupid little lives in the middle of a huge myth and delusion.[97]

Michael is upset by a society which fails to see the insanity of the war. Society allows the war to happen, yet the individual has to fight it. The army tries to raise Michael's morale by reminding him of "mother, God, and country," but when he faces death each day, these fine ideals lose their appeal. No ideal or illusion can sugar-coat the bitter taste of death. He has seen too much needless dying and needless living to be shaken from his conviction that the world and the war are absurd, irrational, and pointless.

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[96] John Horne Burns, The Gallery, p. 6.

[97] Ibid., p. 17.

In the first "promenade" the author expresses his aloneness, and his tendency toward insanity when faced with the absurdity of war.

> . . . in a sense I went mad. Those who brood on death in wartime find that every pattern of life shrivels up. Decency becomes a window shade game to fool the neighbors, honor a tremolo stop on a Hammond organ, and courage simply your last hypocrisy with yourself--a keeping up with the Joneses, even in a foxhole.[98]

The author feels alienated from the mad world; he writes, "My loneliness was that of a drunken old man sitting in a grotto and looking out on an icy sea at the world's end."[99] In this world every thinking man is alone, for what man of reason would link himself to a hypocritical society?

To Hal (the third portrait of The Gallery), the absurdity of the war makes the world unreal. Burns writes that "Hal's secret was a great emptiness within himself. He believed in nothing, often doubted his own existence and that of the material world."[100] Hal is disillusioned with all the people who live their lives without questioning their values. They live only to satisfy their immediate needs: food and sex to appease their biological urges, and liquor and money to feed the gnawings of insecurity. To Hal,

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[98] Ibid., p. 22.

[99] Ibid., p. 24.

[100] Ibid., p. 54.

> People have become petty and horrid . . . if they ever were anything else . . . This is the age of toothbrushes and war bonds and depilatories. Shakespeare and Dostoievsky are dead . . . spirituality was something to console people when they couldn't buy medicine and life insurance . . . .[101]

The longer he tries to discover a pattern in the world, the more isolated and unreal he becomes.

> Hal found himself swimming in a wild and lonesome lake of semantic irrelevance. Nothing made any more sense to him. There was nothing anybody could say to him to lift the weight of unreality that was crushing him.[102]

When one suddenly realizes that his whole life is absurd and meaningless, everything tends to become unreal. The author concludes:

> In wartime the greatest heroes are the sensitive and shy and gentle. They're great because they have to live in a world which is dedicated in wartime to an annihilation of everything they stand for.[103]

This absurd fact is the crowning irrationality of the war.

In the fourth "promenade," Burns hears his fellow soldiers talk in an Algierian bar. "What conversation they made to one another or to me heightened my sense of the mania and irrelevance of the war."[104] Burns also feels the sense

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[101] Ibid., p. 62, (all ellipsis are J. H. Burns').

[102] Ibid., p. 74.

[103] Ibid., p. 87.

[104] Ibid., p. 120.

of aloneness and unreality that Hal felt:

> And I too began to slide around in the dihedrals of time and space, slipping in and out of being like a ball bearing in a maze . . . . At these moments I'd see myself rocketing out into space, seeing this world from the view-point of eternity. How tiny we all were, how like fleas dolled up for a pageant.[105]

Viewed from the perspective of the anti-hero, man appears insignificant and ignoble. In this "promenade" the author meets an officer who tells him,

> Your curiosity will be the death of you, Corporal. Play safe and retreat into some sort of a role . . . . I for example have lost my touch with life. I'm like those basket cases in combat. A man still alive but limbless and deaf and dumb, and blind. I just lie in a great white bed, my brain still functioning, but able to make no impression on the world outside me.[106]

This officer feels totally alienated from and opposed to a society which is so wrong and false that it appears to have gone mad. He wonders what he, one man, can do to change its course. He can see it all so clearly and yet he can do nothing.

> . . . nothing I learned at Yale has given me any preparation for the mad world in which I find myself . . . . Are you happy moving in herds and thinking as the newspapers and the radio commercials tell you to? . . . we get smugger all the time. We call forces of destruction

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[105] Ibid., p. 121.

[106] Ibid., p. 123.

> and speed, the March of Progress. . . . no one man can put his hands up to stop a locomotive . . . .[107]

No one individual can stop a blind society from charging on to destruction. After all, what can one man do, when his society is heading toward an insane and absurd end? The great American way of life is false, concludes the author. ". . . Americans were very poor spiritually. Their ideals were something to make money on. They had bankrupt souls."[108] Everyone in The Gallery speaks with the same anti-heroic spirit, though the words and accents are different. A sergeant softly says, "I'm fed up with the idea of sex without love and ideas without deeds."[109] The war made the soldiers examine their values; many intelligent soldiers became fed up with a blind, stupid society which made them fight an absurd war and striped their lives of all meaning.

The ninth and final portrait is of Moe. Moe is scheduled to go up north to fight the next day, but the night before, he talks with Maria. Maria expresses a disillusionment with life, and says that everyone has lost his way. But Moe replies that he has not lost the way and expresses the one hope of all anti-heroes: self-honesty.

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[107] Ibid., p. 124.

[108] Ibid., p. 259.

[109] Ibid., p. 292.

> We just have to find what not to put our faith in. Most of the people who try to tell us what to do are wrong . . . . We've confessed to one another that we're frightened and puzzled. But the point is, we have confessed. We don't pretend to know the answers.[110]

This is the essence of the anti-hero: he is one who does not know the answers and admits the fact; but he lives in a society which pretends to know the answers, and attempts to force him to acknowledge this falseness, to mold him into conformity, to crush his individual spirit, and which, claiming to have all the answers, becomes a closed system. Communism and certain religious fanatic groups claim to have found all the answers. Once this claim is made, the system becomes intolerant of all other possible answers. Such a system must crush the individual if it is to survive, for the individual will doubt its answers and question its values. The anti-hero is this individual, and today he questions the values of a middle-class society which seeks to equalize all and make everyone the same. The Gallery is a novel of such a society and the anti-hero who opposes it. John Steinbeck speaks of this same concept:

> And now the forces marshaled around the concept of the group have declared a war of extermination on that preciousness, the mind of man. By disparagement, by starvation, by repressions, forced direction, and the stunning hammer-blows of conditioning, the free, roving mind is being pusued, roped, blunted, drugged. It is

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[110] Ibid., p. 292, (Italics mine).

> a sad suicidal course our species seems to have taken.[111]

In The Gallery, the anti-hero reaches full maturity. His character now has been established, and further developments are only refinements.

Catch-22 (1955), by Joseph Heller, is a novel of a sane man, trapped in an insane world. The scene of the novel is an air base on a small Mediterranean island during World War II. The central figure, Yossarian, is a bombardier who is trying desperately to stay alive. John F. Hoffman sums up the theme of the novel: the war in Catch-22 is insane, for it is managed by incompetent officers who give irrational orders; the only way to stay alive is to take advantage of the same absurdity which is trying to kill you.[112] Yossarian will sacrifice anything to remain alive. When assigned to dangerous missions, he retreats into the hospital with a mysterious liver ailment. He is terrified by the war. Everyone is trying to kill him, yet when he tries to escape death, people think he is crazy. Yossarian expresses his fear to his friend, Clevinger:

> "They're trying to kill me," Yossarian told him calmly.
> "No one's trying to kill you," Clevinger cried.
> "Then why are they shooting at me?" Yossarian asked.

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[111] John Steinbeck, East of Eden, p. 114.

[112] Hoffman, op. cit., p. 262.

> "They're shooting at <u>everyone</u>," Clevinger answered. "They're trying to kill everyone."
>
> "And what difference does that make?"
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Clevinger really thought he was right but Yossarian had proof, because strangers he didn't even know shot at him with cannons every time he flew into the air to drop bombs on them, and it wasn't funny at all.[113]

John Muste observes that Yossarian is pointing to the ultimate absurdity of the war.[114] Yossarian must first maintain his existence before he can hope to find his essence. His superior officers try to attach an essence to him by telling him that he is fighting for freedom and many other "nice" ideals. But as soon as he swallows this sugared pill, he dies. Yossarian refuses the pill and fights to stay alive. John Muste observes that Yossarian is not at all confused; he knows with absolute certainty that everyone is trying to kill him.[115] The society, of which Yossarian is the victim, is made up of irrational and hateful people, who try to kill not only Yossarian's non-conformity, but Yossarian himself. In one scene in the novel, Clevinger is tried for ". . . breaking ranks while

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[113]Joseph Heller, <u>Catch-22</u>, p. 17.

[114]John M. Muste, "Better to Die Laughing: The War Novels of Joseph Heller and John Ashmead," <u>Critique</u>, V (Fall, 1962), 26.

[115]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 24.

in formation, felonious assault, indiscriminate behavior, mopery [sic], high treason, provoking, being a smart guy, listening to classical music, and so on."[116] Clevinger was sentenced to fifty-seven punishment tours:

> It was all very confusing to Clevinger. There were many strange things taking place, but the strangest of all, to Clevinger, was the hatred, the brutal, uncloaked, inexorable hatred of the members of the Action Board . . . .
>
> Yossarian had done his best to warn him the night before. "You haven't got a chance, kid," he had told him glumly. "They hate Jews."
>
> "But I'm not Jewish," answered Clevinger.
>
> "It will make no difference," Yossarian promised, and Yossarian was right. "They're after everybody."[117]

Yossarian is right. "They," the insane, irrational, absurd society, are out to kill everybody who does not become part of the absurd system.

Yossarian, as bombardier, has the job of steering the pilot out of the flak. On the run to Bologna, Aarfy climbs down into the nose of the plane with Yossarian. After the bombs are dropped, Yossarian screams at Aarfy to get out. When the flak becomes heavy, McWatt, the pilot, yells for directions, and Aarfy grins and says, "What did you say?"[118] Yossarian screams, curses, and swings at Aarfy to get him to leave, but Aarfy only grins. John Muste comments on this

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[116] Heller, op. cit., p. 77.

[117] Ibid., p. 83.

[118] Ibid., p. 153.

incident:

> Yossarian's desperation in his turret would be merely funny if Heller had not convinced us that the flak is real . . . . Aarfy is merely the embodiment of the insensitive, back-slapping amiable ass so familiar to all . . . .[119]

Aarfy apparently does not realize that he is endangering all of their lives, even his own, unless he gets out of the turret. He is so insensitive that he grins even when a shell rips through the plane, inches from Yossarian's head. Aarfy, later in the novel, rapes and then pushes a girl to her death because he did not want her to say bad things about him. Aarfy is typical of the insanity with which Yossarian must contend.

Catch-22 is very humorous, and yet very pathetic. John Muste notes that the most bloody and pathetic scenes are placed in a humorous setting; the humor is there but so is the reality, and the smile on the reader's lips is twisted in discomfort.[120] For example, in one scene McWatt buzzes the beach in his airplane, as was his habit. Kid Sampson was out on the raft and he,

> leaped clownishly up to touch it at the exact moment some arbitrary gust of wind or minor miscalculation

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[119]Muste, op. cit., p. 25.

[120]Ibid., p. 20.

> of McWatt's senses dropped the speeding plane down just low enough for a propeller to slice him half away.[121]

Sampson's legs stand on the raft for a while and then fall in the water; ". . . McWatt turned again, dipped his wings once in salute, decided oh well, what the hell, and flew into a mountain."[122] Humor and pathos are joined to produce a sense of weird and appalling absurdity.

The final absurdity is, of course, Catch-22 itself. This is a regulation invoked by the mad society to prevent any sane person from acting effectively. Yossarian wants to be grounded; he wants to live out the war. Everyone says that he and Orr are crazy, and he thinks that this should be ample medical reason to be grounded:

> 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.[123]

Yossarian is moved by the simplicity of Catch-22. John

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[121]Heller, op. cit., p. 347.

[122]Ibid., p. 349.

[123]Ibid., p. 47.

Muste defines this regulation as that which trips up anyone who thinks he has found a way out of the mess; it is the unpredictable final claim of a mad society on the individual.[124] John F. Hoffman defines it as a rule which makes free choice impossible, defeats all logical expectations, and resists the invasion of sanity.[125] Catch-22 represents all the irrationalities of a mad society which prevents the individual from finding order or meaning in life, and seeks to prevent him from living.

Many of the anti-heroic concepts initiated in The Gallery are brought to maturity in Catch-22. In The Gallery, the soldiers sensed the irrationality and the absurdity of the war, but in Catch-22, this absurdity takes on avalanche proportions, condemning not only the war but the civilization which allows the war to occur. Yossarian and his comrades are trapped by a ruthless, irrational society which, in its insanity, tries to kill them--the survivors of a sane subspecies of an insane race. The "hero" in this society would be the craziest person--like someone who would give up his life for the sake of his country. The anti-hero would be the sane person who would refuse to perform such an irrational act. The effect of these anti-heroic concepts,

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[124]Muste, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

[125]Hoffman, op. cit., pp. 262-64.

says John F. Hoffman, is to turn reason upside down, or to push Yossarian through a rabbit hole into a world where everything is a reverse image of the normal world.[126]

Catch-22 is not a war novel: the war merely has the effect of heightening the absurdity inherent in society. The society is already mad; the war is simply a symtom of the disease. Although the role of the anti-hero can appear extremely comical, as it does in Catch-22, the reader must finally agree with Yossarian when he says it isn't funny at all.

Rabbit, Run (1960), by John Updike, is also a novel directly concerned with anti-heroic concepts. But whereas Catch-22 shouts that the world has gone mad, Rabbit, Run abjectly whimpers it. And whereas Yossarian curses and fights the system, Harry (Rabbit) Angstrom merely twitches and scampers away. Both novels decry society's war on the individual, but Rabbit, Run is more subtle in its methods.

Harry Angstrom is a six foot, three inch, twenty-six year old ex-basketball star. He is also a disillusioned man who can not put his heart into selling kitchen gadgets. When he was in high school, he was a champion; he broke the B-league scoring record, and was famous throughout the county. Now, he is nothing. Updike describes Harry and

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[126] Ibid., p. 262.

explains his nickname.

> So tall, he seemed an unlikely rabbit, but the breadth of white face, the pallor of his blue irises, and a nervous flutter under his brief nose . . . partially explain the nickname, which was given to him when he too was a boy.[127]

Harry is a rabbit; he is alone in a world of big things and he is frightened. He is not happy with his present life. He felt good when he was playing basketball, for then he had his place in the world. But now, merely an ex-basketball star, he feels left-out and lonely.

On his way home from work, he plays basketball with some kids in an ally. He has not lost his touch, but the kids, Updike comments, "They've not forgotten him; worse, they never heard of him."[128] When he arrives at his home, he senses the decay and insignificance which surrounds his present life: he sees the "worn" steps under which a lost toy "molders;" in the "sunless" vestibule he sees a light bulb burning "dustily," three "empty" mailboxes, and his neighbor's door, shut like an "angry" face; and he smells something soft "decaying" in the walls.[129]

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[127]John Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 3.

[128]Ibid., p. 5.

[129]Ibid., p. 7.

Harry goes to a nearby town and lives for about a month with Ruth, a semi-professional prostitute. He tries to love her, but it is a vain attempt to fill the vacuum inside him. Ruth says she likes him, and when Rabbit asks why, she says: "'Cause you haven't given up. 'Cause in your stupid way you're still fighting."[130] Rabbit is fighting for a significant place in a society which has lost sight of inner and true values.

Jack Eccles, an Episcopal minister, visits Rabbit in an attempt to reconcile Rabbit and his wife, Janice. In answer to his questions, Rabbit replies:

> I once played a game real well. I really did. And after you're first-rate at something, no matter what, it takes the kick out of being second-rate. And that little thing Janice and I had going, boy, it was really second-rate.[131]

Rabbit did not actually run away from his wife, but from the whole dirty business of an insignificant and meaningless existence. Rabbit says, "I don't know, it seemed like I was glued in with a lot of busted toys and empty glasses and television going and meals late and no way of getting out."[132] Rabbit blames his wife for making life miserable;

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[130] Ibid., p. 91.

[131] Ibid., p. 105.

[132] Ibid., p. 104.

he does not think, yet, that life, itself, can be miserable. As an anti-hero, Rabbit sees in Janice all the false and meaningless values of society. Life "outside" is absurd. Rabbit says, "All I know is what's inside me. That's all I have."[133] He has his inner-direction, his guiding light, but nothing else. He gestures at the world and says, ". . . there's something that wants me to find it."[134] He is not sure what it is, but he knows that, since high school, it has been missing from his life.

When Janice has her second child, Harry goes back to her, although their relationship, basically, has not changed. While out with his first child, Nelson, Rabbit

> . . . feels the truth: the thing which had left his life had left irrevocably; no search would recover it. No flight would reach it. It was here, beneath the town, in these smells and these voices, forever behind him. The best he can do now is submit to the system and give Nelson a chance to pass, as he did, unthinkingly, through it.[135]

Rabbit realizes that it is not the fame that is now missing from his life, but the honesty and purity that accompanied the innocence of his youth. He decides to forget that and he tries to compromise with the system. He gets a job in

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[133] Ibid., p. 106.

[134] Ibid., p. 127.

[135] Ibid., p. 225.

his father-in-law's used car lot; but still,

> He hates all the people on the street in everyday clothes, advertising their belief that the world arches over a pit, that death is final, that the wandering thread of his feeling leads nowhere.[136]

Things get no better. He decides to walk around the block to clear his head, but instead of turning the corner he goes straight:

> His legs . . . scissor along evenly. Goodness lies inside, there is nothing outside, those things he was trying to balance have no weight. He feels his inside as very real suddenly, a pure blank space in the middle of a dense net. I don't know, he kept telling Ruth, he doesn't know, what to do, where to go, what will happen, the thought that he doesn't know seems to make him infinitely small and impossible to capture. Its smallness fills him like a vastness . . . . His hands lift of their own and he feels the wind on his ears even before, his heels hitting heavily on the pavement at first but with an effortless gathering out of a kind of sweet panic growing lighter and quicker and quieter, he runs. Ah: runs. Runs.[137]

Like Moe, in The Gallery, Rabbit admits that he does not know where he is going or what will happen. And like Moe, this confession fills him with a certain kind of peace. Other people, the ones in the system, pretend to know where they are going, for it is socially expected. Confessing that he does not know the answers, makes Rabbit feel small,

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[136] Ibid., p. 234.

[137] Ibid., pp. 306-07.

so small that society can never catch him in its trap of conformity, falseness, and insignificance. And he runs.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962), by Ken Kesey, is a novel concerning the inmates of an Oregon mental hospital. Since the anti-hero is, by definition, one who is, by society's standards, abnormal, he can be expected to be found in mental hospitals. In a world of insane people, the sane are put in mental hospitals, because they are abnormal, the unadjusted ones.

Within the hospital the outside normal society is personified by "Big Nurse" and her three Negro orderlies. The narrator of the novel is an Indian giant, Chief Bromden, who pretends to be deaf and dumb. The inmates are divided into two main classes: acutes, who are still repairable, and chronics who are beyond repair. Chief Bromden says,

> What the chronics are--or most of us, are machines with flaws born in, or beat in over so many years of the guy running head-on into solid things that by the time the hospital found him he was bleeding rust in some vacant lot.[138]

The chronics, in turn, are divided into walkers, like Chief Bromden, wheelers, who are confined to wheel chairs, and vegetables, who have absolutely no muscular control. The scene is static; Big Nurse gives the orders and the inmates

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[138]Ken Kesey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, p. 14.

jump. She tries to eradicate their abnormality, or individuality, in order to make them socially acceptable people, or at least, well-behaved inmates. This is the way it is until R. P. McMurphy enters the hospital.

In the words of Leslie Fiedler, McMurphy is a ". . . red-headed Irish-American rebel-bum."[139] He asked to be transferred from a prison farm to the hospital because he thought the life would be easier. He is a gambling man who is seemingly concerned with only one thing--filling his pockets. McMurphy is not like the other inmates; he is not tired of life, and Big Nurse can not kill his independent spirit.

While talking to his new inmates, McMurphy discovers that most of them have voluntarily entered the hospital to receive "help." They can leave, of their own free will, whenever they think they are ready to face the big world outside. At this point McMurphy stops filling his own pockets and starts helping the others get back on their own feet. He bets that he can get the Big Nurse's "goat" within a week. He fights back, but he has to play the game by Big Nurse's rules. If he does not "behave himself," she will send him to the Disturbed Ward or to the shock treatment room. McMurphy curses and jokes and gambles and sings. He gets up before the usual time and disrupts

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[139]Leslie A. Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p. 131.

Big Nurse's schedule, to show that he is not beaten. The other inmates begin to sense that this new patient is different. He destroys the apathy of the patients, which Big Nurse has spent years building.

The patients slowly become restless; they begin to consider themselves, once again, as individuals. But it takes courage to stand up; it is much easier to fall back into the system where one is safe. Chief Bromden says, "That's what McMurphy can't understand, us wanting to be safe. He keeps trying to drag us out of the fog, out in the open where we'd be easy to get at."[140] All week long, McMurphy laughs, jokes, and makes the inmates feel as if they are men again. Chief Bromden explains:

> There was times that week when I'd hear that full-throttled laugh, watch him scratching his belly and stretching and yawning and leaning back to wink at whoever he was joking with, everything coming to him just as natural as drawing breath, and I'd quit worrying about the Big Nurse and the Combine behind her. I'd think he was strong enough being his own self that he would never back down the way she was hoping he would . . . . It don't seem like I ever have been me. How can McMurphy be what he is?[141]

McMurphy is an individual with the courage to be himself. This quality is what Chief Bromden and the other inmates lack. They did not fit in society, and instead of discovering themselves in the hospital, the Big Nurse

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[140]Kesey, op. cit., p. 123.

[141]Ibid., p. 153.

had hammered them into a machine. McMurphy disrupts this machine; he refuses to be fit into place and invites the other cogs to come out and be themselves.

The Chief and McMurphy fight with the Negro orderlies. For "misbehaving," they are taken up to the Disturbed Ward, where Big Nurse asks McMurphy to admit he is wrong, or take shock treatments. McMurphy refuses to sign the confesion. In the shock room, the Chief comments that,

> He don't look a bit scared. He keeps grinning at me.
> They put the graphite salve on his temples. "What is it?" he says. "Conductant," the technician says. "Anointest my head with conductant. Do I get a crown of thorns?"[142]

The Chief comes down in about a week. But McMurphy is given shock treatments every day for several weeks because he refuses to sign Big Nurse's paper. The Chief tells the inmates of McMurphy's courage. McMurphy grows into a legend. When Big Nurse gives up and McMurphy comes downstairs, he says:

> When I get out of here the first women that takes on ol' Red McMurphy [sic] the ten-thousand-watt psychopath, she's gonna light up like a pinball machine and pay off in silver dollars! No, I ain't scared of their little battery charger.[143]

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[142] Ibid., p. 270.

[143] Ibid., p. 276.

McMurphy shows the inmates that the Big Nurse can not defeat him. They take their individualities out of the drawer and begin to wear them in pride, and with defiance.

At the end of the novel, Big Nurse blames Billy's suicide on McMurphy in an attempt to discredit him in the eyes of the other inmates. McMurphy walks slowly into her office, and calmly rips off her uniform and chokes her until he is pulled off. Chief Bromden says that it was our need that forced him to do it. He appeared to be just ". . . a sane, willful, dogged man performing a hard duty that finally just had to be done, like it or not."[144]

Now, several of the patients, because of McMurphy's efforts, have the courage to check out and go back into the world. Big Nurse, when she recovers, has a lobotomy performed on McMurphy, and he is reduced to a vegetable. The inmates do not believe that it is McMurphy; they think Big Nurse is trying to regain her tyrannic hold over them by showing them a false, beaten McMurphy. In order to keep the legend and spirit of McMurphy alive, Chief Bromden suffocates the vegetable that used to be McMurphy. Then he himself has the courage to escape into the world; he is finally himself.

R. P. McMurphy is an anti-hero who takes on, not only the responsibility for his own actions but also the

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[144] Ibid., p. 305.

responsibility for the well-being of others. He sacrifices not only the easy and safe pleasures that the system offers, but his life, so that others can be free of the system. In this novel, the conflict between the anti-hero and society develops from a desperate and losing battle of one against many, to a battle between the few against many, which might be won. McMurphy is a fully developed anti-hero, who goes one step beyond all other anti-heroes: he sacrifices his life so that others might live truly and authentically. He is a tragic figure, where the others are merely pathetic. Miss Lonelyhearts pretends to be Christ, but McMurphy truly becomes a Christ-figure.

CHAPTER IV

THE ANTI-HERO AND THE MODERN SOCIETY

The anti-hero, today, could be defined as one who personifies anything and everything that is anti-social. Therefore, in order to know the anti-hero in any adequate fashion, one must be familiar with contemporary American society. Orvin E. Klapp, in a study of Americ's heroes, villains, and fools, lists five categories of heroes: winners--those who get what they want, champions; splendid performers--those who make a "hit" before an audience; heroes of social acceptability--those who are well liked and epitomize the values of belonging and conforming; independent spirits--those who make their own way in the world, disregarding as fully as possible the way of conformity; and group servants--those who seek to serve and help others.[145] The term "social hero" would correspond to Klapp's "heroes of social acceptability," and the "anti-hero" would be most closely related to his "independent spirits." The new American character embodies nothing of the independent spirit; he personifies any and all values that are socially acceptable. Klapp says that this new hero is ". . . too well adjusted to be an independent

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[145]Klapp, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

spirit, too friendly to be uncooperative."[146] He travels smoothly through life, because he is like a log on the sea: he meets no resistance, because he has no definite objective. He is content merely to float, and to go where the sea carries him. The social hero is "well adjusted," a designation which means, simply, that he does not do anything that is anti-social--he always goes with the tide.

In order to be socially acceptable, the social hero tries to please everybody--everybody of social importance, that is. He seeks to have many friends and no enemies. He protects his reputation and strives to project a good public image. He plays any number of roles in an attempt to be a "good guy" to all groups and all people. Klapp observes, "It seems to me that modern society is building a facsimile of solidarity by adjustment technique and expert role-playing."[147] Society pretends to be a solid structure built upon essential and basic concepts and facts. The truth, however, is that society is concerned only with the non-essentials and superficialities of life, which represent the "refinements" of civilization.

In this modern society, the social hero is afraid of real commitment. He would rather feign indifference than

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[146] Ibid., p. 109, (Italics mine).

[147] Ibid., p. 112.

be caught in the embarrassing predicament of believing in something. Orvin Klapp concludes that the social hero, as a defensive measure, mocks the concepts of nobility, austerity, and striving to rise above the ordinary.[148] If he does not believe heroism is possible, he is released from the responsibility of being heroic. Commitment is dangerous; one is much safer to sit and be inconspicuous. Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek notes that too many Americans choose merely to drift with the crowd, conforming to social demands until they lose sight of their real identities.[149] Partly responsible for this fear of commitment and this lust for irresponsibility, says Klapp, is the ". . . tired, apathetic, cool, and beat rejection of lofty goals.[150] In order to defend their apathy and irresponsibility, the Americans tend to become cynical of all ideals. This cynicism is not the result of a disappointed search for a meaning in life, but is the defense of a mind too lazy to examine the values by which he lives. The social hero, then, like Tom Sawyer, refuses to doubt and question the values handed to him by society. He refuses to determine his own values and to take the responsibility for his actions.

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[148] Ibid., p. 158.

[149] Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek, The Individual and the Crowd: A Study of Identity in America, p. 111.

[150] Klapp, op. cit., p. 157.

He is content to let society define him, and determine his existence. Ruitenbeek concludes that in order to find his true identity, the American must learn to separate reality from illusions, and important values from trivial values; and then he must assert his identity by refusing to take society and social values for granted.[151] A man must be responsible for his actions if he wishes to define his identity, to become himself. But the great mass of American people are irresponsible; they seem to lack the courage and the time to define themselves.

The anti-hero, then, is the individual who is trapped in this society. He would like to leave civilization, and, like Huck Finn, "light out for the territory." But there is now, no "territory ahead;" society's web of non-essential values covers the world. Morris Wright conceives of the American character as being part anti-hero and part social hero: publicly, he is the builder of cities and a believer in the future of the American civilization; privately, he has a powerful urge to run away from all the things he publicly promotes.[152] John W. Aldridge also notices this "split-personality." He says that the typical American must decide whether to pursue success and social position

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[151]Ruitenbeek, op. cit., p. 118.

[152]Wright, op. cit., p. 44.

or be happy knowing that he is doing what is right.[153] These two facets of the American character are in utter opposition to each other.

The anti-hero trusts nothing; he questions everything, and does not pretend to have found all the answers. Truth and honesty are essential ingredients of the anti-heroic concept. The anti-hero is utterly opposed to intolerant, closed systems which deny the individual the right to act in accordance with the values he has defined for himself. Leslie Fiedler points out that totalitarian governments are not the only such systems:

> Not only in totalitarian societies, however, is the anti-heroic spirit assailed by the guardians of the pseudo-heroic. In democratic nations, mass culture is entrusted with the job assigned elsewhere to the secret police; and if those who snicker at pretensions are not hauled off to prison, they merely find it difficult to make themselves heard over the immensely serious chatter of the press. Yet recent writers from Norman Mailer to Joseph Heller, continue to feel obliged to carry to the world the comic pathetic news it is still reluctant to hear: the Hero is dead.[154]

The hero is dead, for anyone who personifies the values of the modern society is not even a real individual, let alone, better than average. He is one who merely pretends; he is a false, hypocritical tyrant who lives in and for the

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[153]Aldridge, op. cit., p. 125.

[154]Leslie A. Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p. 29.

non-essential pretensions and conventions of a false mass culture. The anti-hero has been born to take his place. As modern society formed, the hero was slowly transformed; as American culture rose to its middle-class heights and began to dictate position, manners, and values, the American novelists turned to the anti-hero as their instrument for resisting the rising tide of irresponsible conformity.

Huckleberry Finn (1883) was the first to contrast the falsity of a sentimental, romantic, and hypocritical society with the truth and reality of a boy throwing off all social pretensions and choosing his own values. In 1896, The Damnation of Theron Ware buried the concept of the social hero. Theron Ware was an unconscious anti-hero, who made an unsuccessful attempt to become a social hero. The Wings of the Dove (1902) reveals a self-conscious anti-hero who rejects all social values even as she faces death. Jennie Gerhardt (1911) shows a passive anti-hero who is seemingly powerless to act in the midst of a powerful and tyrannical society. Dorinda Oakly in Barren Ground (1925) actively opposes a society of fatalists who have given up hope of ever making the ground produce. The anti-heroes of all these novels, with the exception of Huck Finn, are immature. They are all inner-directed and opposed to a false society, but their rebellion is always "safe." They do not take unnecessary risks when following their commitments.

But Huck Finn, on the contrary, risked the gallows and eternal damnation when he decided to help Jim out of slavery. The rebellion of the other anti-heroes is very nearly as socially acceptable as the social values they oppose. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the American society of this period is immature; the great mass culture, as it is today, had not yet fully developed. It had not yet taken seriously its job of enforcing the standard values, manners, and conventions of middle-class society.

Miss Lonelyhearts (1933) shows a man who wants very much to believe in something, anything, in the cynical society of the thirties. It is a mocking novel which shows the helplessness of one man in an absurd, orderless world. The Gallery (1947) illustrates life from the viewpoint of men at war: a man hurrying from home to business and back again, can easily ignore the essential facts of life, but a soldier facing death each day finds it more difficult to do so; he can not overlook the overwhelming absurdity of life and death. Catch-22 (1955) presents the same concept of man and his world as does The Gallery, and expands it into a classic example of the absurd novel. In order to emphasize the inherent irrationality of the world and the absurdity of society, Yossarian is pictured as a sane man trapped on an insane world. He knows that society is

utterly wrong in its assumptions, but he is so busy trying to stay alive that he has no time to reform it. By the time of Rabbit, Run (1960), the mass culture has matured until it all but overwhelms the truth-seeking individual. Harry (Rabbit) Angstrom realizes that his innocence is gone forever, but he can not help but miss it, because his society is so completely and obviously unpure. He does not know what to do or where to go, and, finally, like Huck Finn, all he can do is run. In One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962), Ken Kesey compresses society and puts it in a mental hospital. Here the true faces of society and the individual are revealed; conformity is enforced so that all abnormalities will be erased. R. P. McMurphy, a mature anti-hero, fights back and leads the inmates to search for their true identities. Although he dies in the effort, his legend lives on as an inspiration to all anti-heroes.

Since 1930, the anti-hero has developed from the hesitant rebel to the man ready to die so that others can have the freedom and the courage to choose to be themselves. The mass, middle-class culture, too, has grown. The anti-hero is a product of the mass culture, just as penicillin is a product of disease. As the mass culture increased its influence and strength, it forced the maturation of the anti-hero. The two are inevitable, irreconcilable opposites. The anti-hero is fighting for survival and

for freedom to be himself; society is trying to exterminate him, for the only force that can destroy it, is the anti-hero.

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