A Comparative Study of Existential Attitudes in John Dos Passos’ Three Soldiers and Norman Mailer’s The Naked and The Dead

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EXISTENTIAL ATTITUDES
IN JOHN DOS PASSOS' THREE SOLDIERS AND
NORMAN MAILER'S THE NAKED AND THE DEAD

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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by
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August 1969
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EXISTENTIAL ATTITUDES

IN JOHN DOS PASSOS' THREE SOLDIERS AND

NORMAN MAILER'S THE NAKED AND THE DEAD

APPROVED 

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( late ) 

HUGH AGE

Director of Thesis

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
PREFACE

Certain academic experiences have whetted my literary appetite and influenced my choice of a thesis topic. In recent years, I have developed a profound interest in modern fiction. Dr. Robert Miller's philosophy class, Existentialism 315, during the second semester of 1966 at Georgetown (Ky.) College, introduced me to such renowned existential thinkers as Martin Heidegger, Soren Kierkegaard, Edmund Husserl, and Jean-Paul Sartre, and produced in me an insatiable desire to discover more about my own individual being and the universe in which I existed. This search for ultimate truth in life, agonizing and frustrating though it is, continues to influence and stimulate my activities as a graduate student at Western Kentucky University. My preoccupation with existential philosophy has resulted in my becoming interested in modern literature which echoes certain existential doctrines.

In February of 1969 my thesis director, Dr. Mary Washington Clarke, suggested as a possible topic an analysis of similarities of writing techniques used by John Dos Passos in his early novels and Norman Mailer in The Naked and the Dead. Some introductory reading showed that such a study did indeed have possibilities; however, my greater interest in ideas and philosophies made me reluctant to
undertake a thesis-length study of techniques. Ideas began to take form for an entirely different comparative study of the two writers. I began to relate words like isolation, despair, hopelessness, and anguish as they appeared in existential doctrines to the plots of Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* and Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. Dr. Clarke tentatively approved a search for existential parallels in *Three Soldiers* and *The Naked and the Dead*. I proposed to concentrate on a comparative study of existential elements in the two novels. The other members of my thesis committee agreed. My thesis project was launched and has proved interesting and rewarding.

In writing this thesis I have incurred several obligations. For their encouragement, understanding, and timely financial aid I am grateful to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Knuckles, now of Orlando, Florida. My thinking and writing have been profoundly influenced over the years by my father's unique sense of humor and quick wit—characteristics as much a part of him as the mountains of his beloved eastern Kentucky. From my mother, the former Ambel Stephens-Auson of Danville, I have acquired, mainly through the reading of her poetry, an unrelenting desire to find positive meaning in life. In a sense, this thesis reflects such a search.

I am grateful to Dr. Hugh Agee for taking time out of his busy schedule in order to provide me with helpful comments and suggestions.
I am indebted to Dr. Mary Washington Clarke, my thesis director, for her unfailing patience and forbearance. During the course of this thesis project I have learned from Dr. Clarke that quality literary scholarship requires more than zealous determination and vivid imagination. It requires an adherence to certain rational and logical methods of approach which are involved in literary research and investigation.
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INTRODUCTION

In two of the most significant books to emerge from the post World War I and II eras, the early Dos Passos and the early Mailer seem to display a special awareness of the transcendent set of values which Robert Hearn and John Andrews discovered and achieved in their lifetimes. While most critics seemed aware of the naturalistic elements in Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead, few acknowledged the existential undercurrent which ran silently and deeply through these and other works of their respective eras. In the late 1960's, as the concern for individual values has gained attention, it seems suitable to re-evaluate certain novels of the 1920's and the 1940's in an existential light.

Society and the institutions which compose it are deterministic; however, the individual, although a part of society, possesses an inviolable right to personal freedom. The tragedy of life lies in the individual's failure to exercise this freedom, which may be achieved inside or outside of society. The tendency of twentieth-century existential writers of fiction has been to portray their characters struggling alone, unaided, and unheeded. The list of "disaffiliate" American authors in a long one which continues to grow: John Dos Passos, E. E. Cummings, Thomas Boyd,
Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, Paul Bowles, Jack Kerouac, Harvey Swados, William Styron, Bernard Malamud, J. D. Salinger, and Norman Mailer.

A study of existential attitudes in John Dos Passos' <i>Three Soldiers</i> and Norman Mailer's <i>The Naked and the Dead</i> grew out of considerable selective reading in twentieth-century American fiction and a review of the history of existential thought. Existentialism, contrary to popular belief, is not a new philosophy. Says Ronald Grimesley:

Socrates may be considered as the first truly existential thinker of ancient Greece because he set the ethical reference of thought against the scientific bias of the Ionian school which sought to understand "nature" rather than "man." Within the Christian era St. Augustine and [Blaise] Pascal are held up as typical champions of human existence against the tyranny of "objective" worldviews which seek to tone down or eliminate the distinctive features of human existence.¹

The first chapter of this thesis provides a panorama of the American scene from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. The early Dos Passos and the early Mailer seem especially suitable for this study because of their similar personal backgrounds as well as their common outlook on the predicament of modern man. Of their several early novels <i>Three Soldiers</i> and <i>The Naked and the Dead</i> seem best for a comparative study. They zero in on the plight of the creative individual caught in a wartime situation where his freedom is stifled, dramatizing on a small scale

the plight of modern man, whose individuality appears inconsequential among the myriad institutions which are contained in modern society. The attitudes of Dos Passos and Mailer regarding the modern dilemma closely relate to various doctrines found in contemporary existentialism. Selective reading in atheistic existentialism revealed that the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre was most suitable for comparison with the stand (the defense of the creative individual caught in the autonomous grip of the military) taken by Dos Passos and Mailer in their previously-cited novels. Chapters two and three of this thesis concentrate on selecting key passages from Sartre's essays and works of fiction and relating them to corresponding extractions from *Three Soldiers* and *The Naked and the Dead* in order to make clear their existential relationships. The final chapter is retrospective in the sense that it looks backward over the assimilated material and traces what appears to be an unmistakable trend in American literature; this trend focuses upon isolated characters who are struggling to derive some positive meaning from their existence.

The intention of this study is to explore one facet of the existential mood in modern American fiction: the effect of wartime disillusionment in a naturalistic setting on a sensitive and creative young soldier as he searches for identity in a society whose values he has rejected.

The particular viewpoint here is to note the marked similarities of psychological development and resolution of the
dilemma in a World War I situation and in a World War II situation. Both central characters tend to be autobiographical and both exemplify an early development in American fiction oriented toward existentialism. The two novels considered are John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* (1921) and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), both written at stages in their authors' lives when lost faith in the capitalistic society, of which the army was epitome and symbol, had receded in favor of Marxist idealism.

Some operational definitions of atheistic existentialism, naturalism, and Marxist idealism will be presented in the paragraphs immediately following.

Sartre's doctrine of atheistic existentialism encompasses the following ideas:

Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or as Heidegger has it, the human reality. What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that first of all man exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is... Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.²

Naturalism is closely related to Existentialism and Marxism, but it has certain variations. Naturalism is a

philosophy of determinism. This is the vital principle of naturalism, setting it off from realism, says Vernon Farrington.

The naturalist will envisage the truth, and the truth that he sees is that the individual is impotent in the face of things. Hence it is as the victim, the individual defeated by the world, and made a sardonic jest of, that the naturalist chooses to portray man.\(^3\)

A definition of naturalism set forth in A Handbook to Literature amplifies that of Farrington:

The fundamental view of man which the naturalist takes is of an animal in the natural world, responding to environmental forces and internal stresses and drives, over none of which he has either control or full knowledge. The novels produced in this school have tended to emphasize either a biological determinism, with an emphasis on the animal nature of man, particularly his heredity, portraying him as an animal engaged in the endless and brutal struggle for survival, or a socio-economic determinism, portraying him as the victim of environmental forces and the product of social and economic factors beyond his full control or his full understanding. Life, he seems to feel, is a vicious trap, a cruel game.\(^4\)

A third ideology which finds expression in the course of this thesis is Marxism. Dos Passos and Wailes were attracted early in their writing careers to some aspects of this philosophy, dialectical materialism, the most basic tenet of Marxist socialism, is expressed in Marx and Engels' Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848).

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This document is considered as the greatest of all socialist pamphlets. Basically, Marx and Engels believed that mankind has always been divided into exploiter and exploited, master and slave, and in our day proletariat and capitalist. True personal freedom is possession of the power of independent action, of which the artisan, the small trader, and the peasant has long been deprived by capitalism. The Manifesto advocates nationalization of land, credit, transport, the abolition of rights of inheritance, the increase of taxation, the intensification of production, the destruction of the barriers between town and country, and the introduction of compulsory work and free education for all.

Marx preached the elimination of all conflict between man and man, and class and class. His guiding principle was the conception of the true nature of man, man viewed as humanity. But man could not live as man until all institutions based on money and private property were swept away and replaced by the co-operative activity of all individuals for common ends. Therefore, the socialist movement would not appeal to the proletariat for material ends, but to all men in terms of every kind of ideal good. A comment on Marxism that recently appeared in the American press is relevant to the philosophical implications of Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead:

The Marxist vision is a peculiar, sometimes deadly—but for many men an effective—way of perceiving the moving society and relating themselves to it. The revolutionary spirit in Marx's

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Europe was essentially anarchist. It was the revolt of men alienated by industrializing change from the land, from their tools, from a sense of their status. . . Although Marx sympathized with the emotions that called forth this revolt, he recognized anarchism's impotence and fought it bitterly. . . In a rapidly changing world, men apparently need a clear image of the "enemy" responsible for their anxiety and frustration. Hence the recent discovery of something called "The Establishment." A more recent American variant is "the military-industrial complex," familiarly known as MIC. The idea descends from Marx's "ruling class" of capitalists, with their grip on government and the cultural "superstructure."

This thesis is devoted primarily to examining existential factors present in *Three Soldiers* and *The Naked and the Dead*, but it is evident that naturalism and Marxism make their presence known in both novels. *Three Soldiers* and *The Naked and the Dead* suggest through their existential overtones that indeed existentialism is a vital force which is clearly exerting itself in twentieth-century literature.

Chapter one will clearly show presence of existential elements in the literature of World War I, and Chapter two will reveal that existentialism is a continuing force in American literature. The existential plight of modern man is clearly revealed and made more poignant in a wartime situation. The military stands out as one division of the near total authoritarian complex which holds modern man in its vise-like grip. Chapter three will examine the reactions of Norman Mailer, John Dos Passos, and Jean-Paul Sartre to this sickness which has enveloped the American

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society in particular. Through an examination of Marxist, naturalistic, and existential principles these authors attempt to find an escape route from the maze of confusion which overshadows modern man.

Sartrean existential philosophy has been applied to the representative heroes in each of these respective novels. From this study certain generalizations will be made in support of the main thesis that the truly heroic character in modern American society is the one who will disassociate himself from those en-slaving institutions which attempt to usurp his individuality; this character places his personal freedom above all other concerns and realizes that without achieving such personal freedom he risks complete dehumanization. When this happens, life assumes a totally meaningless character.

This study supports the viewpoint of a growing number of modern authors' works which have concentrated on the individual's struggle to find meaning and fulfillment in a complex world—a world of nuclear devices, campus unrest, global strife, military conquest, and racial turmoil from the existential point of view. Man's only salvation is to reject society's institutions and create an atmosphere which emulates individual rights and freedoms. Don Passos, Mailer, and Sartre have been pleading the cause of self-actualization and self-realization for years, pleas that seem more relevant in the 1960's than in the decades when they were written.
This investigation of existential attitudes in John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* is by no means exhaustive. Certainly more investigation may be carried out on existential elements and attitudes in twentieth-century American literature.
CHAPTER I

BRIDGING THE DIMENSIONS OF FICTION, PHILOSOPHY, AND HISTORY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

Existentialism has found its way into twentieth-century American literature. Its very existence in American culture may be linked to the crisis in human values which the population has experienced in modern times. American citizens question their worth and significance in a society where an age of automation, industrialization, and mechanization has dawned.

John Dos Passos’ Three Soldiers and Norman Mailer’s The Naked and the Dead are two literary projections of a modern dilemma that present many interesting parallels. Dos Passos, Mailer, Jean-Paul Sartre (French atheistic existentialist philosopher), and many other contemporary novelists and philosophers view man as a forlorn creature who is ultimately victimized by his environment, yet they accord unmistakable worth to the individual who struggles against the tide of complacency in order to discover meaning in his own existence. The naturalists and the existentialists stand on common ground in the sense that they see the world and man’s place in it as an “incredulity.” However, the existentialist feels that man has the potential to attain some meaning in his brief span of earth.
John Dos Passos' Three Soldiers and Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead present vividly existential attitudes in a naturalistic setting. Focusing the camera on the particular events of Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead, respectively, reveals close-ups of two significant points in American history. These significant points are far enough in the past to allow perspective, yet recent enough to relate to the present (the 1960's) and to narrow the focus to wartime prototypes of the two major authors at a time of climactic choices.

Dos Passos and Mailer championed the cause of the individual who was faced with an environment which threatened to dehumanize him. These two authors realized, like Sartre, that as human beings they were—in spite of the fact that they were living in an "absurd" world—condemned to be free. Dos Passos and Mailer not only have written about existential heroes who fought against institutions and systems, but they have lived their lives accordingly. Dos Passos at seventy-three has recently published The Portuguese Story: Three Centuries of Exploration and Discovery. Mailer was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in May of 1969 for his best selling non-fiction work Armies of the Night. These two authors are still "becoming" in the existential sense of the word. The existential attitudes in Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead reflect their authors' initial contact

experiences. Authors and prototype characters alike were placed in a situation where individual liberty and opinion were virtually nonexistent. The United States Army's stringent regard for the unfailing obedience of its members applied equally as ambulance-driver Don Passos witnessed military discipline in 1918 on the battlefields of France as it did for Mailer in 1943 in the jungles of the South Pacific theater. The plight of the sensitive individual whose every action is controlled by the military affords an excellent opportunity for application of certain existential attitudes. For the sensitive individual, life becomes all the more "absurd" in such an authoritarian environment. Such a situation calls for "existential courage." The confrontation with the military way of life is indeed a crucial period in the life of the Sartrean "authentic" man, hence provides the two novelists with the vivid metaphors of the human plight in the modern world.

Some of the war novels, exploiting the military adventures of their authors, which came out after the Armistice of 1918 were E. E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room*, Thomas Boyd's *Through the Wheat*, and Lawrence Stellings' *Plumes*. Those appearing in the decade following the end of World War II were William Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness*, Irwin Shaw's *The Troubled Air*, and George Garrett's *Which Ones Are the Enemy*. In retrospect most of these now seem inferior precisely because they appear to be imitative. Such war novels as James Jones' *From Here to Eternity* and Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man* are exceptions.
Jean-Paul Sartre, although he has not written a full length war novel, experienced the terror that accompanies one's participation in war. Sartre, who served as a member of the French underground during the Nazi occupation of France during World War II, knew well the wartime feelings of Dos Passos and Mailer. Sartre's short story "The Wall" is closely related to Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead in that it focuses upon a central character who is involved in an existential quest.

The "authentic" man--the man who is concerned with his personal freedom and destiny--is the man extolled by Dos Passos, Mailer, and Sartre. The philosophical foundations upon which Sartre rests his existential case are set forth primarily in two sources: Being and Nothingness and the Critique of Dialectical Reason. The influence of these works is much involved with Sartre's drama and fiction, for Sartre was not only an apostleized philosopher but a successful author as well.

As mentioned previously, Sartre was qualified by experience to understand the theme of individual reaction to the stifling oppression of military regimentation as expressed in Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead. Sartre's own book The Republic of Silence (1947) relates the author's experiences as a member of the Resistance Movement in Nazi occupied France during World War II. It is important to note that Sartre's basic "freedom" doctrines are expressed in this book. He pictures members of the Resistance group as heroes. Says Sartre:
All those among us . . , who knew any details concerning the Resistance asked themselves anxiously, "If they torture me, shall I be able to keep silent?" Thus the basic question of liberty was posed, and we were brought to the verge of the deepest knowledge that man can have of himself. For the secret of man is not in his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex: it is the limit of his own liberty, his capacity for resisting torture and death. Total responsibility in total solitude— is not this the very definition of liberty? . . . Thus, in darkness and blood, a Republic was established, the strongest of Republics. Each of its citizens knew that he owed himself to all and that he could count only on himself alone. Each of them, standing against the oppressor, undertook to be himself, freely and irrevocably.

Sartre felt that allegiance to one's personal beliefs, even in the face of death, is the highest honor for which man can be cited. Sartre, speaking out of an analogous experience of another country at a similar stage in modern western culture, agrees with the view of Dos Passos and Mailer. While the cornerstone of Sartre's atheistic existentialism is concerned with the responsibility of man to exercise his personal freedom, a second facet of the Sartrean doctrine examines the human being in relation to his universe. One must realize that he literally "is"—that he possesses the quality of being—before asking the more profound question of the "why" of it all.

Dos Passos, Mailer, and Sartre view man as an isolated creature doomed to inevitable defeat in an impervious universe. Sartre claims that man is the master of his own

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fate. An awareness of this responsibility creates in him an agonizing and infinite responsibility. Since God does not exist for the atheistic existentialist, everything is permitted and man is in consequence forlorn because he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers that he "is" without excuse. F. R. Heinemann claims that "three fundamental concepts, liberty, situation, and negation, must be understood if one wants to understand Sartre." He also states that "an individual who is faced with the permanent threat of annihilation discovers that non-being is a permanent possibility connected with being, and that the Nothing haunts Being."

John Dos Passos and Norman Mailer saw an opportunity with the emergence of World War I and World War II, respectively, to criticize a complacent and materialistic oriented American society. For these two authors, as well as Jean-Paul Sartre, the great majority of American citizens were "unauthentic" creatures. They were to be associated with Sartre's term "bad faith." This term was explained by John Wild:

The free man lives out his existential nothingness, and becomes what he really is, i.e., what he is not. He is dynamic, fluid, and ever creative. The non-free person, on the other hand, is ceaselessly trying in bad faith to become something fixed and affirmative which he is not. Such people adopt fixed...
principles, and have a firm and serious sense of duty. They are the conformists who make up the masses. Above all they are the serious people who move slowly and heavily, giving many reasons for the immediate policies to which they rigidly adhere, but falling into mythical Utopianism when questioned concerning the ultimate end. 5

The American scene prior to the outbreak of World War I and the publication of Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* (1921) had witnessed dark, foreboding elements of discontent blowing in upon a *fin de siècle* society. Before the turn of the century William Dean Howells and other realists asserted that American realism was hopeful because American life was hopeful. The novelist in this favored land was supposed to reflect "the temper of a people made kindly by an abundant prosperity and democratic justice." 6 Vernon L. Parrington partially bridges the gap in the emergence of naturalism and the decline of realism on the American scene in the following passage:

But while Howells was thus summing up the achievements of American realism and somewhat overconfidently forecasting its future temper, he was in fact writing the history of a past phase. Already the clouds were gathering upon our "gay" horizons, and the current optimists were finding less to feed on. ... The conclusions of the physical sciences were ravaging the orderly preserves of biological evolution, with its cardinal doctrine of organic growth and historical continuity; the hurrying march of scientific investigation was leaving far behind the benevolent universe conceived of by Victorian thinkers and was coming out upon higher and bleaker tablelands of

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speculation. It was the conception of determinism that after long denial was at last coming to wide acceptance—a conception that underlay the thinking of such diverse men as Comte and Spencer and Marx. As this mechanistic conception found lodgment in minds prepared by a mechanical economics, the last vestiges of the old French romanticism was swept away; a benevolent, egocentric universe was become unthinkable; progress was no longer the inherent law of matter and of life; but instead, everywhere change, disintegration and reintegration, a ceaseless and purposeless flux to what final end the human mind could not forecast. 7

American involvement in World War I was soon to deepen the mood of disillusion and increase the sense of disorientation of its citizens. This involvement in the war dashed to bits the hopes of countless millions who wanted to live out their days in an aura of dignity and tranquility. American industrial progress soared infinitely, and corrupt businessmen and politicians profited immensely during the war years. At the same time, however, American lower and middle-class soldiers were being slaughtered by the thousands on the battle-scarred terrains of Verdun and Belleau Wood in France.

America’s unprecedented growth and prosperity created new problems: a shortage of qualified instructors to teach men the necessary skills involved in operating new equipment; virtual absence of laws or regulations to protect the workers in the factories; dislocations of unskilled country people lured to the big cities in hopes of finding high paying jobs; overcrowded urban neighborhoods where the misery of
unassimilated poor from at home and abroad spawned violence and disease. The resounding cries of the poor echoed early in the century in Dreiser's *The Love of Money* (1900), in Morris's *The Octopus* (1901), and in Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906). Any fervent hopes that Americans held for returning to "the quiet afterglow of the nineteenth century," as John Dos Passos termed it, were extinguished when the nation entered World War I.

The high seriousness of wartime revealed American authors searching for deep and lasting values in the midst of uncertainty and chaos. Swiftly changing economic, cultural, and social conditions necessitated certain innovations in literature. Future novels would emphasize the psychological involvements of their characters as opposed to vivid external descriptions. The importance of individual thought may no longer be overlooked.

Perhaps William Dean Howells, who is credited with instituting the realistic novel in America, expressed most accurately the attitude of the majority of artists in America when he announced in 1914 the following message:

This war does not furnish the poet, the dramatist, the novelist with the material of literature. ... War is an upheaval of civilization, a return to barbarism; it means death to all the arts.


In 1916 John Dos Passos had directed attention to the fact that not only was American literature a rootless product lacking the folklore tradition which all older literature possessed, but that "an all-enveloping industrialism" had destroyed the possibilities of such a tradition arising in America.\(^\text{10}\) Dos Passos looked to the present and future for inspiration. He—along with Ernest Hemingway, E. E. Cummings, and Sherwood Anderson—was not prepared for the kind of inspiration which was to be found in France. Before departing for that country in 1917 to serve with the Norton-Harjes volunteer ambulance service, Dos Passos exclaimed to a Harvard classmate:

... if there were somewhere nowadays where you could flee from all this stupidity, from all this cant of governments, and this repetition of hatreds, this strangling hatred. But there is no such place, just as there is no more free land in America to escape to. Today every man must make a stand in the world; the only choice now is struggle or suicide.\(^\text{11}\)

These writers, whom Gertrude Stein labeled a "lost generation," were brought up in what is now thought of as the last stable period in American history—before America became a world empire. "Mr. Wilson's War," as Dos Passos called it, came in the life of this generation as an explosion of the old isolationism. "Mr. Wilson's War" tied America to Europe in a way that was to be stimulating at the time.

\(^{10}\) A. Galper, "John Dos Passos," \textit{Newman Review,} XL (July, 1932), 341-349.

\(^{11}\) Michael Gold, "The Education of John Dos Passos," \textit{English Journal,} XXII (February, 1933), 51.
to Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Cummings; but it destroyed their image of America. From their point of view "Mr. Wilson's war" was a moral cheat and a political catastrophe; as they saw it, it would soon give free reign to the speculators, financiers, and other "rugged individuals" whose unbridled greed was a dangerous American tradition that only men of intellectual principle had ever kept in check.19

Dos Passos' Three Soldiers, as Mailer's The Naked and the Dead was to do later, shows vividly the effects of military regimentation on individual soldiers, especially the stifling effects of the military system on the futile struggling of certain sensitive idealists who attempted to extricate themselves from the multitudes of nameless, faceless, speechless, and soulless human beings who are forever enmeshed in "the system."

Whether or not Dos Passos and other members of the lost generation knew it, they were reaffirming some of the cardinal points on which the philosophy of atheistic existentialism rests. Jean-Paul Sartre's "existential hero" may be closely identified with certain of Dos Passos' and Mailer's characters. Sartre, a contemporary French philosopher, Dos Passos, and Mailer see the individual as one who is engaged in a never-ending struggle to find meaning in life amid society's attempt to integrate him with the masses. They observe in the American military system a metaphor of the

intellectual's dilemma in a mass society. Similarities in the personal lives of these three men may be largely responsible for giving them such similar focus on the plight of a creative person in wartime military service. These facets will be considered later in the light of the more detailed analyses that here follow immediately.
Modern criticism of the place of John Dos Passos in American literature has very nearly run a complete revolution or circle between the early 1920's and the late 1960's.¹

The life of John Dos Passos was divided, as were the lives of all of his generation, into three parts: an era before the First World War, experience in the war, and an aftermath of adjustment to the postwar society.

Dos Passos was born in 1896, the son of a successful New York lawyer. The year 1896 would fall under a category which Van Wyck Brooks has called (1885-1915) "the confident years."² New inventions, rapid industrialization, territorial expansion, and transcontinental transportation saw America transformed into a world power. Her literature echoed this dramatic transfiguration. A tendency toward original themes (for example, the local color movement) had emerged much earlier in the works of Hamlin Garland, Mary E. Wilkins

¹Robert G. Davis, John Dos Passos, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers 220 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 5. (Hereinafter referred to as John Dos Passos.)

Freeman, Ambrose Bierce, Bret Harte, and others; but romanticism had acquiesced to realism.

Frederick J. Hoffman characterizes the United States in 1916, the year of John Dos Passos' graduation from Harvard University, as follows:

America was enjoying a material happiness based on better wages, newer goods, and wider stock distribution. For some, however, the very complacency of material progress was stifling. Young men in offices, factories, or salesrooms were bored despite the better wages, were bored because there seemed no way in the slow roll of solidifying citizenship to prove themselves while still young. When the war did arrive it was seized as the very breath of glory.3

Dos Passos was one of those thousands of young men who yearned for adventure. The year following his graduation from college in 1916, Dos Passos signed up with the Norton-Harjes volunteer ambulance unit. He was to serve with this outfit in France until his discharge in 1920 from the service. Young Dos Passos, the product of a sheltered existence, was not mentally prepared for the shock, confusion, and bloodshed which confronted him on the French battlefronts. Two early novels (One Man's Initiation-1917 and Three Soldiers) reflected the devastation which had been indelibly etched on the young author's mind. This stark confrontation set in motion Dos Passos' quest for personal identity which has become a lifelong obsession. Dos Passos stated that when he tried to confront himself he encountered "an unidentified

The relation of the individual to society has consistently been the key problem for Dos Passos, both as writer and citizen; and his conviction that individual freedom was being lost within a steadily congealing social organism attracted him from the very beginning to any expression of revolt. Robert G. Davis comments on Dos Passos' feelings of sympathy for the oppressed individual when he declares:

Dos Passos' imagination seized almost exclusively on lost causes, beaten men, sensitivity helpless before power. Clearly it is not only America he is writing about, but the human condition. Dos Passos as Telemachus or Quixote sets out on a search that could have no terminus in space. This is why his novels so often conclude with the image of a man striding he knows not where.

This concept of a man, the kind of man he himself was, struggling to find some sort of identity coincides with the Sartrean idea that the real man—the "authentic" man—the one who realizes that man can have no assurance of anything meaningful in life, yet pursues his "essence" in spite of this life's "absurd" condition.

4 Blanche H. Gelfant, "The Search for Identity in the Novels of John Dos Passos," PMLA, LXXVI (March, 1961), 133-140. (Hereinafter referred to as "Search for Identity.")


6 Davis, John Dos Passos, p. 5.
Alan Calmer remarked in July of 1932 that only three splendid war novels emerged from World War I: John Dos Passos' Three Soldiers (1921); Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms (1929); and E. E. Cummings' The Enormous Room (1930).  

Archibald MacLeish and Conrad Aiken insisted that Dos Passos' Three Soldiers lacked "total reality." By this they meant that Dos Passos had been biased against the army in his novel. They insisted that during war--any war--men are enriched by what they undergo, made more human, not more mechanical. MacLeish and Aiken looked at the anti-war novels as examples of false despair and unpatriotic sulking; the chief point of attack was simply that the despair writers were sensitive and artistic young men, and so altogether untypical as soldiers.

Dos Passos insisted they were wrong. He held that economic conflict under capitalism resulted in wars which made huge profits for a few while it destroyed the common soldier under the hysteria and subterfuge of patriotism. Dos Passos realized that while the combat soldier was the one required to sacrifice himself on the battlefield, there were innumerable beneficiaries back in the United States who

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Ibid., p. 197.
reaped the rewards of this sacrifice. World War I provided many things for the non-combatants, as Stanley Cooperman has pointed out:

Young men and women wanted excitement; the British wanted supremacy of the seas; farmers wanted better prices; industrialists wanted better contracts; clergymen wanted a holy cause; and generals wanted to convince a world gone soft with peace that the possession of arms represented the health of the state.\(^\text{10}\)

Ernest Hemingway, a contemporary of Dos Passos, shared the latter's attitude concerning the terrible sacrifices that soldiers often had to make in battle. Frederick Henry in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and Robert Jordan in a later war in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) experience existential attitudes in naturalistic settings. Hemingway lived and presented in his fiction a code by which men went to war and survived or died in it. Nobility, honor, and patriotism were phony abstractions. Disappointment, rebellion, utter rejection, and moral and spiritual collapse marked the memorable books (*Dos Passos*' *Three Soldiers* [1921], Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* [1929], and E. E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room* [1930]) that came out of World War I.\(^\text{11}\)

Dos Passos' first novel, *One Man's Initiation-1917*, was published in 1920. The novel's main character, Martin

\(^{10}\)Cooperman, *World War I*, p. 59.

Howe, spoke for a number of his comrades-in-arms when he 
beailed the disparity of his position:

Oh, the lies, the lies, the lies, the lies that
life is smothered in! We must strike once more for
freedom, for the sake of the dignity of man. Hope-
lessly, cynically, ruthlessly we must rise and show
at least that we are not taken in. That we are
slaves but not willing slaves. Oh, they have de-
ceived us so many times. We have been such dupes,
we have been such dupes.12

Martin Howe was, in actuality, John Dos Passos. The year
1917 found the restless young Harvard graduate serving in
an ambulance unit on the battlefronts of France. The shock
and dismay felt by Dos Passos was initially expressed in
One Man's Initiation-1917; however, the world would soon learn
of the author's real discontent with the publication of Three
Soldiers. Its author's hatred of the army and the war finds
expression in Three Soldiers in its exposition of the army's
oppressive disciplines and in its detailed portrayals of war
tedium and vulgarity. "The dominating symbolism is the ma-
chine, which rules over the individual and reduces to nothing
all his pretensions and hopes. The war was for Dos Passos
brutal, vulgar, and cruel...."

George Snell remarks of Three Soldiers:

This novel burst like a bombshell... No
American had written so devastating a criticism
of war's effects on the individual; no American had
dared to write so candidly about the individual's
real attitude toward the machine that destroyed

12Aldridge, Lost Generation, p. 45.
13Hoffman, The Twenties, p. 61.
his manhood as surely as its guns could destroy his body.\textsuperscript{14}

R. H. Footman supports Snell's remark by commenting:

Dos Passos could not help himself with this book; he had to write it. The war must have seared itself into his mind, which could never be normal until it had purged itself of the awful memories. \textit{Three Soldiers} is his mental detergent.\textsuperscript{15}

In \textit{Three Soldiers} a new novelist used all the weapons of the mind in his portrayal of the social scene: those privates who lived out their desolate histories in such halting accents, the ministers, the radicals, the Southerners in the novel who are still waging their private war against their Negro comrades, the officers, undertakers, taxi-drivers, and Harvard aesthetes who comprised the military organization—or perhaps rather the military disorganization.\textsuperscript{16}

The first picture of John Andrews in \textit{Three Soldiers} is an appropriate one. He has fallen into the clutches of the army; the process of dehumanization had begun: "John Andrews stood naked in the center of a large bare room, of which the walls and ceiling and floor were made of raw pine boards."\textsuperscript{17} Andrews had deliberately enlisted in the faceless unity of the army:

\textsuperscript{14}Cooperman, \textit{World War I}, p. 238.


\textsuperscript{16}Maxwell Geismar, \textit{Writers in Crisis} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1942), p. 34.

This was what he had sought. . . . It was in this that he would take refuge from the horror of the world that had fallen in on him. He was sick of revolt, of thought, of carrying his individuality like a banner above the turmoil. This was much better . . . to humble himself in the mud of common slavery. . . .

Behind Andrews' act of joining the service lies a complex of emotions that constitutes the typical syndrome for Dos Passos' hero: self-recrimination and guilt, boredom, and a desperate desire to be reborn. Not getting anywhere and not doing anything constitute the typical hero's complaint. He enters the army hoping to forget himself, wanting to become a part of a great common effort, fully understanding the need of command and subordination in the military establishment. He believes, moreover, that in this environment individuals may become stronger through mutual dependence; and this, of course, proves the cruelest of all his illusions. Instead of finding comradeship, he learns that each man is isolated by military routine into his niche within the system. John Andrews suffers most severely the depersonalization of a discipline which implicitly demanded that men be turned into machines. He experienced the violence and insult of imprisonment, the inevitable punishment to the individual in rebellion. His loss is the greatest because


20 David Sanders, "Lies and the System: Enduring Themes From Dos Passos' Early Novels," South Atlantic Quarterly, LXV (Spring, 1965), 222.
it frustrates man's most exalted power, the power to create and by creating to liberate his talents towards a total expression of his being. The hero's inner-compulsion to define himself through a social role in turn defines Dos Passos' novels. According to Gelfant:

It gives them logical consequence, direction, plot, and moving power. This problem of achieving a whole and innerly motivated real identity is one of the characteristic problems of our time.

Dos Passos saw that the individual had to struggle constantly against the impersonality of the military organization and the meaninglessness of its activity. The war and the military took their place as prime forces working towards the depersonalization of modern man. Dos Passos is constantly seeing the individual being hurt by his environment, no matter whether it be tightly organized or in chaos. He reacts almost instinctively against the shape of things as they are; he finds everywhere frustration of the individual's search for satisfaction—frustration by the acts of childhood, youth and age, by the structure of family, school, army, church, factory, union, corporation, and government.

John Andrews soon discovers that his need for identity can never be realized in the army. The suppression of his

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22 Ibid., p. 149.
23 Eltinger, Fiction of the Forties, p. 75.
individuality becomes an unendurable tyranny as he realizes that the army has deprived him of—certainly not donated to him—the chance to achieve self-identity. In the end, Three Soldiers portrays the search for identity climaxed in the spiritual destruction of the man. Andrews' questioning of the entire military system is implicit in the following passage taken from Three Soldiers:

He thought of himself and Chrisfield picking up cigarettes and the tramp, tramp, tramp of feet on the drill field. Where was the connection? Was this all futile madness? They'd come from such various worlds, all these men sleeping about him, to be united in this. And what did they think of it, all these sleepers? Had they too not had dreams when they were boys? Or had these generations prepared them only for this?  

Although Andrews is acknowledged as the main character in Three Soldiers, Fuselli and Chrisfield too are victimized by the army. Theirs, however, is not the overpowering and total despair of Andrews. Fuselli lacks Andrews' feeling and sensitivity. He has never been concerned about his identity; therefore, he does not feel that the army is taking anything away from him. He willingly succumbs to the system of order and regimentation. Fuselli is concerned only with his chances for promotion. Gaining a corporalship would bring about the ultimate in status. He thinks about the prestige that this title will gain for him with the folks back home. Fuselli yields to the system completely in the


26 Don Fassine, Three Soldiers, p. 71.
hope that it will reward him. One can readily see the gulf which separates the personality of Fuselli and the more sensitive and creative personality of Andrews. Fuselli survives only by withdrawing to a level of mere physical existence. Commenting on his permanent assignment to a labor detail, Fuselli remarks that there are good meals, regular hours, and equally regular opportunities for drunken sex. "The dog image," says Stanley Cooperman, "introduced by Dos Passos is in truth the definition of Fuselli as he works his way—or crawls his way—into the promised land of a corporalship."27 Fuselli gains favoritism with his sergeant and lieutenant by efficiency as a laborer, willingness as a servant, and humility as a messenger boy.

There are times when Fuselli, like Andrews, becomes aware of a growing uneasiness which adds to his heaviness of heart. He has just been ordered to sweep a lieutenant's room and resents this humiliating assignment. Fuselli's despairing mood is captured in the following passage:

Despair seized hold of him. He was so far from anyone who cared about him, so lost in the vast machine. He was telling himself that he would never get up where he could show what he was good for. He felt as if he were on a treadmill. Day after day it would be like this—the same routine, the same helplessness... 28

Dos Passos points out that individual rebellion against the military injustice is a universal attitude. In Three Soldiers a Frenchman speaks to Fuselli saying...

27 Cooperman, World War I, p. 152.
28 Dos Passos, Three Soldiers, p. 63.
that "in the tyranny of the army a man becomes a brute, a piece of machinery" (p. 92). The author is particularly cynical with army regulations that tended to victimize those enlisted men who were least educated in the ways of wickedness. For example, a serviceman in the United States Army was subject to disciplinary action if he were caught in an intimate relationship with a French woman. Dos Passos thought that the army was being totally unrealistic in relation to this biological necessity. The French Army solved the problem with officially licensed prostitutes. Why did United States Army commanders fail to find a solution for this problem? Dos Passos would point out the typical stupidity of the army hierarchy as the reason.

In *Three Soldiers* Dos Passos mentions an instance in which one young soldier refuses to come to attention because of illness. The commanding officer interprets this as an act of insubordination and orders the soldier arrested. Before the young man can be carried off to the guardhouse, he collapses and dies. Here is a perfect example of what Henry David Thoreau was talking about when he spoke of the State as never intentionally confronting a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses.

The third of the *Three Soldiers* in Dos Passos' novel was named William Chrisfield. He was a simple, unthinking Hoosier who was much like Fuselli. His concerns were immediate: food, shelter, and clothing. Perhaps one of the
highlights in the novel's action occur when Chrisfield stumbles upon the body of a dead German in a field far from the battlefront. The German had shot himself. He had lost his nerve, his will to live, his hope. War, servility, and uniformity were not life. They were, for him, an empty existence, a waking nightmare whose only end was death. Here is a prime example of the fate often experienced by the human being who can no longer endure his isolation. This German soldier faced what is the only serious question man ever faces according to the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre—that is death. Sartre does not condemn the man who takes this way out; however he does say "life is individual, spontaneous, and free, but it takes nerve to live it." 29

Jean-Paul Sartre asserts that man is free to make decisions, but that there is a certain responsibility which accompanies this freedom. One must be willing to accept the consequences of his act. Andrews will eventually decide that he can no longer endure the stifling atmosphere of the army. He flees knowing that capture will result in a lengthy prison term. When this finally occurs, Andrews accepts defeat with calm resignation. He rebelled against the system, achieved his moment of freedom, and now must suffer the consequences of his act of defiance.

Dos Passos ridicules those individuals in the army who have been duped into actually believing that they are

29 Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 209.
fighting for a noble and valiant cause. Fuselli and Andrews are told by one of their comrades that they are voluntary workers in the cause of democracy: "You're doing this so that your children will be able to live peaceful." 30

Fuselli and Andrews realize that their personal liberties have been forfeited in order that bankers, munitions makers, industrialists, and the incalculable others may grow wealthy and profit at their own expense. Perhaps the realization of this forced isolation was the factor that prompted the German soldier found by Chrisfield to pull the trigger on himself. 31

Dos Passos, like less existentialist-oriented writers of naturalism, saw man's destiny controlled to a large extent—but not completely—by heredity and environment. The individual is imbued with the power of choice. This power of choice will permit him with the means to escape being simply a cog in the universe's gigantic wheel of creation, Dos Passos illustrates this point in Three Soldiers. Andrews escapes his "treadmill" existence; Fuselli and Chrisfield do not. Chrisfield, who is insipid and uneducated, rebels


31 An interesting comparison may be drawn between the finding of the German soldier's body in the woods by Chrisfield and the discovery of the rotted corpse by Pvt. Henry Fleming in Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage (1896). Dos Passos, the author of Three Soldiers, in which Chrisfield appears, admits that he was influenced by Crane and the naturalistic tradition. The aforementioned incidents may be found in The Red Badge of Courage and in Three Soldiers on pages 92 and 148 respectively.
against his lowly position as does Andrews. It must be
noted, however, that Chrisfield's rebellion is directed at
a particular officer—not at the military system in its
entirety. Chrisfield provokes Sgt. Anderson, whom he had
once attempted to knife, because the latter ordered him to
perform a distasteful assignment. Chrisfield in a blind
act of uncontrollable rage later murders Lieutenant Anderson,
whom he had stumbled upon in the woods near a battle zone.
Anderson has been wounded. Seeing the helpless soldier's
predicament, Chrisfield tosses a hand grenade at the unsuspect-
ing victim. This is clearly a barbarous act on the part of
Chrisfield. Dos Passos certainly would not condone this ac-
tion but would point out the intolerable conditions within
the military system that drove Chrisfield into temporary
insanity. With the removal of the hated Anderson, Chris-
field's behavior assumes a normal pattern.

Throughout the novel Dos Passos successfully employs
the use of flashback. Invariably, scenes of gaiety and
merriment in the soldiers' lives are recalled. When Andrews
suffers a serious wound, he becomes delirious and his thoughts
wander back to the pleasant times he had known before the
war. These fleeting moments spent in semi-consciousness con-
stitute the only relief that Andrews can find in his miserable
existence. He struggles to maintain his identity in this
overpowering system which seems to strip him of all individu-
ality. Each time Andrews recovers his senses he again be-
comes "the slave broken on the treadmill, the querulous."
piece of hurt flesh." It is during Andrews' confinement in the field hospital that he experiences what Jean-Paul Sartre termed "the moment of freedom." Andrews realizes the "absurdity" of his position. It is at this time he decides to take a stand in defense of his position. For Sartre and the existentialists, Andrews has ceased to be the "unauthentic" man. Evidence of Andrews' moment of revelation may be seen in the following passage:

The phrase about making the world safe for democracy came to Andrews' mind amid an avalanche of popular tunes, of visions of patriotic numbers on the vaudeville stage. . . . He had not been driven into the army by the force of public opinion, he had not been carried away by any wave of blind confidence in the phrases of bought propagandists. He had not the strength to live. He had not had the courage to move a muscle for his freedom. . . . What right had a man to exist who was too cowardly to stand up for what he thought and felt, for his whole makeup, for everything that made him an individual apart from his fellows, and not a slave to stand cap in hand waiting for someone of stronger will to tell him to act.33

Dos Passos' thesis was simple enough: the war was absurd; it led not only to the destruction of abbeys but to the collapse of trust in the noble thoughts of adventurous minds of the past. One of the ambiguities the Dos Passos naif could never puzzle out for himself was the fact that the war was obviously absurd and yet it persisted, and men continued to fight without more than ineffectual protest.34

32 Dos Passos, Three Soldiers, p. 200.
33 Ibid., p. 207.
34 Hoffman, The Twenties, p. 57.
Don Fasson's detestation of armed conflict is echoed in the character Andrews in *Three Soldiers*. William Frohock makes the following observation:

Andrews' hatred of war, and more specifically of the army, is almost paranoid. At times it seems that the army has been invented only to frustrate him. He hates the indifference of the noncoms and despises the officers who give him a sense of inferiority, and who are unconcerned about what happens to a common soldier but terribly concerned when one of their own kind is killed.\(^3\)

Pvt. Andrews' despair appears almost totally overwhelming as it is reflected in the following speech:

He thought of all the long procession of men who had been touched by the unutterable futility of the lives of men, who had tried by phrases to make things otherwise, who had taught unworldliness. Dim enigmatic figures they were—Democritus, Socrates, Epicurus, Christ, so many of them. They had wept, some of them, and some of them had laughed, and their phrases had risen glittering, soap bubbles to dazzle men for a moment, and had shattered. And he felt a crazy desire to join the forlorn ones, to throw himself into inevitable defeat, to live his life as he saw it in spite of everything, to proclaim once more the falseness of the gospels under the cover of which greed and fear filled with more and yet more pain the already unbearable agony of human life.\(^4\)

Andrews expresses in this speech the existential dilemma. Life is an absurd and meaningless experience; however, man is condemned to freedom. Existence demands that the individual extricate himself from the secure confines of the masses to make the discovery that life is an empty void. Herein lies the existential paradox. The person

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\(^4\) Don Fasson, *Three Soldiers*, p. 211.
who achieves ultimate freedom has, in reality, gained only the knowledge that he is a loser regardless of the position which he chooses. The preceding speech by Andrews indicates that he has been made painfully aware of this fact.

One of the most savage denunciations of the army and all that it represents is presented in the form of a letter which Andrews wrote, but lacked the heart to send, to the mother of one of his friends who had been slain in combat. The letter reads as follows:

Dear Madam:

Your son, Francis, died needlessly in Belleau Wood. You'll be interested to know that at the time of his death he was crawling with vermin and weak from diarrhea. His feet were swollen and rotten and they stank. He lived like a frightened animal, cold and hungry. Then, on June 9, a piece of shrapnel hit him and he died in agony slowly. You'd never believe he could live three hours, but he did. He lived three full hours screaming and cursing alternately. He had nothing to hold onto, you see: he had learned long ago that what he had been taught to believe... under the meaningless names of honor, courage, patriotism, were all lies.37

Andreas has decided to rebel against the oppressive force which has for such a long time stifled his freedom. The method he selects is not surprising. Andrews makes the irrevocable decision as he lies wounded in a field hospital that "as soon as he got out of the hospital he would desert; the determination formed suddenly in his mind, making the excited blood surge gloriously through his body."38

Andreas has made his bid for freedom. The decision has been a painful one. For such an artistic and sensitive

37Cooperman, World War I, p. 57.
38Dos Passos, Three Soldiers, p. 211.
person the decision was, nevertheless, inevitable. Andrews must now, in the finest existential tradition, be prepared to bear the consequences of his act with courage. This is the responsibility he assumed when the decision to seek freedom was made. Sartre once exclaimed that the greatest pleasure in life was doing exactly what one's conscience dictates. It seems that Andrews has achieved this ultimate satisfaction.

Andrews deserts to Paris with a companion. In Paris Andrews accidentally meets Chrisfield. The latter attempts to dissuade Andrews from his illegal action. He suggests that they both go to Germany where they can indulge in riotous living. Andrews the individualist replies: "I don't want to live like a king, or a sergeant or a major-general... I want to live like John Andrews." Andrews meets his old friend Fuselli in a dimly lit alley in Paris. The latter has been assigned to a labor battalion. When questioned by Andrews on the reason he was made a corporal, Fuselli can only reply that "I got in wrong, I suppose." The man who attempted to please everyone in order to get ahead is now lashed to the treadmill from which Andrews has just taken leave. Fuselli appears to have been completely broken by the system which he once held in high esteem. Says Cooperman, "He is a beaten man who hits the dung heap at last." 

39 ibid., p. 265.
40 ibid., p. 302.
41 Cooperman, World War I, p. 155.
Dos Passos does not view a man's downfall as a tragic occurrence. The author has the following to say on the subject:

Tragedy is impossible; there is only irony. The best a man can hope is to be permitted to know himself; if he is given the occasion to perceive his own insignificance, he has a chance for he will learn also the unimportance of his death.\(^{42}\)

A ray of hope brightens the life of John Andrews when he falls in love with a French girl named Geneviève. One senses from the beginning of their relationship that this dream of Andrews' is destined for failure. Andrews is a sensitive idealist who "wants so very much more of life than life can give."\(^{43}\) He exclaims, "I was one of those people who was made not to be contented."\(^{44}\) On the other hand, Geneviève is materialistic and mundane. A revealing portrait of her character may be seen in this statement:

But what's the good of freedom? What can you do with it? What one wants is to live well and have a beautiful house and be respected by people. Oh, life was so sweet in France before the war.\(^ {45}\)

One can almost see Andrews shudder at this statement. But he was a lonely man who was blinded by the charm and innocent candor of this young French girl.

\(^{42}\)Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 113.
\(^{43}\)Dos Passos, Three Soldiers, p. 329.
\(^{44}\)Ibid., p. 337.
\(^{45}\)Ibid., p. 327.
Andrews is jerked back into the nightmarish reality of army life when he is arrested and charged with desertion. Dos Passos does not miss the opportunity to expose the ruthless attitude of the army on one of its members who bucks the system. Andrews' bid for freedom has been dealt a crushing blow. However, he still maintains freedom of conscience and refuses to acquiesce in spite of merciless treatment:

Handsome (an M.F.) made a step towards Andrews and hit him with a fist between the eyes. There was a flash of light and the room swung round, and there was a splitting crash as his head struck the floor. He got to his feet. The fist hit him in the same place, blinding him, the three figures and the bright oblong of the window swung round. A great weight seemed to be holding him down as he struggled to get up, blinded by tears and blood. . . . There were handcuffs on his wrists.45 Andrews and a companion escape from a work detail. In the ensuing turmoil Andrews' accomplice, Hoggenbach, drowns in the Seine River. Andrews is rescued by a passing barge.

Andrews is provided with a new outfit by his rescuers. He sneaks back into Paris in order to rendezvous with his lover. Two old friends, Mesalow and Walters, try to reason with him in an attempt to dissuade him from his plan to desert the army. They tell him that his school detachment (Andrews had been enrolled at a local university studying music at army expense) has probably not been aware of his absence.
Andrews refuses to listen to the advice of his friends. He cries, "I've got to be free, now. I don't care at what cost. Being free is the only thing that matters." 47

John H. Wrenn reflects Andrews' attitude perfectly when he mentions that the courage that each man must attain is the courage to face life, not death; for life is the ultimate reality. To Andrews it does not follow that a man who has faced death can walk forth with a kind of stoicism to face whatever life has to offer. Death is, rather, often a temptation to be resisted by those who have not attained the courage to face life; stoicism is passive and negative; and life demands action, response, and purpose. 48

Andrews does, indeed, possess courage; his struggle to achieve freedom never ceases; he refuses to succumb to the system. Andrews truly exemplifies Jean-Paul Sartre's "authentic" man.

Andrews' isolation grows more complete. He has become alienated from his girlfriend, his companions, and from the army. Even though he had the liberty to pursue studies in music at the University of Paris—a liberty which he cherished—Andrews was always reminded that he was still the property of the army. Until the chains that bound him to this machine were broken, he could never call himself a free man.

47 Ibid., p. 324.
48 Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 113.
Andrews is reunited with his love, but upon discov­ering that he is an army deserter she renounces his af­fection. This scene as a severe blow to which he utters a response that expresses the theme of identification. It seems to me that human society has been always that organizations revolving hopefully against the old society and forming new societies to crush the old society and becoming slaves again. In their turn, ...
system. But in this world who emerges victorious from life? The meaning of the Sartrean concept of "absurdity" becomes all too apparent when applied to Andrews' predicament. Three Soldiers concludes with the wind's scattering of some sheets of music which Andrews had composed and left on a table in his room. The blowing away of the music sheets symbolizes Andrews' life being blown to who-knows-where.

The mood of despair that concludes Three Soldiers is overwhelming. Andrews was clearly victimized even though he did manage to retain some degree of mental freedom. The army had stripped him of all else. A broken love affair added to his misery. As Andrews was led away to receive more beatings and abuse, the situation implied the negativism expressed in the parody of the Lord's Prayer in Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (1933):

Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada... Give us this nada our daily nada and nada our nada as we nada our nada's and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada... Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee... 52

John S. Wrenn makes this final evaluation of Andrews:

John Andrews, the artist, sensitive, intelligent, was also broken. His very act of joining the army had been a failure of nerve. He had failed to achieve his individuality and had enlisted, seeking refuge from the horror of the world that had fallen upon him. Andrews was fully conscious of his own weakness: his lack of initiative and his inability

to act. The war had claimed him from the start by providing escape from responsibility; the easy way which he was too weak to resist; and he knew this too. 53

Mr. Wrenn’s analysis characterizes Andrews before the latter reversed the direction of his meaningless life and made a stand for freedom. Evidence of Andrews’ decision is reflected in the following passage:

He was ready to endure anything, to face any sort of death... An enormous exhilaration took hold of him. It seemed the first time in his life he had ever been determined to act. All the rest had been aimless drifting. 54

Andrews exercised his freedom of will knowing that he was risking his life in the process; he was at peace with himself as he awaited the arrival of the military police. The fact that Andrews’ self-realization precipitated his self-destruction should not obscure the more significant fact that he had overcome his weakness.

John Aldridge feels that Dos Passos had known from the beginning what Andrews’ fate must be. Andrews had to be destroyed, whatever the causes, for Dos Passos must express his hatred, however clearly he recognizes its futility. It seems apparent from the outset that Andrews will be swept under by a tide of tyranny. 55

When does the individual ever triumph over the organization? Man’s greatness is achieved in his fall from

53 Wrenn, John Dos Passos, p. 111.
54 Dos Passos, Three Soldiers, p. 211.
55 Aldridge, Lost Generation, p. 59.
prosperity. The only people who were spared by the war were the dead, and those who had not begun to live. For those individuals who had really begun to live (specifically Andrews), the military system attacked their will, destroyed their nerve, and hastened their downfall. Fuselli did not survive because he tried too hard to please. He had been taught to worship material success and always attempted to satisfy everyone. As a result the more ruthless walked over him, and he failed, miserably alone. It is inevitable that Chrisfield's past will catch up with him, or he will repeat his violent act again. Chrisfield is antithetical to Fuselli. The former will oppose blatantly anyone who in the least manner antagonizes him. He does not particularly hold the military system in contempt but rather any person who attempts to impose his will upon him is considered an enemy. The unnecessary and willful murder of Lieutenant Anderson by Chrisfield marked homicidal tendencies. John H. Wrenn feels that only the least human could survive: officers who exploited the civilian order. Those who like sheep simply submitted, and the police who beat them into submission, would continue their meaningless existence. 56

Fuselli's fall evokes no sympathy. He represented no worthy cause and lived a purely hedonistic existence. When he does hit the dung heap, as one author mentions, he

56. Wrenn, John Doe Person, p. 110.
makes no effort to get up again. Passive acceptance characterizes Fuselli's attitude.

Chrisfield likewise fails to gain the reader's sympathy. He typifies the characteristic dull-witted, insipid imbecile who abounds in great numbers in any army. Yes, he rebels—and often. Unfortunately Chrisfield has no ideals, no convictions, and no goals. He brawls for the sake of asserting himself. Chrisfield has no sense of identity, no urge to achieve it.

Andrews is to be pitied and admired, as he overcomes what Maxwell Geismar calls a "failure of nerve."57 Says Geismar:

Andrews lacks any real purpose in life and the energy to conceive one. The Hemingway hero is a man to whom things happen, but the early Dos Passos hero is in effect a man to whom very little can happen.58

R.H. Footman supports this argument by saying that the inability to create heroic characters is one of the major faults of Dos Passos which became evident in Three Soldiers; the other is the tendency to overstate a thesis. The theme of the novel is that the army crushes human originality and individuality. Footman thinks that Dos Passos' hatred for the army makes him write about one hundred pages too many, since he is so engrossed in his own emotions that he does not know when his point has long since been made.59

57Coopersan, World War I, p. 140.
58Ibid.
Mr. Footman's seeming failure to recognize in John Andrews the author's existential mood, unfortunately, raises a serious question as to the validity of the foregoing criticism. First of all, Dos Passos does not create any heroic characters in *Three Soldiers* because there can be none where an individual is crushed by an autonomous system. Andrews is heroic in the sense that he made a stand to preserve his individual freedom. For the existentialists, Andrews is a hero of the first order. As far as the multitudes are concerned, he is a loser because he won no battles, received no commendations, and violated every code of conduct known in the army. There are no resounding cheers as Andrews is led away in chains by the two N. F.'s at the novel's end.

Footman claims in what must be termed a value judgment that Dos Passos overstated his point. Dos Passos did indeed make his reading public fully aware of the havoc which is wreaked on an individual in wartime. Moreover, Dos Passos' criticism is aimed at the military system, which owes its very existence to the fact that there are wars. He attempts to etch so indelibly the horror of three soldiers' fates into the minds of the American public that they would become forever repelled by the entire military organization.

A major criticism offered of Dos Passos is that he proposes no solution for the human enslavement which he has so vividly portrayed. Willard Thorp in 1960 remarked:

> How are Americans to win freedom? How are they to achieve the skill in self-government which will
guarantee freedom to every man? Dos Passos has never ventured an answer, except in his praise of the philosophical anarchists of Italy and Spain and their American heirs. The nausea of his later writing suggests a sense of guilt for having never found a social philosophy in which he could believe very long.60

Many critics, including Footman, Frohock, and Thorp, have viewed Dos Passos' characters as not particularly alive, not particularly believable.61 Such criticism seems to reflect unawareness of an important fact: Andrews is no ordinary person, but is rather the one person in a million who thinks and feels very deeply about life, the rare person who is aggrieved at the meaninglessness of his existence. When Thorp says, "Dos Passos seems to be saying that in our complex world individuality is almost null,"62 he speaks to the youth of the 1960's as clearly as he did to the youth of the 1920's. Readers have little trouble in identifying with Charley Anderson and J. Ward Morehouse of Dos Passos' well-known trilogy, U. S. A. (begun in 1930 and completed in 1936) because their rushed and empty lives follow a more conventional pattern.

60 Willard Thorp, American Writings in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 139. (Hereinafter referred to as American Writings.)


62 Thorp, American Writings, p. 139.
Carl Van Doren claimed in 1939 that the three soldiers in Dos Passos' novel were not typical of the army at large. Van Doren calls Andrews' desertion a heedless folly because the soldier has only a few months of duty before he would have been officially discharged. Perhaps Andrews is not typical of the many unquestioning cowards in the army, but this novel's purpose was not aimed at portraying the actions of the masses. Dos Passos' story was no less true than romantic epics depicting brave Americans in arms as they went about their duty of making the world "safe for democracy," stories printed in newspapers and magazines in order to preserve the country's morale. In 1932 Alan Calmer warned that Dos Passos must not be looked upon merely as a naturalist, maintaining that if Dos Passos is a naturalist at all (and the word has so many meanings that one of them seems almost bound to fit), he belongs to the minor naturalist connection. Calmer separates Dos Passos from the prominent school of naturalism (included in it would be Émile Zola, Theodore Dreiser, Thomas Wolfe, and Stephen Crane) because Dos Passos is too much of a pessimist, whereas Zola, for example, he considers "an incorrigible optimist"—for since man's fate is determined for him by his heredity and environment, amelioration is possible through the gradual improvement of his surroundings and his blood.

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65 Ibid., p. 241.
is gloomy where he is not downright bitter. His report on his life and times is anything but exhilarating. Obviously Dos Passos felt that it took more than just a change in environment and blood to alter an individual's psychological makeup.

Dos Passos' bitterness would later manifest itself in novels which included civilian affairs. Human folly is by no means confined to the military world. Most of the main characters after *Three Soldiers* constitute what Jean-Paul Sartre termed the "unauthentic" man. They make no attempt to seek individual freedom. Society will eventually take its toll and crush the likes of them under its indifferent wheels. Despite Dos Passos' bitter invective, he takes a stand that thoughtful readers are finding relevant to the temper of the 1960's, in this age of tinkling teacups, meaningless chatter, and the constant threat of nuclear extinction. An unquestioned existence is not worth living, and the man who submerges himself in the system—any system—is committing a form of suicide as real as those involving guns or sleeping pills. Andrews realized his error too late. Fuselli and Chrisfield were oblivious of it all unto the end.

From the perspective of another generation following another war, another American novelist sees with startling similarity the plight of the creative individual in modern Western society. Twenty-seven years after the publication of John Dos Passos' novel *Three Soldiers*, Norman Mailer jolted the American public from their complacency with a
novel which points out how a ruthless system such as the army can totally destroy the sensitive and artistic individual. *The Naked and the Dead* employs new locations, new situations, and new personalities, but Dos Passos' old themes are echoed and re-echoed throughout this novel that appeared in 1948.
CHAPTER III

RECURRENT VISIONS

A keystone of the modern existential attitude is that the nature of reality, if reality does in fact have any systematic structure and coherence, is beyond the power of human perception. Mailer feels that there are no truths other than the isolated truths of what each observer feels at each instant of his existence.¹ An amplification of the previous statement is presented by Mailer in his book *The Idol and the Octopus*:

Existentialism begins with the separate notion that we can live out our lives wandering among mysteries, and can guide ourselves only by what our inner voice tells us is true to the relations between mysteries. The separate mysteries we may never seize, but to appropriate a meaning from their relationship is possible.²

In 1968 Richard Foster describes Mailer's existential hero as being "limitless and unpredictable—the Dostoevskian underground man comes above ground into the Tolstoian

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mainstream of history. M"ailer goes on in the same year to give his own definition of the existential hero:

The existential hero is the one kind of man who never develops by accident. He is a consecutive set of brave and witty self-creations. All heroes are leaders—even if, like Don Quixote, they have but one man to follow them—but not all leaders are heroes. An unheroic leader is a man who embodies his time but is not superior to it—he is historically faceless. Roosevelt was a hero. So was Eisenhower. Joe McCarthy, on the contrary, was a hero, but because he was a hero, a most distressing kind of hero he encountered opponents as well as he attracted followers, and he was finally defeated.

This definition may be directly applied to the plight of Lieutenant Robert Hearn, Mailer's existential hero in The Naked and the Dead. Hearn was not a public hero as were Roosevelt and Eisenhower. He, like Joe McCarthy, was his own private hero. Hearn was isolated from the great democratic throng. He refused to support the ideals and convictions of the military system and more specifically those of his own commander, General Cummings. By following the dictates of his own conscience Hearn was doomed to defeat. Hearn, like McCarthy, relinquished possible fame in order to achieve personal satisfaction. For Jean-Paul Sartre, this was the most noble act of which a human being is capable. Sartre has expressed the idea that all human beings are trying to fill up a sense of nothingness which

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3Richard Foster, Norman Mailer. University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers #73 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 25. (Hereinafter referred to as Norman Mailer.)

4Mailer, The Idol and the Octopus, p. 137.
plagues them continually. More wine and louder music are needed to combat that dreadful sense of loneliness and emptiness. Mailer believes that the cultivation of these feelings is important as they bring about a sense of self-realization:

I suppose that the virtue I should like most to achieve as a writer is to be genuinely disturbing... It is, I believe, the highest function a writer may serve, to see life as others do not see it... For me, this is the highest function of art, precisely that it is disturbing, that it does not let man rest, and therefore forces him so far as art may force anything to enlarge the horizons of his life.5

Mailer's desire to be genuinely disturbing is reflected in the following passage taken from Cannibals and Christians:

There are honors beneath the surface, cannibals in all of us, made animals. And for a reason. It's as if we're stifling, as if the air we breathe is no longer air but some inert gas... Let us just say that the modern condition may be psychically so bleak, so overextended, so artificial, so plastic—plastic like styrene—that studies of loneliness, silence, corruption, scatology, abortion, monstrosity, decadence, orgy, and death can give life, can give a sentiment of beauty.6

George A. Schrader in a 1962 article in Yale Review asserted his conviction that Mailer has discovered what countless men before him have known, namely that the world offers no self-sustained meaning, no ultimate satisfaction,7

5Foster, Norman Mailer. p. 40.


Mailer's quest for meaning and sense of purpose in life were not always an obsession with him. He spent a normal childhood in Long Branch, New Jersey. A diploma from Boys High School in Brooklyn in 1939 qualified him for admission to Harvard University, from which he took a degree in aeronautical engineering in 1943. During the next year and a half, part of which was spent in Europe, where he was enrolled at the Sorbonne, Mailer wrote The Naked and the Dead. This novel was written in the same tradition as Dos Passos' Three Soldiers. The most vivid account of army life among our common soldiers during World War I, Three Soldiers helped create an antimilitaristic mood in readers of the twenties and thirties, and even left its mark on major novels written after World War II. The Naked and the Dead and From Here to Eternity (1951), for instance, have leading characters chosen much as Dos Passos had chosen his. Mailer and Jones follow this pattern, too, in stressing the intensity of the conflicts within the army itself.9

John W. Aldridge draws an important distinction between the writings of Dos Passos and some of his World War I counterparts and those of Mailer. Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Cummings avoided any effort at portraying the entire military complex. Their efforts were focused only on the struggling individual who was caught in its web.

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8 Foster, Norman Mailer, p. 8.
9 Ibid., p. 10.
Hemingway shows the brave going down under the physical violence of war; Dos Passos presents the sensitive young man facing the loss of his personal freedom under the regimentation of the war; Cummings accounts for the moral degradation of the individual in the midst of the sickness, filth, and privation of war. In each case the emphasis was on the individual rather than on the mass. Miler, widening the range, gives close insight into the thoughts and actions of a general as well as a private and all the ranks in between. Whereas Dos Passos presented only the reactions of the commanded, Miler presents the thoughts of the commanders as well. Norman Podhoretz amplifies the previous sentence when he asserts:

Mailer's intentions are perfectly clear. Cummings and Croft exemplify the army's ruthlessness and cruelty, its fierce purposefulness and its irresistible will to power, while Hearn and Valsen together make up a picture of the rebellious individual who, for all his determination and courage, is finally defeated in an unequal contest. An atmosphere of gloom and despond pervades The Naked and the Dead from the very beginning. In the opening pages of The Naked and the Dead, the familiar void which Sartre speaks of so often seems to be plaguing Gallagher:

He was feeling a deep and familiar bitterness; everything turned out lousy for him sooner or later.... No matter what he tried, no matter how hard he worked, he seemed always to be

10 Aldridge, Lost Generation, p. 113.
caught. . . There was something he wanted, something he could feel and it was always teasing him and disappearing.¹²

For Red Valsen, this emptiness felt by Gallagher was nothing new. Valsen "had never found anything. He had always been a loner."¹³ A wanderer since the age of eighteen, Red constantly fought to maintain his identity in a world which sought to rob him of it. His wanderings led him to near fatalism which he refused to accept. Red reasoned that there is always another tomorrow.¹⁴ He had his existential moments but they seldom lasted very long.

Even in the heat and noise of combat there is often experienced a feeling of aloneness. When Pvt. Hennessey became separated from his unit during an assault on a beach, he panicked: "He was alone, all alone, he told himself, and he felt an awful dread at being so isolated."¹⁵

These examples of human isolation represent a feeling which had long haunted Mailer. George Schrader claims that this feeling or new self-consciousness is something with which Mailer was trying to come to terms in 1962.¹⁶

The single anxiety which haunts the majority of characters in *The Naked and the Dead* concerns unfaithfulness

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on the part of their wives or girlfriends. Mailer is especially vicious in his attitude toward women. Those men who are married seem to regret their position continually. Pvt. Brown's attitude is shared by most of his companions: "There ain't one of them a man can trust out of his sight; how many times have I picked up a piece from a married woman with kids; it's disgustin' the way they all act."¹⁷ Mailer's characters seemingly have no self-confidence nor do they have any confidence in anyone else. Their isolation is complete. Perhaps Sgt. Groft typifies this point by his exclamation, "I hate everything which is not in myself."¹⁸

The particular sense of aloneness which grips Lieutenant Robert Hearn, the principal victim of military insidiousness in The Naked and the Dead, is directly comparable to the inherent feeling of insecurity that bothered Private Andrews in Three Soldiers. Both were Harvard-educated aristocrats whose wealth prevented them from setting their sights on a goal that seemed to them worthwhile. Hearn admitted this revealing statement:

It's just everytime I start an affair, I know how it's going to end. The end of everything is the beginning for me. I just feel blank. . . I don't give a damn, I'm just waiting around.¹⁹

¹⁷ Mailer, The Naked, p. 120.
¹⁸ Ibid., p. 164.
¹⁹ Ibid., p. 248.
Hearn is the epitome of Sartre's "unauthentic" man because he lacks the courage to assert his individuality. There are times, as will later be revealed, when it appears that Hearn will take a stand similar to Andrews' in *Three Soldiers*, but he always fails to follow through in his actions. Hearn is entranced by the awesome degree of power which his commander, General Cummings, seems to hold over him. Howard M. Harper believes that "Hearn's fascination with the personal magnetism of Cummings could also be read as an indication of Hearn's latent homosexuality."20 This is a rather bold assertion by Harper. Finding a reference in *The Naked and the Dead* which would conclusively prove the point would be quite difficult.

General Cummings, perhaps the central figure in *The Naked and the Dead*, next to Lieutenant Hearn, is a curious figure indeed. He would easily fit into the existential framework of Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher (1844-1900), who claimed that man is no longer subject to any obscure law or ethic beyond himself but that he is free to realize his own infinite destiny. Sartre would agree basically with Nietzsche's "will to power" concept, but he would have reservations. When an individual, for example, General Cummings, becomes so obsessed with power and control, he ceases to be an individual. His ambition has enslaved him most assuredly. Cummings has, for Sartre, committed the unpardonable sin: He has become

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satisfied and ceased—if he ever started—the struggle to find ultimate meaning in life. In spite of Hearn's reluctance to assert himself, he has, at least, maintained a questioning attitude. Unlike Andrews in *Three Soldiers*, no character in *The Naked and the Dead* achieves a moment of revelation.

General Cummings has given up human relationships completely for the sake of organization and efficiency. He believes that the only value of a human soul is the use to which it can be put.21

Cummings believes ardently in the primacy of the human will and the survival of the fittest. He sees the army as an instrument for the exercise of personal power; Hearn sees him as a "nerve end with no other desire than to find something to act upon."22 Cummings believes that man is in transition from savage to god, that man's primary drive is to achieve omnipotence, that "the only morality of the future is a power morality, and a man who cannot find his adjustment is doomed."23

The warped and dangerous thinking of General Cummings reflects, according to Alfred Kazin, the entire philosophy of the military system:

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23 ibid.
Soundly trained military men say that power must be achieved through fear. The masses must be made subservient to the power machine. The instrument of enslavement is the fear ladder on which every man will fear the man above him. If the army is to fight well, the officers by means of the fear ladder must break the spirit of the men. Cummings' philosophy holds that the masses, in their clamor for status, have watered down and degraded the culture they inhabit. Purification and re-establishment of the culture must be accomplished by the restoration to power of an elite who will exercise aristocratic controls over society.

The preceding quote indicates an attitude which is aimed at the total depersonalization of individual will. The flickering flame of Hearn's personal freedom is destined to be relentlessly usurped by Cummings. The twentieth century, as Cummings believes, belongs to the reactionaries. Hitler is the interpreter. The highest value men can achieve is not ethical or religious, as liberals think; it is rather to make men, oneself included, the instrument of one's policy. Men, therefore, must be controlled by hate and fear.

Hate and fear play a prominent part in the isolated condition of Goldstein, a young Jewish soldier who resents the drunken and lecherous men of whom the army is mostly composed. The soldiers have a way of constantly reminding Goldstein that he is different because of his religion.

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24 Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, p. 35.

Evidence of the army's corrupting influence is revealed in the following thoughts of Goldstein:

He hated the soldiers he had been put with because all they knew was to run around with loose women and get drunk like pigs. He was changing. He suddenly realized it. His confidence was gone, and he wasn't sure of himself. 26

Mailer, like Hemingway, was especially fond of shocking his reader by describing scenes of death and destruction. The following quote reflects the entire idea of Sartrean existentialism in that it exemplifies the absurdity of existence:

Red Velsen was looking at a corpse which lay almost naked on its back. It was an eloquent corpse, for there were no wounds on its body, and its hands were clenching the earth as if to ask for a last time the always futile question. 27

The reader will notice in Mailer a growing discontent and uneasiness with life as the novel progresses. Aldridge sees Mailer stumbling through life in an attempt to find meaning. Mailer has no feeling for the ordinary, satisfied, and "unauthentic" man who proceeds through each day with utter complacency. In the following passage Aldridge re-echoes Sartre's idea that the "authentic" man will always remain unsatisfied with life. He never "arrives" but is always "becoming":

26 Mailer, The Naked. p. 207.
27 Ibid., p. 214.
the abnormal; for it is there and only there that the tragic situation of modern life exists. The mediocre and the undaring, the businessman who goes unwaveringly to business, the family man who lives out his life in domestic mediocrity, are unrepresentable in dramatic terms. Their adjustment to life is made at the expense of no conflict. Their happiness has no consequences.

It takes some extraordinary happening to make one aware that life is a deadly serious matter. The war gave Mailer the ideal chance to show his fellow citizens how individuality could be lost, exploited or forgotten about completely when it is stifled by an impersonal system—in this case, the military. War is itself a tragic occurrence—perhaps the greatest to befall any civilization—but what it does to the manacled individuals whom it preys upon is an even greater disaster.

In most cases the lives of the men in The Naked and the Dead were doomed as a result of the environmental background which spawned them. The weaknesses of Cummings and Hearn stemmed from a certain mental instability; those of Croft, Gallagher, Minetta, Wyman and others resulted from cultural depravity. Unfortunately the army did nothing to aid these soldiers to overcome their predicaments. In no way would it enable Hearn, for example, to achieve self-realization and fulfillment as a person. The army served only to promote a feeling of hopeless despair among its members. Pvt. Stanley's reaction is typical of what many soldiers felt:

26 Aldridge, Lost Generation, p. 92.
Stanley felt a nameless anxiety arising in him. Dimly, he knew that part of it came from fearing death... It fed upon his jealousy and indifferent love-making; it came from the nights at home when he had been sleepless and frantic. He was sweating, close to whispering. A vague oppressive horror bothered him.\(^29\)

Here is an expression of the typical sense of isolation which various soldiers felt in *The Naked and the Dead*. In Stanley's case, the confrontation with actual combat has brought all of his repressed emotions to the surface. Stanley is beginning to question his existence. Unfortunately this will be as far as it will go. After the battle is over—after any sudden crisis has passed—Stanley and all the others like him will drift once again into a lethargic complacency until their existence is again threatened.

In other words, they do not share Sartre's idea that life is a continual struggle to find ultimate answers concerning the meaning of our existence. Although Sartre maintains that man lives in an absurd world where no answers are available to him, it is imperative—at least for the concerned and "authentic" man—that the search must go on until death. Stanley and his companions are not willing to sacrifice immediate sensual pleasures for a life of frustrated searching—searching for that which does not exist.

Red Valseen comes somewhat closer to beating the military system than anyone else in *The Naked and the Dead*. After Hearn's untimely death, it would appear that Valseen

\(^29\)Keller, *The Naked*, p. 298.
would have to be a man of strong conviction in order to triumph over a system which is noted for crushing the spirit of individuality. Unfortunately Valseen is not the heroic character that many people thought he possibly was. Valseen had no self-identity from the very beginning. He starts with nothing and ends with nothing. Aldridge claims that Valseen's self-control has been based all along on negation. He has been able to hold himself together by believing in nothing. His life before the war has been made bearable by his faculty for escaping the war. His defeat, therefore, instead of being the tragic moral breakdown obviously intended, is merely a meaningless exchange of one negative position for another.

Lieutenant Hearn comes closest to making the break from the imposed slavery of the army, but a premature death, hardly arranged by jealous Sergeant Croft, ends the reader's opportunity for knowing whether Hearn would ever have reached the "existential moment of freedom" as did Andrews in Three Soldiers. Hearn covertly defies General Cummings on several occasions. This is not, however, an indication of an admirable action by Hearn. His gestures are designed merely to antagonize his commander whom he realizes is a warped and weak individual behind all his pompous and vainglorious mannerisms. Besides, Cummings could crush his lesser at any chosen moment but rather delights at toying with this cornered mouse.

30Aldridge, Lost Generation, p. 136.
A typical example of Hearn's desire to antagonize the general is seen in the instance where he deliberately grinds a cigarette butt into the newly waxed floor of Cummings' quarters. This is a senseless disregard for authority which is an aimless gesture.

Cummings is enraged when he finds the crushed cigarette. Built on a "fear ladder," this act signifies the ultimate in contemptuousness. Cummings' reaction to the incident is seen in the following passage:

His rage was just beginning to function; a furious uncontrolled anger tightened his mouth, set his heart beating overrapidly, and tingled the tips of his fingers. Almost unbearable... What Hearn had done was equivalent to a soldier's laying his hands on his person. To Cummings it was a symbol of the independence of his troops, their resistance to him. ... The cigarette on the floor was a threat, a denial of him, and he had to meet it directly and ruthlessly. The longer you tarried with resistance the greater it became. It had to be destroyed.\textsuperscript{51}

Still, Cummings is fascinated with the lieutenant. Says Cummings: "There was something unapproachable and unattainable about Hearn which had always piqued him, always irritated him subtly. The empty pit where there should be a man."\textsuperscript{52}

Mailer provides the reader a good look at Hearn as the "Time Machine" reverts back to Hearn's college days at Harvard. Hearn is, indeed, making the quest to find himself--to discover the real Robert Hearn. Hearn's senior year finds him bored with classes, girls, and the whole

\textsuperscript{51}Mailer, \textit{The Naked}, p. 318.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., p. 322.
routine. He tries to find an escape in sex:

Different women, different nights, when he lies in embrace, steeped in a woman's flesh until the brew is intolerably joyous. . . . Only it never lasts. It's just every time I start an affair, I know how it's going to end. The end of everything is in the beginnings for me. It's going through the motions. . . .

Hearn has achieved independence from his domineering father by refusing to take money from him for college expenses, He does not want to be obligated to any person. The anxiety and loneliness that Sartre speaks about so often as part of the human condition are weighing heavily on Robert Hearn's shoulders.

Howard N. Harper describes the life of Robert Hearn up to his entrance into the service:

Hearn's life has been a series of disillusionments—with parents, with prep school, with medicine, with radicalism, with literary criticism, with his jobs as a literary editor, union organizer, and radio copywriter, and with one woman after another.  

After college Hearn becomes more and more dissatisfied. He floats from job to job and has one affair after another. Hearn's father wants his son to enter big business with him, but the boy turns the offer down. In order to engage such a setup, he would necessarily have to relinquish his independence. Hearn realizes that "everything is crappéd up, everything is phony, everything curdles when you touch it. It has not been the experience in itself. There was

33 Ibid., p. 348.
Throughout the novel one harbors the feeling that the Sartrean "moment of revelation" for Hearn is looming dead ahead. That feeling of expectation persists right up to the moment when a Japanese bullet sends Hearn crashing into nothingness.

This passage provides a clue as to the fate which Hearn will suffer. Cummings feels a growing need to crush this upstart young officer, this individual who refuses to conform to his rigid standards of behavior. Cummings feels a certain admiration for Hearn's bravado, but it is an admiration which a general cannot afford the luxury of having if he is to command the respect of his inferiors.

Reference has previously been made concerning the "power philosophy" of General Cummings. His need to control, to manipulate, to dominate human beings carries over into his civilian life as well. The "Time Machine" presents a picture which indicates with shattering intensity the degree of Cummings' desolate condition. Cummings marries a wealthy Boston socialite and brings her back to an Army post. Their lovemaking is fantastic for a time. Cummings must subdue, absorb, rip apart, and consume his wife. Margaret does not see her husband's concealed motive until a year later when she remarks:

After a year it is completely naked, apparent to her, that he is alone, that he fights out

the other thing, unfocused, the yearning for what?

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After a year it is completely naked, apparent to her, that he is alone, that he fights out

battles with himself upon her body, and something withers in her. . . . There is all the authority she has left, and she has left it, to be caught in a more terrifying authority, a greater demand. . . . 35

Howard N. Harper feels that Cummings' failure as a husband stems from the fact that "he is a latent homosexual." 37 This impression was given early in the novel, but there is no evidence to support the assertion by Harper. Cummings never makes a direct play for one of his men.

Up to this point no mention has been made of the novel's third major character, Sergeant Croft. Maller intends for Croft to represent the army's typical, unthinking brute who delights in pushing people around. Croft, like Cummings, is obsessed with power. He is not afraid to act. Croft is "unauthentic" in the sense that he could care less about the meaning of existence, yet he is "authentic" in that he is an unsatisfied person who is always fighting, struggling, gouging, and pushing to conquer the unknown. This is seen when Croft forces his men to climb Kount Anaka. Ihab Hassan claims that "the mountain comes to represent for him [Croft] everything he must know and conquer, the way to his own immortality." 38

Hassan espouses the theory that a poor standard of living produces good soldiers and vice versa. The pampered youths like Hearne fail to rise to the challenge of combat,

38 Hassan, Radical Innocence, p. 146.
while underprivileged boys like Croft find their true voca-
tion in the army.\textsuperscript{39} There is truth in this idea. Croft
knows that the army affords him the best opportunity that
he will ever have to distinguish himself. Therefore, he is
determined not to let this chance slip through his fingers.

Croft can achieve a sort of self-realization in the
army, but it will not be the individual self-realisation
that Sartre advocates. In order to become successful,
Croft will have to remain subservient to the army's system.
Only through complete obedience can Croft hope to be rewarded.
Hearn would have no use for such a reward because no personal
sense of accomplishment would come with it. Hearn, unlike
Croft or Cummings, needs desperately to achieve distinction
which is accompanied by a feeling of personal victory.

Croft senses the struggle for freedom that is taking
place within Hearn and he, like Cummings, wishes to see it
destroyed. Croft makes his feelings openly known whereas
Cummings assumes the role of a Pontius Pilate (Roman governor
of Judea when Christ was crucified). Cummings wishes to see
Hearn crushed but would not want his conscience haunting and
reminding him that he had directly participated in the act
itself. Twenty years after Kailer had written \textit{The Naked
and the Dead} he would admit, "The characters for whom I had
the most secret admiration, like Croft, were violent peo-
ple."\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{39} \textit{ibid.}, p. 291.
\bibitem{40} \textit{Kailer, The Idol and the Octopus}, p. 140.
\end{thebibliography}
Cummings sends a company of soldiers to the island's interior on a search and destroy mission. Hearn commands the group, but Croft, since he is familiar with the terrain, seems to do most of the directing. At one point Hearn's mission appears destined for failure. Word comes that a Japanese unit may be camped directly in their route, thus preventing the company of soldiers from moving forward. Hearn refuses to turn back; to do so would be an admission of failure to Cummings. Besides, this is the first chance that Hearn has had to prove himself after all the years of fleeing responsibility.

Thus, it appears that Hearn is about to achieve the responsibility which Sartre claims for the "authentic" human being. Robert Hearn was coming close to self-realization when he "was killed by a machine-gun bullet which passed through his chest."\footnote{Mailer, The Naked, p. 602.} Now, suddenly, nothing mattered anymore. Ihab Hassan comments on Robert Hearn's death in the following passage:

The classic redeemers of death are scapegoats--people like Hearn, perhaps Goldstein... The book adapts itself, on the whole, to the existential pattern. Necessity rules the encounter of all. For Hearn there is no self-renewal.\footnote{Hassan, Radical Innocence, p. 151.}

After Hearn has been slain in a Japanese ambush, Croft refuses to return to the base camp. Instead, he has an uncontrollable urge to climb Mount Anaka. This adventure
was previously mentioned. Croft’s ambitious plans are never realized, for he too suffers defeat. As his company nears the summit of the mountain, they are forced to retreat by a swarm of wasps! Croft’s reaction is described in the following passage:

He had failed, and it hurt him vitally. His frustration was loose again. He would never have another opportunity to climb it. Croft kept looking at the mountain. He had lost it, had missed some tantalizing revelation of himself. Of himself and much more. Of life. Everything.

Perhaps the most ironical occurrence in The Naked and the Dead is reserved for General Cummings. For weeks Cummings made elaborate plans and maneuvers all designed for one major assault on Japanese positions on the island of Anopopel. One morning Cummings travelled away from headquarters to make a routine visit to an obscure position on the island. When he returned to his post the following day he learned that Major Dalleson discovered that the Japanese defenses had collapsed weeks previously. Cummings had no way of knowing this fact. Now his elaborate campaign plans were rendered worthless and "for a moment he almost admitted that he had had very little or perhaps nothing to do with this victory."44

Cummings is disheartened by the sudden turn of events; he is also strangely aggrieved by the news of Hearn’s death:

43Mailer, The Naked, p. 709.
44Ibid., p. 716.
For an instant when he first heard the news of Hearn's death, it had hurt him. . . . Hearn had been the only man in the division who was capable of understanding his more ambitious plans, capable of understanding him. But Hearn had not been big enough. He had looked, become frightened, and crawled away, throwing mud.45

Norman Fochoretz feels that Hearn fails in his inability to transcend the terms of the given. Hearn knows perfectly well that these terms are intolerable, yet he cannot envisage any conditions other than the ones before his eyes, and therefore he is reduced to apathy, cynicism, and despair.46 Hearn cannot make the break with his environment. He feared such a self-imposed isolation. Thab Hassan views Hearn's defeat this way:

He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done pro-

vokes. . . . He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence.47

Chester Eisinger sees this novel as one in which no one wins. The dominant view of experience here is that an over-all futility marks man's every effort. The role of accident in human life is so much more important than that of individual will, mind, or skill that life appears to be meaningless.48

This statement by Eisinger seems to indicate that Mailer may be writing in the naturalistic tradition viewing man as an animal who is the victim of environmental forces

47Hassan, Natural Innocence, p. 151.
48Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, p. 37.
and the product of social and economic factors beyond his control or his full understanding. It is easy enough to view the characters in *The Naked and the Dead* as pawns being moved at random on nature's infinite chessboard. Realizing this ridiculous predicament, the existentialists have called this an absurd world void of significance or meaning. Naturalists and existentialists see man fighting a noble but forever losing battle against the forces of nature. However, in spite of all the obstacles, the existentialists say that the drama and meaning in life stem from man's struggle to learn something about his existence. Man, say the existentialists, since he possesses superior intelligence to all other animals on the surface of the earth, is condemned to a life of searching for meaning rather than throwing up his hands and being overwhelmed as are the naturalists. Hearn puts up a terrific struggle to achieve personal freedom before he is cut down by a force over which he has no control. One will find no such struggle being made by the leading characters in the naturalistic novels of Dreiser and Crane; they rather meekly succumb to their fates. Also, it may be pointed out that Cummings and Croft in *The Naked and the Dead* contradict the naturalistic principle that man does not understand the forces which are constantly at work against him. Willard Thorp says:

Heller covertly uses the concepts of Freud and Adler to give authority to his characterization of the two men. It should be noted that Heller
and Cummings are well read in modern psychology, as their convictions reveal. They are thoroughly onto themselves and each other.49

Perhaps Mailer's critics need to take another look at The Naked and the Dead. Those who claim Mailer for realism, naturalism, or existentialism might do well to listen to what the author himself had to say about his own book:

I don't think of myself as a realist. That terrible word "naturalism." It was my literary heritage—the things I learned from Dos Passos and Farrell, I took naturally to it, that's the way one wrote a book. But I really was off on a mystic kick. Actually—a funny thing—the biggest influence on The Naked and the Dead was Moby Dick. . . . I was sure everyone would know it. I had Ahab in it, and I suppose the mountain was Moby Dick. . . .50

Mailer and Dos Passos have treated a theme which runs throughout American literature of the twentieth century—the struggle of the individual against those systems which seek to strip his identity and render him a small, meaningless part in a gigantic machine. It is interesting to compare the methods used by the two authors in their efforts to make known the plight of the oppressed, sensitive individual. Chapter four will treat this matter specifically.

49. Thorp, American Critics, p. 147.

50. Foster, Horsemailer, p. 10.
CHAPTER IV

THE EXISTENTIAL DILEMMA

John Andrews and Robert Hearn, the main characters in Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead, were dragged down to inevitable destruction which, according to the naturalists, awaits all. That Andrews and Hearn were defeated soundly is unquestionable. All the naturalists, cynics, and other prophets of doom may see this end as another example of the futility and meaninglessness of man's condition. They may throw up their hands in despair over the fact that the good, the valorous, and the courageous receive no special rewards in life but instead are often the ones who are called upon early to receive the sting of death. On the other hand, there are many people who, after reading the sagas of John Andrews and Robert Hearn, discover something inspiring and valuable in the lives of two men who battled adversity on equal terms until they were obliged to yield to a force greater than their own. Andrews and Hearn realized that they were abandoned in an absurd world where one has the potential to rise out of chaos and shape his own destiny. One either blazes his own way through life's dark and mysterious forests or he remains on the perimeter in the sunlight where it is safe and secure.
Andrews and Hearn dared to enter into the forest and although neither emerged on the other side, who can say that what they discovered in there does not exceed our standards of living? Andrews and Hearn faced defeat and death with a stoic bravado. They had faith in themselves. Such faith provides the key to survival in today's power-mad world. This chapter will show how such a key may be obtained.

It is an acknowledged fact that most men spend an entire lifetime groping for an understanding of their world and their relation to it. Jean-Paul Sartre, whose philosophy has served as a guideline throughout this thesis, assumes that this groping for understanding may be conscious or unconscious and is an integral part of the human condition. The majority of humanity—Sartre's "unauthentic" men—refuse to confront the bitter pill of existence; they seek avenues of escape: drugs, alcohol, sex, and total commitment to their jobs. A minority of individuals—Sartre's "authentic" men—struggle tirelessly in their search for an answer to the ultimate meaning of existence. Men fear the unknown.

Fear constitutes an unreflective apprehension of the transcendent. In addition to suffering from fear, the "authentic" man experiences anguish or a reflective apprehension of the self. The individual who renounces immediate concerns in order to spend his years searching for wisdom is doomed.

First, he is scorned by the masses because they view him as a freak or outcast. This isolated individual can find little comfort through association with the majority
of men because they are not interested in discovering ultimate truth. Second, the "authentic" person can achieve no inner peace because he receives no reassuring answers to questions relating to the reason behind existence. This doubt, insecurity, and dread commands—it propels—the individual forward in the search for answers. Myriad attempts are made throughout life to relieve the agony of not knowing.

Hearn and Andrews rebelled against the military organization which stifled their individual will; however, each was aware of an even more profound dissatisfaction with life which would have been present even if they had not been inducted into the military service. The army provides vivid imagery, both naturalistic and symbolistic. Prior to Hearn's induction into the United States Army, his discontent is revealed:

He ducks into a hatchway and lights a cigarette. There is the phrase "I'm seeking for something" but it gives the process an importance it really doesn't possess, he thinks. You never do find out what makes you tick, and after a while it's unimportant... How do you conceive your own death in all the marble vaults, the brick ridges, and the furnaces that lead to the marketplace?

Jean-Paul Sartre in his novel Nausea (1938) explored the feelings of despair which plagued Antoine Roquentin. For all practical purposes Antoine Roquentin could be John Andrews or Robert Hearn. He was a sensitive, creative individual concerned with the time-old question regarding

the purpose of existence. Sartre amplifies the problem in the following comment:

"The mind of man, which he did not ask to be given, demands a reason and a meaning—this is its self-defining cause—and yet it finds itself in the midst of a radically meaningless existence. The result: impasse. And nausea."

John Andrews and Robert Hearn viewed military authority as a barrier which had to be removed if there was to be any self-actualization for each of them. Hearn represents the existential dilemma of seeking and never finding. All his life he attempted to fill the void which was part of him. Says Hearn, "It's just every time I start an affair, I know how it's going to end. The end of everything is in the beginnings for me." Andrews' civilian life is not mentioned in depth in Three Soldiers; but there is the feeling that the pangs of doubt and insecurity which affected Hearn before his entrance into the service affected Andrews also.

Soon after his induction into the military Andrews thinks to himself:

"My life before this week seemed a dream read in a novel, a picture I had seen in a shop window—it was so different. Could it have been in the same world at all? I must have died without knowing it and been born again into a new, futile hell."

Realizing that life has no a priori meaning, Andrews and Hearn attempt to come to terms with the world in which

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4*Dos Passos, Three Soldiers*, p. 31.
they are abandoned. They do not seek knowledge, in the Faustian sense, for any power which it may bring them. Andrews and Hearn seek only to find meaning in their individual existence. Such a desire is crushed by the oppressive reign of the United States Army.

Everyone who is concerned with his own existence is caught in a dilemma. John Andrews and Robert Hearn prized their individual freedom more highly after the army had deprived them of it. *Three Soldiers* and *The Naked and the Dead* deal, on the surface, with men who are attempting to regain their lost liberty. In truth, Andrews and Hearn were fighting more than the United States Army; they are struggling unconsciously with a terror which exceeds anything the army could inflict upon them. That terror is existence. Existence brings about the nausea which prompted Antoine Roquentin to utter:

*Somehow I am not at peace; I have been avoiding looking at this glass of beer for half an hour, I look above, below, right and left; but I don't want to see it. And I know that all these bachelors around me can be of no help; it is too late, I can no longer take refuge among them. They could come and tap me on the shoulder and say, "Well, what's the matter with the glass of beer?" It's just like the others, I know all that, but I know something else. Almost nothing. But I can't explain what I see. To anyone. There: I am quietly slipping into the water's depths, towards fear.*

Heinesmann claims that "three fundamental concepts, liberty, situation, and negation, must be understood if one

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*Sartre, *Nausea*, p. 17.*
wants to understand Sartre. He also states that "an individual who is faced with the permanent threat of annihilation discovers that non-being is a permanent possibility connected with being, and that the Nothing haunts Being."

The creative individual is aware of the relation of non-being with being; such realization causes anxiety and dread. For this reason society discourages such thinking and attempts to fill our internal feelings of void with petty attractions. Society attempts to stifle those creative minds which try to enlighten their fellow citizens with talk of self-realization and freedom. Literature is filled with examples where the thinking, sensitive person has been trampled beneath the dull and heavy feet of the masses, such as Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1869) and Jean Valjean in Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862).

American literature—especially in the twentieth century novel—abounds with incidents relating to the victimization of sensitive individuals: among others, Frederick Henry and Catherine Barkley in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929); Stu'ds Loney in Farrell's *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan* (1934); Jim Nolan in Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1936); Wing Biddlebaum in Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919); Robert Prewitt in Jones' *From Here to Eternity* (1951); John Andrews in Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* (1921).

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6 Ibid.
and Robert Hearn in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948).

This list, by no means complete, presents the artist's view of society's corruption and persecution of the individual. John Andrews and Robert Hearn, principal characters in *Three Soldiers* and *The Naked and the Dead* respectively, show two men being destroyed by the most authoritarian branch of society—the military.

*Three Soldiers* and *The Naked and the Dead* are virtually autobiographical in nature. John Dos Passos graduated from Harvard in 1916 and went to France the next year as an ambulance driver on the battlefront. Norman Mailer graduated from Harvard in 1943 and served in the United States Army in the Pacific Theater for the next three years. That Mailer was influenced by Dos Passos in both technique and viewpoint is unquestionable. Mailer's "Time Machine" portraits are analogous to Dos Passos' "Camera Eye" technique whereby flashbacks are used to give the reader a glimpse of a character's civilian life before he entered the military service. Even such obvious debts to Dos Passos as Mailer's "Time Machine" portraits are not merely imitative: the device fits the new context. In characterization Mailer excels. Mailer's characters in *The Naked and the Dead* are intensely psychologically analyzed whereas Dos Passos' are not. Mailer examines the thoughts of everyone from a private to a general in his aforementioned book. In this respect his book is far more
encompassing than Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*. The parallels would be much less significant if they could be dismissed as merely the result of Mailer's imitation of Dos Passos. It is the common theme of terror and dread in the context of wartime experience that signifies much more. Another similarity in the two representative war novels is revealed by the progression of events which lead to the defeat of the good and the exaltation of the wicked. John W. Aldridge points this out in the following passage:

When Valsen and Hearn are defeated, the machinery of protest is set in motion and the way is prepared for the final triumph of evil (Cummings and Croft) over good (Hearn and Valsen), which is the typical climax of the "protest" or "exposure" novel and directly in the tradition of the older war fiction, particularly Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers.*

While it is generally agreed that Dos Passos and Mailer are striving toward the same goals, it must also be acknowledged that the roads by which they travel to reach the desired end are not identical. Despite Marcus Klein's statement that Mailer is rambling "among the idols that are already fallen, searching through the potsherds for something still substantial enough to smash yet once again," it must be noted that Mailer accomplishes more than simply echoing the thoughts of Dos Passos. Maxwell Geisner emphasizes this by saying:

*Three Soldiers*, like most of the typical stories of World War I, was essentially a novel of

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8 Aldridge, *Lost Generation*, p. 139.

individual protest. The military organization was something to escape from, not to understand. The virtue of The Naked and the Dead is that it sees the individual within the military organization, and attempts to evaluate the whole complex structure of the American Army in war and peace, as a manifestation of contemporary society, as well as a weapon of conquest and destruction.  

John Dos Passos was a member of the "Lost Generation" of novelists in the United States, which constituted the first major group of novelists in the history of American literature. They were not a school, for they only occasionally influenced each other directly and consciously, though their relationships were close. Sometime during the early 1920's Gertrude Stein, addressing Ernest Hemingway in her flat at Rue de Fleurus in Paris, France, is supposed to have remarked that Hemingway and his contemporaries were "all a lost generation." Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos were the more prominent members of the group. There is a popular generalization that goes as follows: After World War I ended, the younger generation in America rebelled against established American customs and manners. Out of this generation's disillusion with the world of pre-war America came the novel of the twenties.

Frederick J. Hoffman characterizes Dos Passos' era by remarking:  


12 Ibid., p. 119.
Perhaps the most striking quality of the postwar intellectual was his attitude of refusal—refusal of the comfortable platitudes of the middle class. The 1920's were marked by a disrespect for tradition and an eager wish to try out any new suggestions regarding the nature of man—his personal beliefs, conviction, or ways to salvation. The novels of the 1920's repeatedly blamed the war for whatever was abhorred in the behavior of the young generation: The war years "shattered our illusions"; the young have every right to say to their elders, "You lied to us. Your ideas were vicious, and we reject them and we reject you."

The World War I protagonists as a group found themselves in a situation which was for them in essence non-human and non-universal. According to Sartre's philosophy, life was an absurd experience. The sense of loneliness and "nothingness" was overwhelming. Stanley Cooperman comments that "the machine slaughter and dance—macabre absurdity of World War I had no parallel." Carl Van Doren sums up the 1920's in this manner:

The whole restless spirit of the twenties may be seen in the "nada bail nada full of nada" of Hemingway, the sociological zero of Dos Passos, the romantic hopelessness of Fitzgerald, the "nothing again nothing" of Eliot, the "indefinite refusal to be anything whatsoever" of Valery, the implicit denial of society in Stein and Joyce—even to the "lost, am lost" of Wolfe.

The period between World War I and World War II saw a marked increase in feelings of despair and unhappiness. Those novels which depicted the horror of World War I (Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*, Thomas Boyd's *Through the Wheat*,

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William Scanlon's *God Have Mercy On Us* were overshadowed by novels which told of misfortune and death in the civilian ranks. Some noteworthy examples are John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, and Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*.

In other words, America's problems did not end with the signing of the Armistice in 1918. Those problems at home which the urgency of the war had forced into the background now had to be faced by the citizens. Novelists concentrated with renewed energy on the old themes of poverty, prejudice, and human isolation. Those soldiers who regarded the army as a stifling organization were elated when they gained freedom at the war's end only to find themselves lost in an even greater, more oppressive system when they returned to the United States. The depression years compounded their miseries. The depression in America led to an interest in radical ideas. A noteworthy consequence was the proletarian novel of the thirties: it was full of class conflict, heroic workers, and dialectical morality.16 Perhaps it was in this decade that Dos Passos achieved his greatest reputation as a social novelist.

In 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor; another world war had erupted. The American public had not been prepared for this sudden chaos which was thrust upon them. Norman Mailer's novel *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), published three years after the end of World War II, dramatizes the

severity of the military system as it affects the sensitive individual, paralleling the theme of the earlier novel *Three Soldiers*. According to John W. Aldridge, Mailer, like his predecessor Dos Passos, discovered "that modern life is still basically purposeless, that the typical condition of modern man is still doubt, confusion, and fear." Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist, maintains that this condition prevails and will always prevail for the individual who struggles to find meaning in life.

World War I was a grand and novel occurrence, with American adventure seekers swarming over the European battlefronts. Malcolm Cowley asserts that the attitude at the beginning of World War II differed considerably: "War was seen as a terrible but quite normal development; the possibilities had been assimilated, the horrors were expected." 

Aldridge supports this point by saying:

In the years since these men [World War II novelists] began to write, the forces that gave impetus to their disillusionment and denial released by the broken promises of the first world war—have declined. The young novelists of the present generation are consequently deprived of that impetus at the same time that their own age and experience offer nothing comparable. They have come through a war even more profoundly disturbing than the first: but the illusions and causes of war, having once been lost, cannot be relost. 

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Aldridge's point about illusions and causes of war not being able to be relost is a significant one. The attitudes of World War II novelists, because they had experienced the terrors of war, were more realistic than those of their bewildered World War I counterparts. Nevertheless, Mailer and the World War II generation were probably just as horrified by some of their war experiences as were the World War I participants. Individual feelings of fear and isolation do not drastically change from one generation to the next. *Three Soldiers* and *The Naked and the Dead* are quite similar in these respects.

The trepidation which grips Pvt. Chrisfield in *Three Soldiers* is revealed in the following passage describing a battle:

The lieutenant stood out suddenly black against a sheet of flame. Chrisfield could see his fatigue cap a little on one side and his trench coat, drawn in tight at the waist and sticking out stiffly at the knees. He was shaken by the explosion. Everything was black again. He heard moaning in the darkness. . . . Now and then the flare from aeroplane bombs behind him showed up wrecked trucks on the side of the road. Somewhere a machine gun spluttered. But the column tramped on, weighed down by packs, by the deadening exhaustion.20

Compare the above passage with this one from Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* where Pvt. Stanley reacts to a combat situation:

Just then Croft fired a burst into the jungle and dropped to the ground. The sound of the shots was unexpectedly loud and the men in the platoon almost fell prostrate again in the sand. Stanley found himself sweating so intensely that he could not

focus the sights on his rifle. He lay there with his senses blurred, flinching unconsciously every-
time a bullet passed. Behind him, on the beach, he heard someone scream, and then the firing halted. There was a long uneasy silence among the men, and Stanley watched the air rise shimmering off the sand. 21

Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* accomplishes more than Don Passos' *Three Soldiers* in the sense that it gives the reader a more encompassing picture of all levels in the military. The flashbacks into the civilian lives in *The Naked and the Dead* enable the reader to gain a clearer understanding of the reactions of the characters in their military environment. It is also quite apparent that the feeling of nothingness—the sense of existential doubt—manifests itself as clearly in the minds of the characters in *The Naked and the Dead* as in *Three Soldiers*. The feelings of emptiness and isolation and the philosophy that existence is an absurd reality haunted Andrews, the main character in *Three Soldiers* and Hearn, the central figure in *The Naked and the Dead*. What could be more disparaging than Andrews' remarks in the following passage:

A certain terror gripped him. In a weak the great structure of his romantic world, so full of many colors and harmonies, that had survived school and college and the buffeting of making a living in New York, had fallen in dust about him. He was utterly in the void. "How silly," he thought, "this is the world as it has appeared to the majority of men, this is just the lower half of the pyramid." His friends seemed at home in this army life. They did not seem appalled by the loss of their liberty. But they had never lived in the glittering other world. 22


Hearn's dissatisfaction with life became evident long before he enlisted in the United States Army:

The editorship is out, and this too, and the others, he realizes. A dilettante skipping around sewers, everything is cramped up, everything is phony, everything curdles when you touch it. It has not been the experience itself. There was the other thing, unfocused, the yearning for what? 23

A comparison of Three Soldiers with The Naked and the Dead seems to indicate that Dos Passos suffers more with his characters than does Mailer. Dos Passos seems to be swed--almost panic-stricken--by the horrors with which men are confronted. Such a tragedy as World War I involved national commitment such as had never before confronted Americans. The shock, however, of World War II on Norman Mailer and the writers of his day was accepted in a manner devoid of terror and dread. Because of World War I, Mailer could more readily accept and react to World War II. Whereas Dos Passos' characters sometimes appear to be overwhelmed and engulfed by the havoc they are forced to endure, Mailer's characters simply shrug their shoulders and dismiss war as part of their meaningless existence.

Dos Passos presents the reaction of Pvt. Chrisfield during battle:

The trees suddenly broke away and they saw the valley between them full of the glare of guns and the white light of star shells. It was like looking into a stove full of glowing embers. The hillside that sloped away from them was full of crashing detonations and yellow tongues of flame. A battery near the road seemed to crush their skulls

23 Mailer, The Naked, p. 368.
24 Dos Passos, Three Soldiers, p. 190.
each time a gun fired. Stunned and blinded, they kept on marching down the road. It seemed to Chrisfield that they were going to stop any minute into the flaring muzzle of a cannon.²⁴

Contrast this reaction with that of General Cummings as he watches his men move into battle against the enemy:

The men move slowly now, leaning forward as if striding into the wind. He is fascinated by the sluggishness of it all, the lethargy with which they advance and fall. There seems to be no pattern to the attack, no volition to the men; they advance in every direction like floating leaves in a pool disturbed by a stone, and yet there is a cumulative moment forward. The ants in the final sense all go in one direction.²⁵

Doe Fassoa could not accept the butchery and purposelessness of war;Mailer accepted war as one of the sad realities of life. Both authors paint realistic portraits in their descriptions of the aftermath of battles and skirmishes. Mailer and Doe Fassoo were equally determined to expose the filth and degradation of war in the hope that the American public would become so incensed that they would never again participate in such an atrocity. Both authors agreed that in the final analysis the individual participant in war is ultimately a loser. In the following passage Mailer pictures the results of a "victorious" American attack on a Japanese position:

Another Japanese lay on his back a short distance away. He had a great hole in his intestines, which bunched out in a thick white cluster like the congested petals of a sea flower. The flesh of his belly was very red and his hands, in their death thrash had encircled the wound.²⁶


²⁶Ibid., p. 211.
John Dos Passos does not spare the reader any of the grim realities which war imposes upon its victims:

The only parts of his body that existed were his legs and something in his throat that groaned and groaned. White figures moved about him and strange smells entered his nose and circulated through his whole body, but nothing could distract his attention from the singsong of his groans. His mouth was dry, like leather; he put out his tongue to try to catch raindrops on it. His legs throbbed with flaming agony.

Mailer and Dos Passos are intensely concerned with the matter of freedom of the individual will in a system which will not allow for, nor even permit it. Involvement in war subjects the individual to even greater restrictions. Willard Thorp echoes Mailer's sentiments when he says

"Mailer's soldiers have been stripped of their humanity."28

In an existential sense most of Mailer's characters (Hearn excepted) gave up or forfeited their humanity long before they became a part of the military system. Jean-Paul Sartre asserts that those who refuse to question their existence are reduced to the level of slaves (Nietzsche's "slave type"). It seems that the extent of the questioning done by the majority of characters in The Naked and the Dead concerns physical gratification. One man "was daydreaming about liquor, feeling rather sad because with all the money he had now, he couldn't even buy a pint,"29 while another remarks that "when a man's got it just as nice and steady as

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27Dos Passos, Three Soldiers, p. 196.
28Thorp, American Criticism, p. 196.
29Mailer, The Naked, p. 5.
he wants it, then he never can remember what it's like without it.\textsuperscript{30}

Perhaps the only "authentic" human being to emerge from \textit{The Naked and the Dead} is Robert Hearn. He possesses a true, questioning spirit. Most of the book shows Hearn caught in a moral and spiritual vacuum but when he is put in charge of lives of a company of men who are assigned to a dangerous mission, Hearn's latent qualities of courage and authenticity begin to emerge. He is overwhelmed with a sense of "all the magic of freedom."\textsuperscript{31} Death brings an untimely end to any hopes that Hearn had of achieving a total feeling of independence.

John Dos Passos, like Mailer, campaigned vociferously for the rights of the individual. Kenneth Ledbetter sums up Dos Passos' views:

Man's fate is that in his quest for self-identity he is forced to create the very apparatus by which that identity is inevitably destroyed. Thus the history of men is a succession of tragic moments, a series of disillusionments ending only in despair, for the institutionalizing impulse continues "to choke out good, to strangle the still small private voice that is God's spark to man. Man drowns in his own sour.\textsuperscript{32}

John Andrews appears to be the lone "authentic" character in John Dos Passos' \textit{Three Soldiers}. He, like Hearn in \textit{The Naked and the Dead}, is not primarily concerned

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 339.

with the question of human freedom until he enters the army and then suddenly realizes that he no longer has any rights. As Michael Gold states it:

Three Soldiers was a war story in which the two struggling elements of Dos Passos' nature reveal themselves. There is nothing of himself in Fuselli and Chrisfield, but in the third soldier, Andrews, we have Dos Passos the Harvard aesthete trying to heal himself. Andrews is a talented young musician. He finds that his sensibilities are being outraged, his aspirations crushed by society as embodied in the American army. 33

Andrews, unlike Hearn, does achieve self-realization. He achieves what Sartre termed "the moment of revelation." This revelation brings about the attitude of the realization that this is an absurd world, but the individual determines to make out of it all that is possible. The only individual satisfaction hence will stem from following the dictates of one's own conscience.

John Andrews attains freedom when he decides to desert the army. This is a glorious personal victory for him: "It seemed the first time in his life he had ever determined to act." 34 After Andrews achieves the inner peace that comes from achieving individual freedom, he is never dissuaded from his convictions. He rejects even his girlfriend, Geneviève, who utters, "Can't you understand that other people haven't your notions of individual liberty?" 35 Andrews realizes that his liberty is in constant jeopardy because the military

34 Dos Passos, Three Soldiers, p. 211.
police are searching for him. Andrews has made his decision knowing that he must, at any time, be willing, in the Sartrean tradition, to accept the consequences of his act. Says Andrews, "Every man who stands up courageously to die loosens the grip of the nightmare."36 Even as Andrews discovers that he has been betrayed by his housekeeper and hears the military police surrounding the house, he remains wholly serene:

He became suddenly calm. A man in a boat was passing down the river. The boat was painted bright green; the man wore a curious jacket of a burnt-brown color. Andrews sat in his chair again. The boat was out of sight now, but there was the windmill turning, turning against the piled white clouds. There were steeps on the stairs.37

Both Dos Passos and Mailer have dramatized their themes without obscurity. Dos Passos says: "I think there is such a thing as straight writing. The mind of a generation is its speech. A writer who writes straight is the architect of history."38

Mailer acknowledges the influence of John Dos Passos. Those authors who have been most influential in Mailer's career are ranked as follows: James T. Farrell, John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe.39

36 Ibid., p. 418.
37 Ibid., p. 432.
Sidney Finkelstein comments that Mailer not only borrowed techniques from Dos Passos, as in the "Time Machine" episodes, but often seemed to be looking through Dos Passos' lens, granting, however, that he would have seen this way without Dos Passos. 40

The existential overtones which appear throughout Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead are not obscure. The absurdity-of-existence theme is clearly revealed throughout both novels. Dos Passos' existential attitudes are implied rather than directly stated.

Norman Mailer's existential beliefs are more sharply defined than those of Dos Passos. Mailer is sickened by the society of which he is a member. Existential despair is evident in his statements concerning the seeming hopelessness that characterizes the American way of life. Mailer, however, like Sartre, believes that the individual must struggle constantly in order to find purpose in his own life. Sartre would declare that the "authentic" man is condemned to freedom. In Cannibals and Christians Mailer states:

Apocalypse or debauch is upon us. And we are close to dead. There are faces and bodies like gorged maggots on the dance floor, on the highway, in the city, in the stadium; they are a host of chemical machines who swallow the product of chemical factories, aspirin, preservatives, stimulant, relaxant, and breathe out their chemical wastes into a polluted air. . . . I must see myself sometimes as a physician more than rifleman, a physician half blind, not so far from drunk, his nerve to be recommended not at every

occasion, nor his hand to hold at each last bed, but a noble physician nonetheless, noble at least in his ideal, for he is certain that there is a strange disease before him, an unknown illness, a phenomenon which partakes of mystery, nausea, and horror; if the nausea gives him pause and the horror fear, still the mystery summons, he is a physician, he must try to explore the mystery. 41

John Dos Passos and Norman Mailer have made a lasting and significant contribution to American literature, not by creating characters who are memorable or appealing, but rather by shocking the multitudes of complacent and routine-oriented Americans who stumble through each day without any sense of direction. They present the search for individual meaning life as a serious matter. Andrews and Hearn realize, but unfortunately too late, how precious human freedom is. Only after they had become isolated within the confines of the military system did Andrews and Hearn experience what Sartre termed the moment of revelation. Despite being caught up in a meaningless and hopeless existence, Hearn and Andrews felt compelled to make the struggle to find individual meaning for their own lives. Their heroism is seen not in the catastrophic ends which they met, but in the fact that they made the quest for something better. Andrews and Hearn were defeated outwardly by the system, but not before they achieved personal victory. It requires existential courage to defy "the system" in an age dominated by automation and mechanization, an age in which despair and hopelessness are bywords and the threat of nuclear extermination is constant.

41 Mailer, Cannibals and Christians, pp. 2-5.
General Cummings in *The Naked and the Dead* sums up the situation as follows: "The natural role of the twentieth-century man is anxiety."\(^{42}\)

\(^{42}\)Ibid., p. 177.
CONCLUSION

Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead emerged during eras when war novels were flooding the bookstores. Each novel emerged as a bestseller and in doing so catapulted its respective author to fame. In addition to descriptions of blazing cannonfire, muddy trenches, mine fields and spectacular incidents of hand-to-hand combat, Dos Passos and Mailer delved deep into the human psyche to discover individual reactions to the horrors which accompany war. In doing this each author discovered that man, regardless of rank, background, or nationality, is accompanied by feelings of despair and fear. The sensitive individual who cannot abide violence and regimentation is inclined to suffer to a greater extent than does the uneducated, indifferent person. John Andrews in Three Soldiers and Robert Hearn in The Naked and the Dead are persecuted and eventually defeated in their quest for individuality in their hostile, uncompromising military environment. That their struggle ended in such a manner is altogether fitting. The cause that they represented was made more poignant by their sacrifice—a sacrifice which serves as a rallying point for all those who cherish human freedom.

Sartre's existential ideas have been successfully integrated with some of the basic convictions espoused by
Dos Passos and Hailer. These three men view human responsibility in terms of an individual's attempt to gain meaning and understanding from an existence which seems to be void of such. Individual greatness is reflected in the spirit and conviction with which one pursues this search for ultimate truth. This idea is reflected in the following statement by Jean-Paul Sartre from one of his early theoretical books, L'Être et le néant:

All man's alibis are unacceptable; no gods are responsible for his condition; no original sin; no heredity and no environment; no race, no caste, no father, and no mother; no wrong-headed education, no governness, no teacher; not even an impulse or a disposition, a complex or a childhood trauma. Man is free; but his freedom does not look like the glorious liberty of the Enlightenment; it is no longer the gift of God. Once again, man stands alone in the universe, responsible for his condition, likely to remain in a lowly state, but free to reach above the stars.¹

By conventional standards Andrews in Three Soldiers and Hearn in The Naked and the Dead are the ultimate losers. Even so, in what Sartre terms an "absurd" world, a world void of consequence, their courage sets them apart—divorces them from their absurd environment. Persecution and death are the price of freedom which they can attain in no other manner.

The plight of two such creative and sensitive individuals isolated them from the majority of their fellow citizens. As they seek an "authentic" existence, there

is the suggestion of a continuing problem unsolved and perhaps unsolvable in the contemporary American situation. From this point of view, other materials might have served equally well: a comparison of novels by John Dos Passos and F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway, E. E. Cummings and James Jones, or Carson McCullers and Saul Bellow.

Dos Passos andMailer, who were separated by one full generation, were chosen for this comparative study for several reasons: First of all, the present situation developed out of the past, hence the choice of one novel in each of two generations, both far enough in the past in 1969 to allow some perspective. George F. Whicher expressed this thought shortly after Mailer's novel appeared:

In the last chapter we surveyed a group of writers [whicher had analyzed various works by Eliot, Lardner, Jefferas, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Faulkner and Caldwell in a chapter entitled "Analyticy of Decay"] who found life in the twentieth century far from satisfactory and man as shaped by an American environment less than completely human. The contemporary world as mirrored or symbolized in their imagination seldom permitted the healthy development of body or spirit. It was peopled by frustrated and twisted souls, sometimes defiant, but more often crushed, whose actions had become stereotyped and meaningless. In the midst of excessive national prosperity there was no joy or abundance of life, and where prosperity was lacking a savage violence flourished. The struggle to survive was bitter and unending, social injustice the rule. Such an atmosphere could be productive only of fungoid growths, whose monstrous might provoke the uneasy laughter of outraged sensibilities.2

The despair spoken of by Whither also plagued Andrews in *Three Soldiers* and Hearn in *The Naked and the Dead*. The uneasiness and heaviness of heart which grip their respective authors, Dos Passos and Mailer, are symptomatic of an even greater sickness which has deeply affected American literature of the twentieth century and radically altered the values it affirms or denies. The questions involving the relationship and function of the creative individual to society have been posed by Dos Passos, Mailer, and many contemporary novelists. Mankind is seeking outlets for anxiety over nuclear bombs, racial unrest, campus strife, as well as a foreign war in Viet Nam and the establishment in general. The prospects for relief appear bleak, and consequently Americans are losing faith in their government, their schools, their churches, and, worst of all, in themselves. As American literature continues to reflect this encroaching attitude of despair, the public is beginning to realize that existential thought is becoming an established condition of their everyday affairs. Dos Passos, Mailer, and Sartre would agree that twentieth-century man is riding aboard a speeding vehicle—a vehicle of his own creation. It is too late to get off and all of the passengers must now grimly await whatever destination fate has in store for them. These three authors would spurn escapism; they would continue in the face of despair to be "authentic."

John Dos Passos and Norman Mailer have attempted to make their readers aware that only through "existential
courage" and "will to power" can the individual hope to improve his condition. Existentialism, contrary to what popular opinion holds, sees unlimited potential in every human being; however, that individual must reject those forces which seek to strip him of his "authentic" humanity. Oscar Wilde said in 1923: "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." Unfortunately most of the figures in Three Soldiers and The Naked and the Dead were unaware that stars existed. John Andrews was gazing at them long before the military police led him toward his end, and Robert Bearn's face may have turned toward the heavens for the first time as he fell mortally wounded on the plains of Anzio. Dos Pasage and Kailer, with their interest in Marxism, naturalism, and existentialism, make no attempt to create a revolution in modern American thought. They do point to a narrow and treacherous path which only a few brave souls would dare to follow. In a society where easy and regular satisfactions abound, why should one be concerned with personal identity and freedom? Yet for those who are willing to forego immediate pleasures in order to take the existential route to who-knows-where, unexpected and highly satisfying rewards may be awaiting.

Dos Pasage, Kailer, and Sartre have pointed a finger in the direction where they feel the hope of humanity lies. The individual may choose to accept or reject their challenge.

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In this world one chooses either to strive or not to strive. Both quests lead to the inevitable end. Existentialism promises nothing to its followers. It is only one way of trying to relate oneself to his universe.

Many critics will insist that *Three Soldiers* and *The Naked and the Dead*, *Banville Man*, *The Sheltering Sky*, *The Invisible Man*, and various other works mentioned in this thesis present a good case for naturalism. The forces at work behind heredity and environment negate individual will to a large degree; however, there are many human beings who have succeeded in spite of extreme difficulty—succeeded in the sense that they have cleared their own paths toward accomplishment and fulfillment. History abounds with incidents of persons overcoming difficulties to achieve fame and fortune when others had long since given up the struggle. Man's greatness is reflected in the intensity of his quest for truth and wisdom. The naturalists have no place between man and nature as a one-sided affair. Despite the fact that man is involved in a losing cause and is likely to remain in a low state, Dos Passos, Mailer, and Sartre feel that man has the potential to rise above the mire into which the naturalists have cast him. The value of existentialism, according to these three men, may be seen in the fact that it is a philosophy of possibility: existentialism perpetually leaves a door open somewhere. It demands, as naturalism does not, that its followers never cease their struggle for meaning in life. For the man who has been knocked down by misfortunes, the existentialists urge that he get up again in
order to pursue his essence. Samuel Beckett’s heroes in his trilogy, *Malloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, reinforce this point quite vividly. Mahood, in *The Unnamable*, hears a voice that urges him to continue, and this novel concludes with the phrase "... you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on." The man who submits to defeat and lies in the mud awaiting a helping hand has, in the existential sense, forfeited his humanity. Unlike this man, Robert Hearn in *The Naked and the Dead* and John Andrews in *Three Soldiers* never stop "becoming." The indomitable spirit of these men serve as a testimony of their courage to contemporary fiction writers who in 1969 are seeking to define what constitutes a hero in terms of authenticity in a heterogeneous modern American society.

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