

## **“A Freedom Transcending Mere Materiality”: *Catch-22*, Temporality, Trauma, and Responsibility**

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This article explores the relationship between temporality, trauma and responsibility in the novel *Catch-22*. Borrowing from psychoanalytic theories of the drive, I develop a reading of the temporality of trauma in general, and as related to the drives. This involves a delayed-reaction, non-linear articulation of the trauma that is intimately linked in *Catch-22* to the ways in which Yossarian is exposed to threats to his bodily integrity. In response to an exposure of the finitude of his bodily subjectivity, an initially passive attitude is engendered in Yossarian in response to his traumatic “primal scene,” the death of Snowden. This article is concerned with demonstrating how Yossarian ultimately surpasses this sense of passivity and finitude in order to take responsibility for his own trauma and the fantasies surrounding it. Whilst the drives and trauma might be seen as ex-trinsic factors that serve to limit or curtail subjective agency, with a more nuanced understanding of the drives, trauma, and finitude itself, we can see in *Catch-22* an example of the paradoxical freedom that is manifested in Yossarian in relation to his symptom. The manifest sense of responsibility that Yossarian owns to is, however, matched by a latent responsibility that is not broached in the text. The final part of this article shows how, in comparison with Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Catch-22* elides further responsibilities that are left latent within the text. As such, the comparison between the two texts dramatises the contradictions and ambivalences involved in the act of representing war.

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The following article will address the issue of war-related neuroses and trauma, through a reading of *Catch-22* and in the light of psychoanalytic theories of the drive and temporality. In doing so, I will demonstrate the contribution a psychoanalytically-derived criticism can

make towards denoting registers of complicity and responsibility in war writing. War can be seen as a particularly vexed field in which questions of domination/submission, intersubjectivity, the power of ideology and the workings of power in general can be addressed. As “prime movers” of history, as cultural fault-lines in which existing divisions are exacerbated and new divisions created, and as exemplary instances of the functioning of State power (*viz* both its own subjects and other States), wars can be seen as *the* historical “primal scenes” through which many subsequent ideological developments are focalised. Most specifically, war poses the question to cultural producers and consumers, of the extent to which it makes them *complicit* in it; *Catch-22* will be addressed insofar as it both accedes to and avoids the complicities inherent in representing the spectacle of war. The most pressing concern of the would-be counter-cultural war novel is how it can represent war without somehow glamorising it or acting as an apologist for its perpetrators.

My reading of the psychoanalytic register of temporality is heavily indebted to Adrian Johnston’s masterful *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (2005), and the following analysis is intended to exemplify several of Johnston’s key insights. It is initially useful to assess some of the key aspects of war-related trauma from the perspective of the history of military psychology. Whilst shell shock/PTSD can be made manifest in different ways, there are consistent elements in many cases that need to be stressed and that dovetail neatly with psychoanalytic notions of trauma. The complex that became known as shell shock was, as is well known, first popularised in World War I (though those well-read in military history could have discerned most of its features through study of the American Civil War). That shell shock was instrumental in forcing Sigmund Freud to re-assess his idea that the psyche functioned according to the pleasure principle is also well known, and points towards the discovery of the war neuroses as one of the foundational traumas of psychoanalysis itself. The “death drive,” one of Freud’s most problematic notions, was in a strong sense the offspring of war-related trauma, and is similarly a theoretical-clinical problematic that, until recently, had not been fully resolved. One of the gambits of the following arguments is that a nuanced understanding of the Freudian drive can shed further light on the problem of PTSD, despite the general devaluation of psychoanalysis in the study and treatment of the syndrome over the years. This, in turn, will shed further light on *Catch-22*.

In some ways, the early history of military psychiatry echoes the foundational schisms that beset the movement of psychoanalysis/

psychology, resulting in a bifurcation between approaches centred either on organic/biological causes, or on a strictly psychic causality behind the trauma. In the light of this Manichean opposition, it is perhaps all the more surprising that, firstly, a relatively consistent series of features can be (and indeed were) assigned to war trauma from either perspective, and indeed secondly that many common grounds were laid for the *treatment* of the syndrome. Along with the ongoing debate as to the psychic or organic origins of the trauma, the psychiatric community was similarly split over “real” versus “imaginary” dimensions of the war neuroses (echoing Freud’s oscillation between “real” and “imagined” scenes of parental seduction), and the role of the analyst/therapist’s personality in advancing the treatment (the classical psychoanalytic theme of transference). In short, the debates over war neuroses echoed many of the key fault-lines within psychoanalytic theory, the disciplinary lines of demarcation between psychoanalysis and neuro-psychiatry, and the key problematics assumed by the psychoanalytic discipline.

Whatever the disagreements over the nature of shell shock, there are certain fundamental elements that were consistently denoted in the syndrome, across disciplinary lines. The first and most important for the purposes of this article is the relationship of the trauma to temporality. As became increasingly obvious during the early studies of shell shock, the trauma tended to operate in a non-linear fashion with regards to temporality. A delayed reaction was often evident, a period of incubation for the trauma, so to say, whereby its effects became evident, not necessarily immediately after the traumatic event that precipitated it, but at some later time. In the words of Ben Shepard, “a pilot of a B-17 bomber was able to come seemingly untouched through a terrible experience” (xviii). Having seen the body of a comrade “splattered over the windscreen” of his plane, the pilot “had a momentary twinge of nausea,” but “as he did not know the man, the horrifying spectacle was at an emotional distance” (xviii). With the passage of time, however, “he was himself involved in emotionally distressing events,” and “memories of the first incident came back to haunt and disturb him” (xviii).

This trajectory, where an initial traumatic episode is only experienced as such *retroactively*, implies a second key aspect of the trauma; namely, that the relationship between *repression*, the unconscious and temporality is a constituent factor of many war neuroses. The “working hypothesis” bequeathed to military psychiatrists not averse to Freudian ideas was that “experience not directly accessible to consciousness” was directly related to

“a process of *active suppression* of unpleasant material” (Shepard 87, emphasis added). This “unpleasant material” was, though repressed, likely to re-surface at a later date. Whilst the military psychiatrists rejected Freud’s notion that a sexual *origin* lay behind all mental problems (including the war neuroses), what was useful for many therapists was the *mechanism* his repression-unconscious model outlined.

Along similar lines, it was often the *repetition* of symptoms—traumatic dreams and the like—that were proof of the presence of war neuroses. Wholly against the idea of the subject as an organism devoted to homeostasis and ruled by the pleasure principle, nightmarish scenes were continually revisited by the patient. What is most telling here from a psychoanalytic perspective is that the insistent, irrational demands of the drive characterised these repetitions, a trajectory which seemingly operated irrespective of any demand for gratification or resolution in the patient. The overwhelming impression was of a patient entirely subject to the insistence of the traumatic drives, and this can be linked to the *passivity* experienced by the subject in relation to the originary, foundational traumatic event. Studies during World War I indicated that exposure to the events of war triggered instinctual “fight or flight” patterns in the troops. Owing to the static nature of trench warfare, however (or indeed the claustrophobic environment of an aeroplane as inhabited by Yossarian), the “flight” instinct was mostly curtailed (and the “fight” instinct was largely inhibited), leaving the subject with few outlets to compensate for the “loss of control” imposed upon him by the situations of war. Yossarian’s impassioned screaming at his pilot during evasive action, “hard, hard you bastard,” provides an indication of this contradiction. In this context we can see the traumatic drives as strictly *related* to the position of passivity invariably forced upon combatants, or indeed as being the very means of working through this sense of passivity.

Within psychoanalytic theory there are several approaches to trauma that shed light on the issue of war neuroses. Kirsten Hyldgaard describes trauma as resulting from a “senseless accident”: “A trauma is understood as an event without necessity; a cause for the subject as an accidental, contingent event ... an event that does not make sense, or rather a senseless event that has to be made sense of, an event that hereafter will be the foundation of sense” (74). Similarly, but in a more psychoanalytic language, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis describe trauma as follows:

An event in the subject’s life defined by its intensity, by the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the

psychical organisation. In economic terms, the trauma is characterised by an influx of excitations that is excessive by the standard of the subject’s tolerance and capacity to master such excitations and work them out psychically. (465)

What should be stressed from the above is, firstly, the contingent nature of the “accidental event”; the subject’s *own* contingency is in effect dramatised by the traumatic event, embodying the strictly ex-trinsic and alienated nature of subjectivity in general (as well as the particular alienation brought about by the trauma). Secondly, we see in both of the above characterisations the idea of an “excess” of affect in relation to “sense”; whilst Laplanche and Pontalis at this stage describe the process in terms of “energy” (echoing Freud’s earlier quasi-biological stance), along the lines of the Lacanian turn it may well be more productive to view the excess that besets the subject in terms of *signification*. Along these lines Hyldgaard’s description of a “senseless event *that has to be made sense of*” (74) sets the response to trauma at the level of *translation* and *meaning*, and, more pertinently still, in terms of “an event that hereafter will be the foundation of sense” (74). Thirdly, then, not only is the trauma *related* to sense and meaning, but in Hyldgaard’s terms is “hereafter” the very “*foundation* of sense.”

The trauma, then, in this reading, poses an insoluble question of meaning that the subject cannot *but* assume and attempt to master. Again in the words of Laplanche and Pontalis:

An excessive influx of excitation immediately halts the operation of the pleasure principle obliging the psychic apparatus to carry out a more urgent task “beyond the pleasure principle,” which consists in binding the excitations in such a way as to allow for their subsequent discharge. The repetitive dreams in which the subject relives the accident intensely, *placing himself* once more in the traumatic situation as *if attempting to master it*, is attributed to a repetition compulsion. (468, emphasis added)

The apparent passivity of the subject in the face of the drives is somewhat qualified in the above passage. Whilst the repetitive trajectory is described as a “compulsion,” Laplanche and Pontalis’ emphasis on “binding” and “mastery” implies that the subject’s role in this trajectory is not purely passive/regressive, and that the subject has a *complicit* role in the repetition, which actually attempts to *domesticate* or defuse the trauma through its iteration. This “turning-around” of the seemingly passive

position of the subject in relation to the drive is key in my reading of *Catch-22*, where it will be demonstrated that the *reflexive* trajectory of the drive precludes our reading the drives as a force that simply imposes itself, *ex nihilo* as it were, upon the subject.

This iterative “compulsion,” however, can be viewed not just as a feature of the aetiology of trauma (narrowly defined) but of subjectivity itself in relation to temporality and the drives. Johnston’s wide-ranging intervention on the psychoanalytic theories of the drives sets the issue of temporality at their very heart; indeed, he makes the strong statement that psychoanalysis as a whole “is fundamentally a philosophical insight into the subject’s relationship with temporality” (xxix). The insertion of a more nuanced view of temporality within the conceptualisation of the drives is performed by Johnston via two distinct temporal axes, the “axis of iteration” and the “axis of alteration”: “The salient features of the Freudian-Lacanian Trieb reveal themselves through a focus on the intractable conflict between the repetitious (a)temporality of the axis of iteration and the bi-directional, dialectical temporality of the axis of alteration” (217). Put quite simply, we can understand the axis of *iteration* to correspond broadly with a *metonymic* view of temporality as ineffably driven forwards. Repetition is motored, in this view, by a “cyclical temporality forcefully ignoring chronological consequences” (Johnston 154), and the axis of iteration represents the compulsive aspect of the drive that senselessly repeats itself in the same way found in Freud’s death drive. The axis of *alteration*, on the other hand, approximates a *metaphorical* view of the drive; as opposed to its ceaseless self-repetition, aiming to restore a “lost state,” the axis of alteration condemns the iterated drive as impossible, by *disseminating* its avatars across a plane of “alteration,” which means that each particular act of repetition *fails* to repeat exactly what it seeks to re-iterate. The intractable conflict outlined by Johnston is thus that, whilst the axis of iteration can do nothing *but* repeat past experiences/mental states, the axis of alteration *prevents* this repetition from ever recapitulating the *same* experience.

Exactly *what* the drives seek to repeat is a matter to be further discussed. What must be maintained, however, is that in Johnston’s terms the drives are “internally fissured” and self-defeating because of the conflicting temporal registers they partake of. We must, therefore, come to an understanding of the drive that allows for this constitutive *duality* and antagonism, a conflict that is internal to each and every drive. In the words of Lorenzo Chiesa, “[t]he (drive) is both that which retroactively transforms the primordial undead Real into the Symbolic ... and, given its

subtractive nature, that which tends to transform the Symbolic into the undead ‘inorganic’ Real—it is only in the latter sense in which Lacan says that the drives tend towards the Thing” (144). Notice, in the above, the stress on retroactive transformation—i.e., that the drives only become operative in a deferred way—and also the fact that a dual (and seemingly contradictory) operation is granted to the drives. The drives are, then, both synthetic *and* anti-synthetic, in the sense that they both “transform the ... undead real into the Symbolic” (144), and can also convert the Symbolic “into the undead ‘inorganic’ Real.” The drives, then, “tend” towards either their own *substantialisation* within the Symbolic or their *desubstantialisation* within the Real.

We must also come to terms with the role of the body within this conceptualisation of the drives. Again, in Johnston’s words, “drive is, at one and the same time, the unmasterable ‘thrust’ of the Real body, as well as the overdetermining automaton of the symbolic structures dictating the course of the libidinal economy. This bivalence of Trieb demands a theory that takes into account an internal split, a dehiscence between Real and Symbolic” (369). Alongside the “dehiscence” forced upon the subject by the twin, irreconcilable temporal axes outlined by Johnston, we must also account for the constitutive contradiction between, on the one hand, the Real (represented here by the body), and on the other hand the Symbolic. Contrary to those interpreters of Jacques Lacan that propound a pan-linguistic model in which repetition is solely the result of the automatism of the signifying chain (an understandable tendency given many of Lacan’s positions), Johnston stresses the *dialectical* relationship between the subjective body and the Symbolic. It is in the complex inter-relationship between the (Real) body and the external world of signs that I wish to assert a certain correspondence between war neuroses and psychoanalytic theories of trauma in general, and to do so we must first examine the Freudian phenomenon of “propping.”

The theory of propping or leaning-on was “rediscovered” by Laplanche and Pontalis in Freud’s work, and goes some way towards explaining some of the more troubling aporia of Freud’s drive theory in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1925). Put simply, Freud pointed to both death and life drives, to drives that tend towards a former inorganic state (death drives), and those which are aligned with self-preservative instincts and the pleasure principle (life drives). What Freud overlooked, in the view of Laplanche and Pontalis, was the tendency of the death drive to “graft” itself, or to be “alloyed” to, various functions centred on the self-preservative registers that are supposedly inimical to it. Sexual drives, to give the most obvious

example, partake of both death drives (they are irrational and seek only their own continuation) and life drives (in tending towards reproductive functions they participate in the register of self-preservation). This is why Lacan says that “any drive is a death-drive” (*Ecrits: Complete Edition in English* 848), insofar as the identification of a “pure” life-drive unadulterated by the “irrational” processes of the death-drive is strictly speaking impossible.

What is at stake in the drives, then, is the placement of the subjective body in relation to the external register of the symbolic. There is an ineffable crossover between these registers:

Lacan speaks of “accidents of the body,” thereby indicating that he views the material, biological substratum of the Imaginary ... as a mere contingency. The contours of the body are not logical necessities; perhaps the body could have been formed differently. *Necessity, for Lacan, resides in the fact that this material contingency inevitably gives rise to certain non-material effects.* (Johnston 263, emphasis added)

This article is very much concerned with assessing the contingent nature of the body as displayed in *Catch-22* and the necessity of the accidents that befall it giving rise to certain non-material effects. The central aspect of my argument here is that the “immanent co-implication” that psychoanalysis identifies between self-preservative and libidinal functions can be *reversed* in the case of war trauma. Whilst the sexual drive alloys itself to self-preservative functions, it is my contention that the trauma instigated in the war neuroses (one where the self-preservation of the body is called into question and threatened), by reverse, alloys itself to a repetitive trajectory more commonly ascribed to the sexual drives. In effect, in the war neuroses we are shown a reverse-propping tendency where the self-preservative processes “lean on” the self-destructive tendencies of sexuality. In terms of *Catch-22*, it is my contention that the very contingency ascribed to the body above is at the heart of the text’s traumatic register, a trauma which is compulsively repeated along the lines of an axis of iteration, and gradually widened in scope according to the vicissitudes of the axis of alteration. It is the alterations that are represented in Yossarian’s trauma that will ultimately prove to be significant. Let us now examine the novel itself in terms of the above arguments, bringing them to bear on the text, and also crucially, using the textual analysis as an opportunity to expand upon the definitions advanced so far.

Repetition is in itself one of the key strategies employed in *Catch-22*. Some of the repetitions are primarily of interest for their picayune humour, but I wish to focus on those that provide key insights into the very formal fabric of the text. In terms of its textual modes of repetition, temporality itself is inevitably to the fore in *Catch-22*. The constant analepses of the text are centred on certain key motifs, the most prominent of which is the number of missions required for one of the airmen to be sent home. This number, like the fleeting object of desire in psychoanalytic theory, is both raised and lowered according to the chronological oscillations of the text, a carrot ineffably held out of reach for the characters in the text, until it becomes something of a fetish. Insofar as the airmen do *not* receive their ticket home, and the number of missions required gradually increases (like an object of desire that is forever “to come”), this motif expresses both a sense of temporal movement—we can identify textual chronology according to how many missions were required at the time (“back when only forty-five missions were required for him to pack his bags for home”)—*and*, crucially, an overwhelming sense of stasis and futility or fatalism. “*Plus ça change...*”: whatever the number of missions required at a given moment in the text, the airmen themselves are prey to a debilitating sense of *stasis* that undermines or compromises any sense of chronological progression (60).

Other repeated motifs add a *spatial* component to the text. The references to Ferrara (“where they had to go back over the target and Kraft got killed”), to Avignon (where Snowden was killed) and to Bologna (the bogeyman for the airmen because of the concentrations of anti-aircraft fire there) mix certain locales into the temporal fabric of the text as “primal settings,” so to say (157). Yossarian’s intense meditations on the variety of potential dangers and illnesses from which he is at risk (that, as will be discussed, are themselves projections of the very specific fear which is repressed in him) provides another repeated motif, of the endlessly displaceable nature of bodily fear. Finally, the repetition of Orr’s teasing questioning of Yossarian, which only gains significance for Yossarian *retroactively*, underlines the commitment of the text to expressing an effect of afterwards-ness (or deferred action) not only in relation to trauma, but in relation to knowledge itself. The most frequently-repeated motif in the text, however, is the evocation of Snowden’s death—referred to no less than eight times—and it is this recurring primal scene that forms the centrepiece of my reading of *Catch-22*.

The Snowden scene is to be analysed in terms of, firstly, its aetiology

as trauma, and secondly, the concurrent *responses* this trauma elicits in Yossarian. The second aspect is key, as without a notion of the subjective *transformation* of the drive through praxis we are given a distinctly pessimistic view of the “determined” nature of subjectivity in relation to the drives. The basic theme of these scenes as a *sequence* is of the *gradual* unveiling of the scene in full, as it were. In each successive iteration, more detail is given and the scene is more fully rendered. It is as though the traumatic nature of the scene provides in Laplanche’s earlier terms “an excessive influx of excitation,” which necessarily *cannot* be fully articulated upon its first evocation, until the necessary “binding” and “mastery” have occurred whereby its more traumatic resonances might be “worked out psychically.” In the words of Chiesa (apropos the horror film still),

[w]hen the subject freezes the shocking scene ... he is accidentally watching unaware of its traumatic content ... when he organises the unbearable encounter ... that causes anxiety ... he both obtains a “still” that protects him from the trauma (through the imaginary objectification of the scene), *and lets himself be partially traumatised* (through the real scene that underlies its imaginary objectification). (149, emphasis in original; *emphasis added*)

It is instructive, indeed perhaps essential, to analyse the exact contexts in which the Snowden scene is replayed via Yossarian’s point of view. Let us view the entire sequence in turn, with attendant commentary. The replaying of the Snowden scene often arises out of Yossarian’s own physical fears, which can be brought about either by a generalised anxiety, or from a specific reference to the recent demise of one of his comrades. The very first reference to Snowden, and the only one that does *not* arise from one of the above two causes, comes in the “educational sessions”—“where are the Snowdens of yesteryear?” (39). Without any further, contextualizing explication at this point, Snowden immediately takes on the status of an *enigma*, the fundamental question or problem to be worked out in the text. The second evocation of the scene follows the first of several representations of the terrors of air combat, most specifically with reference to Yossarian’s pre-eminence in the art of “evasive action”; “there was no established procedure to evasive action. All you needed was fear” (56). This then segues into the second allusion to the Snowden scene, where, crucially, Snowden himself is not represented (it is seemingly a memory that is, at this stage, too traumatic); we have “help him, help him,” “the bombardier,” then Yossarian’s “I’m the bombardier, I’m alright” (57). Only *then* are we given

the frame of reference for the request to help him, and even then Snowden himself is not portrayed, we are simply told “[a]nd Snowden lay dying in back” (57). The dying body of Snowden is at this stage, then, foreclosed, and insofar as the chapter ends abruptly on this note, the text itself performs another form of evasive action, peeling *away* from directly representing his death.

The second and third iterations of the Snowden scene both arise following Yossarian’s pathological ruminations on disease, the “hernias and haemorrhoids” and so on that attend his presence in the hospital:

People gave up the ghost with delicacy and taste inside the hospital. There was none of that crude, ugly ostentation about dying that was so common outside the hospital. They did not blow up in midair like Kraft or the dead man in Yossarian’s tent, or freeze to death in the blazing summertime the way Snowden had froze to death after spilling his secret to Yossarian in the back of the plane. (291)

This initial reference to Snowden “spilling his secret to Yossarian” adds a further, elliptical sense in which Snowden forms the central enigma of the text, as the exact nature of the secret he embodies is held in abeyance until the final iteration of the scene. The next (fourth) evocation of the scene similarly connects Snowden’s secret, which he “had spilled all over the back of the plane,” with the multitude of “bartenders, bricklayers and bus conductors all over the world who wanted [Yossarian] dead,” not to mention the “lymph glands that might do him in,” and the “Hodgkins’ disease, leukaemia, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis” and so on (198).

The specifically traumatic nature of the scene, then, is definitively connected to Yossarian’s threatened sense of his *own* bodily integrity (or the potential lack thereof). This is placed into greater relief with the next (fifth) rendition of the scene:

That was the mission on which Yossarian lost his nerve. Yossarian lost his nerve on a mission because Snowden lost his guts, and Snowden lost his guts because their pilot that day was Huple ... and their co-pilot was Dobbs, who was even worse. (258)

The relevance of Huple and Dobbs being Yossarian’s pilots will only become meaningful later in the text, through the *après-coup* temporal mechanism by which Yossarian finally comes to understand Orr’s teasing (this will be dealt with in greater detail later in this essay). For now,

however, what is pertinent is that a direct connection is made between Snowden “losing his guts” and Yossarian “losing his nerve.” From an initially enigmatic allusion, through several iterations, the Snowden scene gradually accretes extra details; insofar as Snowden’s body *is* represented, it is done so in a piecemeal fashion (as with the scene itself) that again suggests its full impact is at first too traumatic to articulate. Snowden next appears (the sixth time) again as a remainder rather than a fully-rendered body: “the day of the Avignon mission when Yossarian climbed down the few steps of his plane naked, in a state of utter shock, with Snowden smeared abundantly all over his bare heels and toes, knees, arms and fingers” (298). Yossarian’s own body is here rendered as a series of body-parts (“heels and toes, knees arms and fingers”), thereby set in relation to the portrayal of Snowden’s eviscerated frame. In Lacanian terms we can see the “smearing” of Snowden as a horrifying remainder of the (bodily) Real that intrudes into the Symbolic, again reminding us that the (Real) body and the signifying system are “immanently co-implicated” in trauma.

As opposed to being linked with Yossarian’s own fear, however, the final two renderings of the Snowden scene—and, crucially, by far the most detailed ones—are related to the deaths of his comrades. The seventh iteration of the scene is also strongly linked with the enigma that Orr poses for Yossarian, again indicating the significance of Huple and Dobbs in the final outcome of Yossarian’s symptom. Firstly, the scene is prefigured by the spectacle of Orr’s plane crashing, of yet another one of Yossarian’s comrades (seemingly) being killed. The iteration of the Snowden scene occurs in the context, then, of Yossarian’s *other-directed* anxiety on behalf of his fellow airmen, as opposed to the earlier, alienated solipsism that characterises his angst. The second key element of this particular rendering lies in the fact that Yossarian admits to himself that he *always-already knew* that flying with Huple and Dobbs would be a disaster, “two vapid strangers, a beardless kid named Huple and a nervous nut like Dobbs” (380). This only assumes its full significance in the context of the offer made to Yossarian by Orr to fly with *him*, and this is an offer that is only represented *later* when we learn of Orr’s escape (it becomes another example of the “*après-coup*” modality of knowledge).

The final rendition of the Snowden scene follows the news of Hungry Joe’s death, and Yossarian’s realisation that now all of his comrades have been killed. This time the scene is laid bare over five pages of the novel, with the plaintive cry of “I’m cold” from Snowden, which is a constant theme in nearly all the repetitions of the scene, providing punctuating marks

between the representations of Snowden’s body. Snowden is represented in terms of the “gory scarlet flow behind the twitching, startling fibres of weird muscle” (501), the “live hamburger meat” his flesh resembles (502) and the “liver, lungs, kidneys, ribs, stomach, and bits of stewed tomatoes Snowden had eaten that day for lunch” (504). Put in such terms the body can scarcely seem anything but horrifying and traumatic; it is interesting to note that the representation of the body as “meat,” and the way various organs such as liver and kidneys (that are associated with edible meats) suddenly segues into a description of what Snowden himself has eaten. The highly contingent nature of the body is finally placed into full relief, as the text finally lays forth the secret than Snowden had spilled: “He felt goose pimples ... as he gazed down despondently at the secret that Snowden had spilled all over the messy floor. It was easy to read the message in his entrails. Man was matter, that was Snowden’s secret. The spirit gone, man was garbage. That was Snowden’s secret. Ripeness was all” (504).

Insofar as the secret that man is matter is what the text carefully husbands until the very last moment, we can assume it is *this* revelation that makes the Snowden scene so traumatic for Yossarian, necessitating a considerable period of incubation and a considerable amount of binding and mastery before it can be articulated. Put one way, the Snowden scene educates Yossarian into the nature of his bodily integrity, or more precisely the lack thereof, leading him to consider his relationship to his body as one of *finitude*. This is all the more to the point insofar as it is a conclusion that Yossarian, early in the text, wholly *denies*:

As far back as Yossarian could recall ... someone was always hatching a plot to kill him. ... but they couldn’t touch him, he told Clevinger, because he had a sound mind in a pure body ... they couldn’t touch him because he was Tarzan, Mandrake, Flash Gordon ...

“ ... I’m a bona fide supraman.” (22)

It is perhaps owing to this extreme conviction that the (conflicting) nature of Snowden’s secret is so traumatic, and thus initially repressed. In the words of Slavoj Žižek (apropos the “pure fatalism” engendered by the knowledge of the genetic determinism operative in DNA) “can one imagine a clearer situation of ‘traversing the fantasy’ and being confronted with the utterly meaningless real of a contingency determining our life? No wonder that the majority of people choose ignorance” (*Organs Without Bodies* 124). Yossarian is in this view confronted, via the Snowden scene, with the utterly

meaningless real of a contingency determining our life (“Man was matter”); the *utopian* strain that counterbalances the anti-utopian implications of the scene is that Yossarian (eventually) *does* traverse this fantasy, rather than choosing ignorance.

Some further concepts within the field of psychoanalysis can help to bring out the full nature of Yossarian-as-symptom, so to say, before moving onto the sense of responsibility that is (belatedly) evoked in the final pages of the text. To begin with, we can certainly characterise Yossarian along the lines of a particular view of anxiety, which is in Johnston’s terms the source of the drive-pressure, and is a result of the two, conflicting temporal axes:

... anxiety is the by-product of the irreconcilable conflict between the iterated insistence of the drive-source and the axis of alteration (wherein this insistence is mediated).

Despite this innate incapacity of the axis of alteration to adequately respond to the insistence of a pure repetition of an always-already lost past, the drive-source tirelessly continues to make its demands.

Anxiety is produced by the simultaneous impossibility of gratifying the drive-source coupled with the refusal of the drive-source to acknowledge this limit. (287)

Again, despite the pessimistic conclusions that might be drawn from what Johnston presents as an irreconcilable conflict, it should be stressed that the permanent structure of anxiety in terms of the “insistent” demands of the drive does *not* imply a determined, un-free subject. Indeed, as the following analysis will show, “anxiety has got everything to do with freedom” (Hyldgaard 70). The problem worsens, in any case, when repression comes onto the scene, for as Johnston says “repression transforms determinate fear into the amorphous, vague affect of anxiety” (275), a description which ties in neatly with the profusion of fears listed by Yossarian, who seems to suffer a generalised dread of just about *everything*.

In terms of the situation enforced upon Yossarian, it is clear that his “self-preservative” instinct is very much curtailed by military hegemony, and that the anxiety that arises from this expresses the contradictions of his position. To cite Johnston once more, Yossarian embodies “the tension between temporal movement and timeless stasis, this tension being the motor-force behind the perpetual, ceaseless activities of the drives” (228). The sense of timeless stasis enforced upon him by his subjection to hegemony is heightened by the *plus ça change* effect of the constant raising

of the number of missions required (thus making the text seem “timeless”), and is directly in conflict with the flight instinct the environment ex-cites in him. It is as though, put another way, Yossarian-as-symptom is evoked as “precisely instinct once caught between nature and reason” (Johnston 335), with his “instinct” being aligned with self-preservation and “reason” standing for his socio-symbolic superego and the demands of society (or, in different psychoanalytic terms, within him there is a conflict between desire and the law). Broadly speaking, then, I have outlined a trajectory of trauma for Yossarian as follows:

bodily finitude/contingency (passivity) → anxiety  
(source-pressure)→drive

What remains to be demonstrated is the way this complex is worked through in the text towards some kind of resolution. It is after his reconciliation with some sense of responsibility that Yossarian departs from the text and the remainder of this section will show how this sense of responsibility is made manifest.

The mode of “working-through” or mastering anxiety and the drives is defined as “traversing the fantasy” in Lacanian terms. The “fundamental fantasy” is “knitted” together, so to say, by a “master-signifier,” and in the words of Chiesa,

[n]eurotics can eventually turn their ideological symptom—the *jouissance* imposed by hegemonic fundamental fantasies—into a nonpsychotic *sinthome* when they undergo the traversal of the fundamental fantasy, the moment of separation from the Symbolic and the subsequent process of symbolic reinscription through a new, individualized master-signifier. (189, emphasis in original)

The remainder of this article will analyse the process through which *Catch-22* traverses the fundamental fantasy represented by Snowden, the way it overturns the fundamental passivity of this primal scene, and how a key part of Yossarian’s reinscription is the need to establish a different relationship to the symbolic Big Other. We should note, however, that it is a conflict that is strictly speaking irreconcilable. As Johnston notes, “the antagonism between the two axes inherent to all drives is not an opposition capable of eventual resolution” (229), and this is exactly why Lacan states that “all drives are *Trieb* to come” (60). This cautionary note might well help to explain the tactic of ending the text with Yossarian in mid-flight—as representative of “*Trieb* to come”—in the “future-imperfect,” so to say.

Insofar as Yossarian does (partially) traverse the fantasy of the Snowden scene, we should note what exactly in the scene *changes* in the course of its iterations, and what elements remain the same. What *remains* of the symptom, once Yossarian has worked-through the scene to its resolution, is the ever-present threat to his bodily integrity, as represented by the (similarly repetitive) murderous impulses of Nately's whore, and the *ambivalence* that could lead to Nately's whore being read as a representation of either life *or* death (or both, simultaneously). What changes is that, firstly, Yossarian has "chosen" to "own" his fear—"it proves you're still alive" (519). Secondly, the danger he now faces is highly *personalised*, as opposed to the faceless enemies that beset him before. Finally, and most crucially, he now has a "project" or "responsibility" *outside* himself (the salvation of Nately's whore's sister), as a counterweight to the impending dangers he is willing to assume. Furthermore, whilst the "axis of alteration" might not seem to wreak many changes on the Snowden scene itself, other than to gradually unveil it, there is a crucial change in emphasis. The repeated verbal motif of most of the earlier renderings is Snowden's "I'm cold." Whilst this is repeated in the final scene, the scene *finishes* with Yossarian's tender solicitude for the dying Snowden—"there, there"—*which is portrayed for the first time*. The plaintive plea *from the other*, then, whilst it is repeated in several of the prior scenes, is *only in the final evocation of the scene* met with a response *from Yossarian*. It is as though this ethical charge—let us call it a responsibility—was *in itself* somehow traumatic (working on the basis that the most traumatic material is generally slowest to emerge) and at the heart of Yossarian's symptom. What Pynchon terms a "kindness-instinct beyond extinction" in *Gravity's Rainbow* (314) emerges as the minimal structure of subjectivity necessary for Yossarian to assume his responsibility.

The above arguments should not be taken to imply that the drives necessitate a pessimistic view of the determined nature of subjectivity. As is implicit in one of Hyldgaard's formulations, the "fundamental fantasy" which gentrifies the drive-trauma can be read as entailing a degree of *choice* at the level of the subject, however minimal:

Fantasy can be understood as the unconscious response, the unconscious interpretation of this "primitive scene," this accidental, contingent event; it is an *original choice of interpretation* that has become the screen through which the world is perceived, a screen which shows itself in the way the subject poses—his or her attitude. (Hyldgaard 78, emphasis added)

This “original choice of interpretation” places a minimal responsibility upon the subject for his own fantasy. Put one way, whilst the demands of the drives are incessant, *this does not mean that we are void of all agency in the face of them*. In the face of the drives, we are “not free not to choose,” to put it in a Sartrean vein. As an initial question, along these lines, we might ask ourselves why, exactly, Yossarian is so traumatised by the Snowden scene, and why indeed his last ministrations for the dying Snowden necessitate the most thorough repression of all the elements in the “fundamental fantasy” that emerges from the scene. One answer might be that it is his (repressed) sense of *responsibility* for the other in this scene that emerges as its “traumatic kernel,” a responsibility that only emerges retroactively via the effects of the *après-coup* temporal loop of the text. The notion of responsibility is then reversed during the text, from the view that Yossarian questions so regularly—of his responsibility to his country and his superior officers—towards a very different idea.

Part of this reversal is enacted by means of the changing relationship of Yossarian to the Big Other of military hegemony. Whilst he poses an enigma and a problem for the authorities, it is crucial to note that Yossarian’s subversive activities are carried out largely within the remit of the game of power, so to say. In his incessant questioning, and his attempt to hold the power-structure to account *on the grounds of its own principles*, Yossarian actually *permits* the authorities to continually hit him with catch-22. His mode of questioning is in Lacanian terms directed towards the Big Other, and as long as he continues to do so, the master-signifier of hegemony is left undisturbed. An alternative way out of the annular, insidious cycle of drive-trauma is suggested by Žižek, especially relevant insofar as it alludes to the subject’s relationship to wider power-structures: “In an ‘ontological state of emergency,’ one should suspend one’s sociosymbolic identity and act *as if* this identity is unimportant, a matter of indifference” (*Organs Without Bodies* 51, emphasis in original). Something very much akin to this process is apparent in *Catch-22*, whereby the status of ontological freedom is maintained despite, or indeed paradoxically because of, the manifest limitations placed on that freedom (Sartre’s comment that the French were “never so free” as when they were occupied by the Germans comes to mind). Part of this process lies in the changing relationship of Yossarian to the master-signifier. When he says that he is “not running away from his responsibilities, but running *to* them” (516), this exchanges a (hegemonic) view of responsibility to his “sociosymbolic identity,” to a more (existential) view of responsibility to *himself* (not to mention Natelly’s whore’s sister). In Žižek’s terms,

[w]hat one should focus, on, rather, is demand as a way to drive; that is to say, what one needs is *a demand no longer addressed to the Other*. Both desire and demand rely on the other—either a full (omnipotent) other of demand or a “castrated” other of the law; the task, therefore, is fully to assume the *non-existence* of the Other. (*The Parallax View* 296, emphasis in original)

In a vulgar deterministic view we might see trauma as being inimical to freedom; if the trauma is, in psychoanalytic terms, “that which is in you more than you,” a cipher for the ineffable intrusion of the extrinsic within psychic life, then this otherness might be seen to curtail subjective agency. This would be to characterise the true nature of ontological freedom in a much too narrow and simplistic way, however, as if freedom were a substantial, positive essence pre-existing subjective choice. To refer back to an earlier citation from Hyldgaard, “anxiety has everything to do with freedom”, and similarly freedom is a “hole in being” (71). This seeming hole or void, however, has utopian implications in the sphere of the noumenal will. In Žižek’s words, freedom exists “in the very gap between the noumenal and the phenomenal”; “the way out of this predicament [of the subject’s finitude] is to assert that we are free insofar as we *are* noumenally autonomous, *but* our cognitive perspective remains constrained to the phenomenal level” (*Organs Without Bodies* 43, emphasis in original). Yossarian ultimately assumes his “noumenal autonomy” in spite of the contingencies and limitations that beset him at the phenomenal level. The Snowden scene, in the light of this insight, paradoxically *instantiates* Yossarian’s freedom (via retroactive temporality): “Freedom is ultimately *nothing but* the space opened up by the traumatic encounter, the space to be filled in by its contingent/inadequate symbolisations/translations” (*Organs Without Bodies* 99, emphasis in original).

The naïve view of trauma as forming nothing but a *limit* to freedom and agency is a corollary to a similarly naïve view of subjectivity as being predicated upon an initial/originary state of homeostasis. In an alternative reading, this homeostatic state is actually a mythical one, one whose assumption *by* the subject is actually the foundational traumatic event of subjectivity:

Consciousness, at its most elementary, is the awareness of a disturbance of the organism’s homeostasis caused by an encounter with an external (or internal object) which serves as its “occasion.”

The subject (of consciousness) is not the organism whose

homeostasis precedes every disturbance, and who strives to re-establish this homeostasis after every disturbance; the subject emerges through the disturbance of the organism’s homeostasis; *it “is” the very activity of dealing with disturbances.* (*The Parallax View* 223, emphasis added)

As the clause “it ‘is’ the very activity of dealing with disturbances” implies, the traumatic disturbance of the would-be homeostatic organism is, then, not inimical to, but the foundational instance *of* its reflexive self-consciousness; the self only intuits itself through the very activity of “dealing with disturbances.” Far from the trauma itself being a “violent imposition” upon subjectivity, Žižek neatly reverses this emphasis: “Freedom is not a blissfully neutral state of harmony and balance, but the very violent act that disturbs this balance” (*The Parallax View* 282). In his beautifully phrased conclusion Johnston puts it thus:

Despite the apparent bleakness and anti-utopianism of an assessment of human nature as being perturbed by an irreducible inner antagonism, there is, surprisingly, what might be described as a liberating function of the drives. In fact, subjects are forced to be free, since, for such beings, the mandate of nature is forever missing. Severed from a biological master-program and saddled with a conflict-ridden, heterogenous jumble of contradictory impulses ... the *parlêtre* has no choice but to bump up against the unnatural void of its autonomy. The confrontation of this void is frequently avoided. (Johnston 341, emphasis in original)

As I hope I have made clear, I view the trajectory of *Catch-22* as embodying just such a confrontation of the unnatural void of Yossarian’s autonomy (which is, to begin with, avoided).

It is crucial to maintain, however, that this sense of freedom can only be recognised and assumed retroactively (“freedom is retroactive” [*Organs Without Bodies* 112]). The final strand in my reading of *Catch-22* is thus, once again, in line with my arguments that temporality and its *après-coup* trajectory are fundamental to the ideological strategies of the text. Insofar as the noumenal realm of freedom is inaccessible to us, it only *becomes apparent* through the void displayed, via temporality, in the phenomenal realm. In Žižek’s words, “the space of freedom is not a magic gap in this first-level causal chain but my ability retrospectively to choose/determine which causes will determine me. ‘Ethics,’ at its most elementary, stands for the courage to accept this responsibility” (*The Parallax View* 203). When Orr

is discovered to have escaped to freedom, Yossarian retroactively realises that he has “always-already” known Orr’s plans; he simply did not fit together the pieces of the enigma set for him. Part of this lay in his misrecognition of Orr as a nemesis (rather like Aarfy), rather than as an alter-ego/ego-ideal to be empathised with and emulated. Further, he misrecognises the continual crash-landings undergone by Orr as signs of his ineptitude, and thus refuses Orr’s offer to fly with him; it is *this* misrecognition that places him in the plane with the “beardless kid” Huple and the “nervous nut” Dobbs. Hence, he is himself responsible for being in the plane when Snowden dies. The contradiction assumed by Yossarian is not that he suddenly becomes responsible for himself, his actions and others, but that he realises he always has been responsible: “There is no empirical founding act of freedom; it is rather that, in a complex and gradual process, the subject all of a sudden—not so much becomes ‘free’ and ‘responsible,’ but—retroactively becomes aware that he *already was* ‘responsible’” (*The Parallax View* 244, emphasis in original). Far from being an oppressive weight, this is fully as liberating as the Sartrean mode of freedom. Similarly, Yossarian seems to take some sort of responsibility for Nately’s whore’s vengeful mania, neither seeming to begrudge it and, in setting out to save her sister, perhaps partially accepting it. Whilst he says that “maybe I was the only one in sight that she could hate when she got the news [of Nately’s death]” (457), there is another implication that we might suggest. As a “placeholder” within the U.S. military, Yossarian in a sense *does* represent the “assassin” that killed Nately. It is thereafter his imperative to run away from the responsibility of his socio-symbolic identity, and towards a new set of responsibilities.

In Chiesa’s earlier definition of “traversing the fantasy,” the key element was the “formation of a new master-signifier” (191). I wonder, however, if from the perspective of Yossarian’s flight in *Catch-22* we might discern a slightly different end-point or, more accurately, an alternative “ending-process.” In Chiesa’s formulation,

[i]f the *sinthome* were to include the formation of a new fundamental fantasy, and the “new manner of repetition” ... corresponded to the emergence of a truly original fundamental fantasy—the unavoidable counterpart of a radically innovative master-signifier—then one can discern the outline of a politics which can deservedly claim to have inherited the legacy of Lacan’s ethics of *jouissance*. (191)

Whilst an alternative fundamental fantasy is broached in the text, through Yossarian’s other-directed solicitude (firstly for Snowden, and then for Nately’s whore’s sister), I would suggest certain grounds for caution over the search for a new master-signifier in *Catch-22*. The master-signifier tends, perhaps inevitably, to be congealed and naturalised within a particular socio-symbolic framework. And, insofar as *Catch-22* partakes of the same trajectory as the drive—especially with the way it ends with Yossarian *in flight*—we might suggest that it is the *process* that is fundamental, and not any particular goal (such as a master-signifier or any other particular, contingent object). In this way, the drive-modality of Yossarian’s flight is stressed over and above what Žižek terms its “contingent/inadequate symbolisations/translations” (*Organs Without Bodies* 99). Accordingly, in Johnston’s words, a “freedom transcending mere materiality” (340) might be maintained in the text over and above its (static) “symbolisations” in terms of the Big Other and master-signifiers. To put it one way, a key aspect of the counter-cultural purchase of *Catch-22* upon the conjuncture of war lies in the way that it is able to critique the monolithic power-structure without returning a similarly monolithic viewpoint. It would seem judicious for criticism to partake of a similar trajectory when addressing the text.

With regard to its relationship to the power-structure, however, there is a certain extent to which *Catch-22* has a latent sense of complicity that is seldom brought out in readings of the text, and which is put into relief by a comparison with Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Whilst the text manifests an existential sense of responsibility in Yossarian, a further responsibility is very much kept latent, namely the responsibility for civilian deaths as a result of the blanket-bombing tactics. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the U.S. Air Force historian, Rumfoord, tells Pilgrim to pity the men who had to do the bombing. Rumfoord is linked with Teddy Roosevelt, and is thus portrayed negatively, and in relation to U.S. imperialism. As one direct (if implicit) critique of *Catch-22*, then, we might point to the contrast between the latter’s portrayal of the horrors of air war *from the perspective of the people doing the bombing*, and *Slaughterhouse-Five*’s view of the people *being bombed*—from the perspective of the German “other.” It is a typically American tendency to portray war only from the perspective of Americans; this tendency was especially pronounced in relation to the Vietnam War, where even a fairly subversive text such as Michael Herr’s *Dispatches* (1977) still excludes the perspective of the Vietnamese “other” almost totally. It seems that this is a tendency *Slaughterhouse-Five* seeks to militate against (and one that, broadly speaking, echoes the stance of *Catch-22* that might be seen to

pity the men who had to do the bombing). In short, by comparison with *Slaughterhouse-Five*, we might suggest that pitying the men who had to do it in *Catch-22* may bleed into an apologist stance on behalf of the bombers, at the expense of the other, and that *Slaughterhouse-Five* reverses this stance. It would seem to dramatise a key ethical problem involved in the portrayal of war, therefore, that pity (or solicitude) for a particular subject may well involve the occlusion of an “other.” The responsibilities and complicities inherent in the representation of war are multifarious and insidious, therefore, and whilst *Catch-22* embodies a thoroughgoing search for a mode of being at a distance from those complicities, the comparison with *Slaughterhouse-Five* implies a further dimension of the war writer’s ethical dilemma.

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