

The Individual vs. the System in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje postavení jedince v systému poválečné americké společnosti ve dvou románech – *Hlava 22* (1961) od Josepha Hellera a *Vyhod'me ho z kola ven* (1962) od Kena Keseyho. Teoretická část se zabývá historickým a kulturním pozadím obou románů. Praktická část nejprve představuje oba autory a analyzované romány. Následně jsou charakterizovány metafory a jiné pojmy, které autoři použili pro kritiku americké společnosti, strategie hlavních protagonistů proti komfortní společnosti, a v neposlední řadě odlišné zakončení analyzovaných románů v širším sociálním kontextu.

Klíčová slova: Joseph Heller, *Hlava 22*, Ken Kesey, *Vyhod'me ho z kola ven*, konformismus, individualita, americká společnost

ABSTRACT

The thesis analyses the position of the individual in the post-war American society in two novels - *Catch-22* (1961) by Joseph Heller and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) by Ken Kesey. The theoretical part focuses on the historical and cultural background of the novels. The practical part first introduces the authors and the analysed novels. Subsequently, the metaphors and other language features and ideas that the authors used for criticism of American society are explained. Further, the strategies of the main protagonists against the conformist society are analysed and finally, the differing tones of the analysed novels are examined in terms of the wider social context.

Keywords: Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*, Ken Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, conformity, individuality, American society

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States of America has been described as county of freedom, individuality, equality, and justice from the very moment when it was founded. Yet, *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* state the exact opposite. Both of these novels criticized the conformist American society in which the freedom of an individual was curtailed by the system. Since the topic of conformity shaped the whole decade of the 1960s in the United States, the novels became the defining pieces of literature of these years and essentials for the counterculture rhetoric.

Therefore, the aim of the thesis is to explore how exactly the authors criticized the society, how they described the position of the individual against the system, and finally, what strategies their protagonists had to use in order to sustain their individuality.

To fully comprehend the examined works, this thesis firstly describes the character of the post-war American society. Besides American involvement in World War II, which had a great impact on economy and the further development of the country, the thesis describes the changing American values and culture as well. With the Communist threat growing, the sense of conformity in America strengthened. The system saw only itself and not the individual, which ironically, was also a feature of Communist nations. People had to conform and live by certain rules and the more and more powerful system oppressed the nonconformists. This led to the dark and rebellious sixties. Therefore, an insight into the Cold War is provided as well.

Attention is devoted to the American military, as *Catch-22* is set in a U.S. Army Air Forces base in the Mediterranean Sea. Post-traumatic stress disorder is described as well, since the characters of both novels can be seen to suffer from it. The thesis also introduces the American mental health care system, as most of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* takes place in a mental institution.

The theoretical part of the thesis provides an overlook of the changing nonconformist mood reflected in the American literature of the 1950s and 1960s. Metaphors for the controlling nature of American society in the novels, the strategies of four main characters in terms of the system are described, and finally the two works are placed in a larger context of a US loss of innocence. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy is the major event in this context. Although both novels were published before this event happened, the two works have often been analyzed in this context, e. g. in terms of tone.

**I. THEORETICAL AND
HISTORICAL/CULTURAL
BACKGROUND**

1 THE POST-WAR UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In order to closely understand both Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, it is fundamental to be aware of historical and cultural background of the period the novels were written in and published, that being the 1960s. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the American society, politics, and historical events from the World War II till the sixties with regard to conformity. However, attention is also devoted to the psychological impacts of wars on soldiers and the American mental health care system since these two aspects are fundamental for the comprehension of the novels as well.

1.1 World War II

The United States of America officially entered the war conflict known as World War II on December 7, 1941. This significant step in American history resulted in the end of the Great Depression and by 1945, when this global war ended, the American nation was regarded as the most powerful and affluent one. However, based on Franklin D. Roosevelt's foreign policy and the Neutrality Acts passed by the Congress, the United States did not intend to be part of the conflict from the outset.¹

The situation reached the breaking point in 1941 when Japan surprisingly attacked American Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Half a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the US military was composed of almost 600,000 men. However, this number was far from what it needed to be. Therefore, more men had to be recruited.² Altogether, almost 17 million Americans served and were in the military, women included. Even though women could not participate directly in combat, they had supporting roles such as "nurses and cooks." Many worked in the war industry as well and female doctors were given the right to directly participate in war in order to "free men for combat."³

One year after the formal entry of the United States into the war, a rather staggering alliance was formed - The Grand Alliance.⁴ Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt united with the purpose of defeating Nazi Germany.

¹ Gary B. Nash and Julie Roy Jeffrey, eds., *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*, 8th ed., vol. 2 (Boston: Pearson, 2017), 569.

² Carol Berkin, et al., *Making America: A History of the United States*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 578.

³ Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 581-82.

⁴ Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 571.

However, as the end of WWII was in sight in early 1945, the question of how should the post-war world look started to create tension within the former allies, the United States and the Soviet Union, as both empires viewed it in their own contradictory ways. The United States wanted to spread “its vision of freedom and free trade around the world” whereas the Soviet Union “required its neighbors on its borders to be politically sympathetic” to its Communist ideals.⁵ Their differences surfaced in the outset of that is nowadays known as the Cold War, which in different ways was reflected in both of the analyzed novels.

1.1.1 The Economic Impact of World War II

The dream of the United States to become one of the most powerful and affluent nations had been finally fulfilled after the war.⁶ The loss of innocence of America that ensued when this prosperous period was finally reached is an important aspect of both *Catch-22* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Industrial production rapidly increased and factories produced nearly half as much as before the war. In addition, the profitability of many companies grew as well, and their profits became twice as large.⁷ However, the country was immensely financial prosperous even during the war. According to the United States Department of Commerce, the profits of American enterprises were the following: “\$8.5 billion in 1941, \$8.7 billion in 1942, \$9.8 billion in 1943 and \$9.9 in 1944.”⁸

The GNP increased by astonishing 250% from the year of 1945 to 1960. Regarding the unemployment rate, its peak was 5% or less during the period from 1950s to 1960s.⁹ Nonetheless, the authority and role of federal bureaucracy grew and led to an extending role the federal government had on the economics of the country.¹⁰ America was an outstanding example of a capitalist country and society. However, this capitalist mindset to earn more and more, especially during such an inhuman event as war, became a target of criticism.

Literary authors were no exception. In fact, the character that embodied the American capitalism in *Catch-22*, Milo Minderbinder, could be regarded as the most famous fictional

⁵ Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 592.

⁶ Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 19.

⁷ Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 578.

⁸ George Soule, “Profits by the Billion,” *The New Republic*, January 7, 1946, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://newrepublic.com/article/93520/profits-the-billion>.

⁹ Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, 8th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2016), 679.

¹⁰ Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 579.

profiteer.¹¹ His business activities were based on a successful American exportation during and after WWII which dragged America out of the Depression and made a great economic imperialistic power out of it.¹² His characteristic phrase “what’s good for Milo Minderbinder is good for the country,”¹³ was based on the Charles E. Wilson’s misquote “what’s good for General Motors is good for the country.” Wilson was the chief executive officer of General Motors whose hold of stock of the company had 2.5 million dollar worth in 1953.¹⁴

Milo Minderbinder starts making profit without any harm to others, however, the more money he makes the more amoral he becomes. One of his deals that worth mentioning could be the bombing of his own squadron by the Germans, the enemies of his country.¹⁵ Milo did not understand the immorality of that as he argued with Yossarian: “Maybe they did start the war, and maybe they are killing millions of people, but they pay their bills a lot more promptly than some allies of ours.”¹⁶

In fact, it is estimated that about 56.4 million people around the globe lost their lives in the conflict¹⁷, while the death rate of Americans who died is about 405,000.¹⁸ Still, despite being the bloodiest war conflict in history, the war was rather an economic blessing in disguise for the United States. The grounds of the country remained intact.¹⁹ The Depression and the country’s isolationism ended, the economy was expanding, population was growing, minorities and women could hope for better opportunities, and the government supported the American industry.²⁰ There was a common belief in a prosperous and bright future.

However, the Cold War began in the next two years and the mood of society became unstable and less unified.²¹

¹¹ Stuart Dean Brandes, *Warhogs: A History of War Profits in America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 273.

¹² John Raeburn, “Catch-22 and the Culture of the 1950s,” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 25, no. 2 (1993): 126-7, <https://doi.org/10.22439/asca.v25i2.1141>.

¹³ David Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller: Against the Grain* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 66.

¹⁴ Daniel Strohl, “Fact Check: Did a GM President Really Tell Congress ‘What’s Good for GM Is Good for America,’” Hemmings, September 05, 2019, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://www.hemmings.com/stories/2019/09/05/fact-check-did-a-gm-president-really-tell-congress-whats-good-for-gm-is-good-for-america>.

¹⁵ Brandes, *Warhogs*, 273.

¹⁶ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage, 2011), 294.

¹⁷ “Highest Death Toll from Wars,” Guinness World Records, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/highest-death-toll-from-wars/>.

¹⁸ Berkin, et al., *Making America*, 590.

¹⁹ Berkin, et al., *Making America*, 589.

²⁰ Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 565.

²¹ Berkin, et al., *Making America*, 596.

1.2 The Cold War

This almost half-century long lasting conflict between two world superpowers began gradually with a growing tension within the United States and the Soviet Union.

The role of the States in international affairs was major and the country was willing to keep its dominance.²² The American economy was highlighted in international trade fairs and in 1954, “the Eisenhower administration earmarked \$2 million” to American presence in the world fairs. The aim was to convince and impress people that America was the one to preserve the world peace and freedom and improve the contemporary quality of living. Besides of typical houses, goods and gadgets, TV sets along with cars, trains, and airplanes were displayed as the miracles of capitalism.²³ In the mid-1950s, a propaganda campaign called “People’s Capitalism” occurred. It was promoted democratic capitalism and the modernization of American society. Abbott Washburn, a deputy director of the United States Information Agency (USIA) praised the campaign for its emphasis that “the people own the capital and the people share the benefits.”²⁴

In 1953, the USIA published the pamphlet *Democracy Begins in the Home* (1953). It praised democracy, its values and contrasted the protection of one’s dignity and privacy with the suppressing living conditions in the Soviet Union. It emphasized how the approach to the individual is completely different in each country. This kind of American propaganda represented the country as the one which was against making people conform and as the one which cherished and supported its people’s individuality.²⁵ On the other hand, American mass media of the 1950s, especially television, continually represented the conformity and security of the suburban consumer nuclear family in such popular TV series as *Leave it to Beaver* and *I Love Lucy*.²⁶

In order to stop the spreading of Communism, America intervened in the Korean War immediately after South Korea was attacked by the North Koreans. First American troops landed on the Korean peninsula five days after the attack.²⁷ Despite its widely-spread unpopularity within the American nation, it was not until 1953 that the war had ended.

²² Gary B. Nash and Julie Roy Jeffrey, eds., *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*, 7th ed., combined vol. (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011), 776.

²³ Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 127.

²⁴ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 131.

²⁵ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 138.

²⁶ Gregory L. Schneider, “Dr. Benjamin Spock and the Baby Boom,” *Bill of Rights Institute*, accessed May 9, 2021, <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/essays/dr-benjamin-spock-and-the-baby-boom>.

²⁷ Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 9th rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 177-180.

In total, more than 37,000 Americans lost their lives in Korea²⁸ but another war in Asia, which caused even more deaths, was yet to come.

The Communist supporters called *Viet Cong* along with the support of the Communist government of the North Vietnam undertook several actions in 1960 in the anti-Communist South of the country in order to unify as one Communist country.²⁹ The determination not to lose Vietnam to communism led to a gradual reinforcement of American military in the country. Despite demonstrations and significant cultural changes at home, there was over half a million American troops in Vietnam by the year of 1969³⁰ and more than 58,000 Americans lost their lives in the country.³¹

Nevertheless, both *Catch-22* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* were embraced during the movements against the Vietnam War. Actually, many Air Force officers revealed that *Catch-22* “had helped sustain them during their service in Vietnam.”³²

1.2.1 The Fight against Communism in the United States

The impact of federal bureaucracy and government was growing and the government along with its citizens were paranoid due to the Communist threat.³³ The House Un-American Activities Committee investigated anyone who was suspected of having ties to Communism and people feared the consequences if being interrogated because they were questioned about their political beliefs, asked to reveal information about their relatives and friends, and based on unsupported assumptions, they could be accused of disloyalty. This great political repression in American history is known as McCarthyism and can be described as a violation of the basic American democratic rights with the aim of protecting them.³⁴

The investigations, conspiracies, paranoia, and Communism are fundamental themes of *Catch-22*. Actually, even though the novel takes places during WWII, these themes signify that the novel is really referring to the post-war America. Heller himself said that he wrote the novel as a reaction to the Cold War and “the Rosenberg trials, the McCarthy hearing, the loyalty oaths” that come with it.³⁵ Indeed, there is a direct reference to the loyalty oaths

²⁸ William L. Hosch, ed., *The Korean War and the Vietnam War: People, Politics and Power* (New York: Britannica Educational, 2010), 14.

²⁹ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 724.

³⁰ Hosch, *The Korean War and the Vietnam War*, 96.

³¹ Hosch, *The Korean War and the Vietnam War*, 14.

³² Thomas Roy Reid, “‘Catch’ 25,” *Washington Post*, October 6, 1986, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1986/10/06/catch-25/caf17dec-2ac8-4112-b2f5-e9d6e7474805/>.

³³ Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 587.

³⁴ Berkin, et al., *Making America*, 614.

³⁵ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 60.

in the novel. By his desire for revenge, Captain Black accuses Major Major of being a Communist and forces men in the squadron to take oaths of loyalty to their country. Since Captain Black would not let Major Major sign the oath, Black intended to make Major disloyal and unpatriotic. This kind of a revenge was called Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade. Therefore, it is an obvious reference to the year of 1949 when members of the University of California had to sign their oaths of loyalty in which they swore loyalty to the Constitution of the United States but also declared no to be Communist or not to be having any associations or connections that could overthrow the current America government.³⁶

This anti-Communist extension to the loyalty oaths of universities spread throughout the States and even Heller signed such an oath when he taught at Pennsylvania.³⁷

1.3 Psychological Impacts of War

Joining the military, the further exposure to combats and exposure to warzone experiences can have some serious negative consequences that can last a lifetime and result in the development of the mental disorder known as the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).³⁸

This disorder affected the main characters of both analyzed novels. Chief Bromden, the narrator of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* experiences periodic hallucinations, depression, and paranoia as a consequence to his traumatic childhood and fighting in WWII. Yossarian, the protagonist of *Catch-22*, is greatly affected by witnessing Snowden's death. This traumatic event is alluded throughout the narrative and it is the reason of Yossarian's anger outbursts, fear, shame, and anxiety.

As demonstrated on these two characters, it is evident that the disorder is likely to be developed after experiencing some extremely disturbing and frightening event related to "an actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or another closely affiliated person."³⁹ Hence, it is a common disorder among those experiencing the horrors of war.

By the end of WWI, the German psychiatrist Robert Gaupp stated that bed in his hospitals were occupied with soldiers who were unable to fight due to their mental

³⁶ Max Radin, "The Loyalty Oath at the University of California," *The American Scholar* 19, no. 3 (July 1950): 275, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41205315>.

³⁷ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 61.

³⁸ Sungrok Kang et al., "A Life-span Perspective on Combat Exposure and PTSD Symptoms in Later Life: Findings From the VA Normative Aging Study," *The Gerontologist* 56, no. 1 (February 2016): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnv120>.

³⁹ Martha D. Buffum and Nancy S. Wolfe, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the World War II Veteran: Elderly Patients Who Were in Combat or Were Prisoners of War May Have Special Health Care Needs That May Not Be Obvious," *Geriatric Nursing* 16, no. 6 (November-December 1995): 266, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0197-4572\(95\)80006-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0197-4572(95)80006-9).

conditions. According to Gaupp, the soldiers suffered from “anxiety brought about by the explosion of enemy shells and mines, and seeing maimed or dead comrades.” As a consequence, they lost their ability to walk, stand, hear, talk and some even lost their consciousness.⁴⁰ Other common symptoms included stammering, shivering, memory loss, paralysis, or hallucinations. While military officials saw the symptoms as a sign of cowardice, the military doctors generally believed it was a neurological response related to a direct exposure of shells explodes. Therefore, this type of a posttraumatic stress disorder was referred to as “shell shock.”⁴¹

As already mentioned, almost 17 million Americans served in WWII. Two years after the war, the American government did a research on mental condition of the veterans and it was revealed that almost half a million suffered from neurological or psychiatric disorder. However, considering that the research was done in 1947 by the government, it is likely that the number of cases was much higher since the society regarded mental health problems, especially those related to war, as an indication of being weak or coward. Moreover, many WWII veterans kept their problems to themselves, denied having any psychological problems or ignored them.⁴²

Nevertheless, the American psychologists Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel state in their *Men Under Stress* (1945) that WWII veterans experienced difficulties such as “anxiety, startle reactions, feeling tense, depression, personality change, memory loss, tremor, difficulty concentrating, confusion, alcoholism.” The Department of Veterans Affairs added that the long-term difficulties included mainly “psychoses, anxiety, depression, and PTSD.”⁴³

As already mentioned, the effects of exposure to the warzone can be extremely psychologically demanding. Such exposure does not only refer to a participation in combat, but also to the facing of death relating to injuries, loss, instability, endless fear or imprisonment by the enemy.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Marc-Antoine Crocq and Louis Crocq, “From Shell Shock and War Neurosis to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A History of Psychotraumatology,” *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 2, no. 1 (March 2000): 49, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22033462/>.

⁴¹ Hans Pols and Stephanie Oak, “War & Military Mental Health: The US Psychiatric Response in the 20th Century,” *American Journal of Public Health* 97, no. 12 (December 2007): 2134, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2006.090910>.

⁴² Buffum and Wolfe, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the World War II Veteran,” 264-265.

⁴³ Buffum and Wolfe, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the World War II Veteran,” 265.

⁴⁴ Matthew J. Friedman, Paula P. Schnurr, and Annmarie McDonagh-Coyle, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the Military Veteran,” *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 17, no. 2 (June 1995): 268-69, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0193-953X\(18\)30113-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0193-953X(18)30113-8).

According to the American Army policies during WWII, soldiers who suffered from any mental disorder had a right to be sent back home. Consequently, the rates of intake was rising and the military officials followed suggestions by psychiatrists. As an example of such can serve the neurologist Frederick R. Hanson's treatment comprised of rest, healthy food and sedatives which, as he argued, could return men into combat in a matter of days.⁴⁵

Another study regarding WWII veterans revealed that all of the 152 examined men who served abroad during the war had PTSD symptoms one year after the war.⁴⁶ However, not all veterans develop PTSD. Actually, it is estimated that the disorder generally occurs in 3 out of 5 war veterans.⁴⁷

1.4 Individualism, Freedom, and Conformity

According to Steven Lukes, a social theorist and professor, individualism is a "social philosophy that emphasizes the moral worth of the individual."⁴⁸ Besides, the psychologist Alan S. Waterman argued that individualism is connected with features such as self-fulfillment, possibility to choose, responsibility and open-mindedness.⁴⁹ A term closely connected with individualism is individual liberty. Concept of such a great importance to the democratic society that it might be defined as one of the basic rights in a democratic community. Yet, due to its instability and elements of independence, it might be considered as a threat to authority and the law.⁵⁰

The repression of individual liberty in the United States came along with the end of the WWII, ironically a conflict fought over freedom, when American society became rather intolerant of those who had differing attitudes and values from the conformist expectations.⁵¹

The American government was conservative and alarmed by those who diverged from the social norms.⁵² The government's attention was attracted by writers as well, especially

⁴⁵ Pols and Oak, "War & Military Mental Health," 2135.

⁴⁶ Kimberly A. Lee et al., "A 50-Year Prospective Study of the Psychological Sequelae of World War II Combat," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 152, no. 4 (April 1995): 519, <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.152.4.516>.

⁴⁷ Charles Kaiman, "PTSD in the World War II Combat Veteran," *The American Journal of Nursing* 103, no. 11 (November 2003): 32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29745429>.

⁴⁸ Steven M. Lukes, "Individualism," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, January 14, 2020, accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/individualism>.

⁴⁹ Anu Realo, Kati Koido, Eva Ceulemans, and Jüri Allik, "Three Components of Individualism," *European Journal of Personality* 16, no. 3 (May 2002): 165, <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.437>.

⁵⁰ Andrew Foley, "Allegories of Freedom: Individual Liberty and Social Conformity in Ken Kesey's One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest," *Journal of Literary Studies* 17, no. 1-2 (June 2001): 32.

⁵¹ Foley, "Allegories of Freedom," 33.

⁵² Martin Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, ed. Justin Quinn, 3rd ed. (Prague: Karolinum, 2011), 239.

by those who belonged to the Beat generation. Its members such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and Ken Kesey and their literary works implied their refusal with the 1950s era of conformity.⁵³

The term conformity can be defined as the way a person thinks, feels, or behaves according to the standards and social norms.⁵⁴ Therefore, society decides what is right and bad and what is acceptable and what is not. Also, some might feel anxious about standing out of the crowd, or feel pressure about what happened if they would, and rather choose the conforming way of life. It was Kesey himself who once said that “conformity, fear, violence - that was the cancer in the heart of society.”⁵⁵ For the demonstration of tension between the individualism and conformity in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, Kesey used the characters of rebellious and individualistic McMurphy and tyrannical Big Nurse.

Nevertheless, those two concepts of individuality and freedom were fundamental in the American rhetoric during the Cold War as a representation of America as a free country in contrast with the communist Soviet Union where individuals were far away of being free, where their freedom was restricted and served only as a tool for an economic prosperity.⁵⁶

1.4.1 The Changing American Attitude towards Conformity

Being educated, having a good job, owning a house in the suburbs, being wed to a well-behaved and loving spouse, raising a new generation of healthy and smart children, and being religious and prosperous member of the community. Those are just some characteristics which could be used for defining the idyllic fifties.

One of the greatest impacts on American post-war housing had the Levitt family. The family built its suburban housing developments, known as Levittowns, across the United States. The very first Levittown was located in the state of New York and it comprised of almost 17,500 houses which would accommodate up to 82,000 persons. Altogether, the family built almost 150,000 new suburban homes.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, the American government agencies supported the suburban growth as well. Several thousand loans governed by The Veterans Administration or Federal

⁵³ Foley, “Allegories of Freedom,” 33.

⁵⁴ Eliot R. Smith, Diane M. Mackie, and Heather M. Claypool, *Social Psychology*, 4th ed. (New York: Psychology Press, 2015) 568.

⁵⁵ Foley, “Allegories of Freedom,” 34.

⁵⁶ Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernist: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 124.

⁵⁷ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 233-236.

Housing Administration were underwritten and due to the Federal Highway Act, 32 billion dollars were invested in infrastructure. Almost 15 million new households were built from 1945 to 1960, three quarters of Americans owned a car and due to the growing road transport, the eating habits started to change with the boom of fast-food chains such as McDonald's.⁵⁸

In his *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960), economist and professor Walt Whitman Rostow labelled the United States as a shining example of uniqueness and democracy.⁵⁹ Social scientists and advertising executives united and “worked as consultants to America’s psychological warfare and propaganda programs.” Their aim was to create propaganda that would show its greatness and propagate it as the country that “should lead the world to modernity, liberalism, democracy, and capitalism.”⁶⁰

The professor of rhetoric and communication Ted J. Smith defined propaganda as “any conscious and open attempt to influence the beliefs of an individual or group, guided by a predetermined end and characterized by the systematic use of irrational and often unethical techniques of persuasion.”⁶¹ Hence, the purpose of propaganda was not only to create a message that nobody would oppose and not to think about the real issue behind it, but also to make everybody conform and create an impression that those who would not conform are “bad people” who ruin the common American harmony.⁶²

The American public relations industry was about “to control the public mind” and implant the set values. According to Noam Chomsky, a political activist, writer and professor of linguistics, the industry had “a conception of what democracy ought to be: [...] a system in which the specialized class is trained to work in the service of [...] the people who own the society. The rest of the population ought to be deprived of any form of organization, because organization just causes trouble.”⁶³

The country’s industrial and technological progress, mass culture and consumerism were praised and admired in the mass media, although some Americans, like both Heller and Kesey, began to question the superficial materialist post-war values. The Soviets, on the other hand, represented the States in their propaganda as an economically instable country

⁵⁸ Berkin, et al., *Making America*, 621.

⁵⁹ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 116.

⁶⁰ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 117.

⁶¹ Ted J. Smith, ed., *Propaganda: A Pluralistic Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 80.

⁶² Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 26.

⁶³ Chomsky, *Media Control*, 22-27.

with high unemployment rates and irresolvable societal issues. The American response opposed “that the economy should exist for the benefit of the citizen, not for the state.”⁶⁴

By the 1960s, television had gained a primary role in mass communication and the number of households owning a TV set had rapidly risen. Up to 40 million televisions were owned across the United States while a decade before that, the number of owned TV-sets was as low as 17,000. Its channels supported mainly the common American image of a white, middle-classed family living at the suburbs and instigated the idea of what was normal. Especially sitcoms such as *I Love Lucy*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, or *Leave It to Beaver* were greatly popular.⁶⁵

The American government repressed homosexuality, considered it as a threat and so the homosexuals tried to hide their true selves, such as Harding in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Whereas most Americans were happy to live a comfortable life in the suburbs, a small counterculture began to recognize the conformity. The government's attitude towards homosexuality started to be criticized and the critique of the whole consumerist culture with the suppression of one's individuality appeared.⁶⁶

Soon, even life in the suburbs started to change since wives and husbands started to feel dissatisfied with their roles. Playboy magazine can serve as a reflection of the men's discomfort since its very first issue was published in the early fifties. Furthermore, a noticeably growing number of teenagers started to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, listen to rock and roll and rebelled against the authorities.⁶⁷

The attention of youngsters was attracted by nonconformist stars of the silver screen such as James Dean or Marlon Brando whose rebellious appearance and behavior did not correspondent with societal conventions. Actually, both the actors were admired by Ken Kesey. He admired Dean for “pushing his life to the limits,” and Brando for his “model of cool, youthful success” that Kesey wanted to achieve as well.⁶⁸ Moreover, Elvis Presley became the leading figure of the music industry. “He introduced the beat to everything - music, language, clothes,” is what Leonard Bernstein, one of the most significant figures

⁶⁴ Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 117-121.

⁶⁵ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 688.

⁶⁶ Berkin, et al., *Making America*, 622-23.

⁶⁷ Berkin, et al., *Making America*, 626.

⁶⁸ Rick Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic: The Young Ken Kesey* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 46-47.

of the American music industry, once said about Elvis and added that he was “the greatest cultural force in the twentieth century.”⁶⁹

Thus, the conformist approach started to tremble by the 1960s, the counterculture started to be popular and people started to demonstrate and even participate in politics.⁷⁰

Greatly influenced by *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and especially *Catch-22*, the Hippie movement was on the rise and peaked in 1967 by *The Summer of Love* in San Francisco. Besides, many civil rights and anti-war movements were organized. One of the most recognized marches was the one from 1963 which took place in Washington, D.C. where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered the “I Have a Dream” speech to thousands of people. Moreover, the usage of drugs was increasing. Ken Kesey, for instance, considered psychedelic as liberation from “established patterns of behaviour,”⁷¹ and as a mean for breaching the frontiers between worlds.⁷² What’s more, the usage of drugs was popular even by some medical practitioners.

The American psychologist Timothy Leary, for instance, was a leading figure of advocating LSD and other drugs. He was raised in a middle-class Catholic family but rebelled against the values the household shared and by the sixties, he was one of the most famous promoters of LSD. He considered the drug as an escape from the “confining, settled, dreary spaces of middle-class America.”⁷³ Because of his drug experiments, Leary was fired from his job as a lecturer at Harvard University.⁷⁴ However, while Leary was more interested in the scientific sides of LSD, Ken Kesey was interested in the personal benefits of LSD such as freeing his mind and interacting with other individuals rather than the scientific sides of LSD. It was a tool of liberation that would free one’s “personality normally hidden from consciousness” and liberate a man from “social conventions and conformity.”⁷⁵ Which is why the usage of drugs was generally increasing.

⁶⁹ Scott McConnell, “The Meaning of Elvis in American Culture,” *TheatreArtLife*, August 28, 2019, accessed February 28, 2021, <https://www.theatreartlife.com/one-and-done/the-meaning-of-elvis/>.

⁷⁰ Chomsky, *Media Control*, 33.

⁷¹ Chris Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution: Psychedelic Philosophy in the Sixties and Beyond: Winner of the William M. Jones Best Graduate Student Paper Award at the 2013 American Culture Association Conference,” *The Journal of American Culture* 36, no. 4 (December 2013): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jacc.12051>.

⁷² Dominick Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 79.

⁷³ Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 80.

⁷⁴ Editors of Encyclopaedia, “Timothy Leary,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, October 18, 2020, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Timothy-Leary>.

⁷⁵ Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 111.

Besides Ken Kesey, the authors who were influenced with their experiences with psychedelics are, for instance, Aldous Huxley and Kimberly Hewitt. Aldous Huxley was an English philosopher and writer who criticized the contemporary society and reflected his concerns in many of his works, especially in his dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932). The main causes of his concerns was “the dangerous alliance of politics, technology and consumerism.” His concerns lasted and in the 1950s, “he noticed the consumerist frenzy post-war America was engaged in [...], he was troubled by the vast array of barbiturates [...] that were being offered to American society, not in the name of public well-being, he felt, but in the name of public order and conformity.”⁷⁶

Therefore, the sixties was indeed a decade when the rebellion against the suppression by the state peaked.⁷⁷ The theme of conformist society and rebellion against it became more common and more common and for this reason, the novels were so popular towards the end of the 1960s. Both *Catch-22* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* criticized what the counterculture supporters referred to as the “Establishment.” A synonym for the American society which was repressing an individual and freedom, and the counterculture supporters' goal was to change that. Besides, the supporters criticized the consumerism and huge American corporations as well since they “owned almost half of the United States' wealth” at one point.⁷⁸ This was reflected in the novels as well. As already stated, the character of Milo Minderbinder in *Catch-22* is embodiment of the American capitalistic society. At first, Milo did business with eggs and the net profit he got was few cents. However, he continued to do business with everything he could and turned his little business into a huge enterprise that endangered people's lives. In *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, it is criticized through the character of Chief Bromden. Throughout the narrative, Chief would remember the time when he was a child and the authorities came to “inform” him and his tribe “of the government's plans”⁷⁹ to build a hydroelectric dam in their land. The government did not value the nature nor the people who lived there. Its only concern was to make a profit. His father, the chief of the tribe, became a drunkard and Chief Bromden suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder based on these events. Therefore, the selling of the tribal lands was

⁷⁶ Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution,” 298-9.

⁷⁷ David Simmons, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel: From Joseph Heller to Kurt Vonnegut* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), ix.

⁷⁸ Meghan Warner Mettler, “‘If I Could Drive You Out of Your Mind’: Anti-Rationalism and the Celebration of Madness in 1960s Counterculture,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 9, no. 2 (2015): 174, <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2015.14>.

⁷⁹ Ken Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 181.

a criticism of the governmental interventions towards ecology which is one of the aspects criticized by the counterculture.

Nevertheless, even academics criticized the modern American society. The American professor and author Charles A. Reich argued in his *The Greening of America* (1970) that the country encouraged “depersonalization, meaninglessness and repression.”⁸⁰ Besides, the Scottish psychiatrist Ronald D. Laing, one of the most prominent psychiatrists during the 1960s, argued in his *The Politics of Experience* (1967) that rather than really suffering from a mental disorder, the illness was used as a way or a label “to certain deviant people in order to enforce conformity and normalized standards of behavior.” Moreover, Laing stated that “the so-called mentally ill were perhaps the healthiest members of society.”⁸¹

1.5 The American Mental Health Care System

An establishment of the very first institution to treat mentally disabled in the United States dates back to the year of 1773. However, even though science and technology had experienced progress during the 18th century, the treatment of mentally ill was rather poor as they were not given any. Yet, the insane had to be dealt with because they caused several problems to their families. Thus, they were sent to mental institutions.⁸²

By the end of the 19th century, almost 140 mental institutions were built across the United States. Most followed an approach by a French physician Phillippe Pinel, who disagreed with practices of bloodletting and physical punishments, and argued that insane need a regiment in a clean and peaceful environment under a medical supervision. Therefore, patients had to follow certain rules. Those who would not conform were sent to seclusion and were restrained.⁸³

The approaches of how a mental illness can be cured and treated started to shift. Radical new ways of treatment such as “insulin therapy, electroshock therapy [...], hydrotherapy, psychotherapy and lobotomy” were evolving during the beginning of 20th century and patients were subsequently treated by these ways.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Mettler, “If I Could Drive You Out of Your Mind,” 174.

⁸¹ Mettler, “If I Could Drive You Out of Your Mind,” 175.

⁸² Lawrence A. Osborn, “From Beauty to Despair: The Rise and Fall of the American State Mental Hospital,” *The Psychiatric Quarterly* 80 (December 2009): 221, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-009-9109-3>.

⁸³ Osborn, “From Beauty to Despair,” 221-225.

⁸⁴ Osborn, “From Beauty to Despair,” 228.

However, there had been a decline in the use of these therapies by the 1960s as they started to be labelled as immoral, inhuman and futile. Besides, with the social changes going on, even the patients of mental institutions contributed to the demise of the treatments as they began asserting their rights.⁸⁵ According to the sociologist Erving Goffman, the institutions which treated mentally ill in 1950s and 1960s could be called “total institutions” since they had a total control of their patients’ lives.⁸⁶

Besides electroshock therapy, lobotomy played a great role in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Mary de Young, professor of sociology, defines lobotomy as a “surgical severing of the neural connections to and from the prefrontal cortex, the anterior part of the brain’s frontal lobes.”⁸⁷ This treatment method was introduced by a Portuguese neurologist Egas Moniz.⁸⁸ However, it was Walter Freeman due to whom lobotomy was accepted and practiced throughout the United States. He was the first American lobotomist and during his life, he performed more than 3,000 lobotomies.⁸⁹ He was convinced of positive effects of lobotomy even though it had cause severe impacts on the patients and even deaths.⁹⁰

However, the treatment was criticized in several studies in 1960s, and literary works as well. Besides Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* which was cinematized in the next decade in 1975, Bernard Wolfe’s *Limbo* (1952) and Tennessee Williams’s *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1957) were published.⁹¹

Another widely used treatment method was “the induction of generalized seizures by passing an electrical current through the brain” called Electroshock Therapy. This kind of a treatment was developed at the beginning of the 20th century in Italy. Its popularity in the United States caused the outbreak of WWII. Almost half of the American mental institution used the therapy in 1941 and the number had grown to 9 out of 10 institutions which used it in 1947. However, its negative effects on human beings such as brain damage evoked criticism and movements against the treatment as it was considered as a “tool of social

⁸⁵ Richard G. Frank and Sherry A. Glied, *Better But Not Well: Mental Health Policy in the United States since 1950* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 32-33.

⁸⁶ Frank and Glied, *Better But Not Well*, 49.

⁸⁷ Mary De Young, *Encyclopedia of Asylum Therapeutics, 1750–1950s* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015), 281.

⁸⁸ Osborn, “From Beauty to Despair,” 228.

⁸⁹ James P. Caruso and Jason P. Sheehan, “Psychosurgery, Ethics, and Media: A History of Walter Freeman and the Lobotomy,” *Neurosurgical Focus* 43, no. 3 (September 2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3171/2017.6.FOCUS17257>.

⁹⁰ Osborn, “From Beauty to Despair,” 228.

⁹¹ Young, *Encyclopedia of Asylum Therapeutics*, 294.

control.” Moreover, the public perception of the treatment deepened after the motion picture version of *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (Forman, 1975).⁹²

The public perception of people who mentally ill people was rather stereotyped in the 1950s. Americans feared, excluded and rejected the ill and characterized them as dangerous and unpredictable.⁹³ Contrastingly to this perception, keeping a stable mental condition started to be a challenging task. Social critics along with physicians argued by the late 1950s and early 1960s that being mentally ill might had not been the people’s fault, but it was the society to blame. Robert Seidenberg, a professor of psychiatry once compared mental institutions to “detention camps.” Also, Gerald Klerman, a psychiatrist specializing in depression, stated that of one fourth of Americans suffered from depression and were needlessly stressed. Pressure to conform to the society along with racism and nuclear threat and the Cold War going on were just a few factors that contributed in worsening the mental state of Americans. By the year of 1957, there were almost 600,000 patients in American mental facilities. The poor conditions of such institutions were depicted for example in Mary Jane Ward’s *The Snake Pit* (1946) or Albert Deutsch’s *The Shame of the States* (1948).⁹⁴

1.5.1 Insanity

According to Andrew Scull, professor of sociology, madness is “the loss of reason, the sense of alienation from the common-sense world” but also a devastating anxiety and unrest which is extremely difficult to recover from. The basic characteristics of being a human are challenged by insanity. It is an extreme and long-term commotion of one’s senses, mindfulness and intelligence.⁹⁵

In *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, it is suggested that if one ought to keep their sanity in the contemporary crazy world, the one needs to sometime act as an insane. In *Catch-22*, the main protagonist of the novel is considered insane by the men in his squadron whereas he himself considers the others as insane. Therefore madness, along with those labelled as mad, is perceived rather differently in the post-war, conformist, capitalist society of the 20th century and its literature.

⁹² Young, *Encyclopedia of Asylum Therapeutics*, 327-331.

⁹³ Jo C. Phelan, Bruce G. Link, Ann Stueve, and Bernice A. Pescosolido, “Public Conceptions of Mental Illness in 1950 and 1996: What Is Mental Illness and Is It to be Feared?,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41, no. 2 (June 2000): 189, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2676305>.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Engel, *American Therapy: The Rise of Psychotherapy in the United States* (New York: Gotham Books, 2008), 132-142 .

⁹⁵ Andrew Scull, *Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity from the Bible to Freud, from the Madhouse to Modern Medicine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 10.

2 THE FIFTIES AND THE SIXTIES IN AMERICAN FICTION

The enthusiasm of defeating Nazism during World War II was evident even in the literary spheres. American authors were optimistic about the victory and celebrated democracy in their country. However, with the further post-war development, the general optimistic mood within the society did not last for long and authors reflected it in their works.⁹⁶ The recognition of novels which reflected contemporary rebellious mood in the society and the dark side of American dream was immense. The reason of the recognition was their themes based on the alienation from the American values, conformity, distrust in politics and the search for freedom.

2.1 The Defining American Novels of the Decades

It was not long after the war and authors started to criticize the American Dream, the hypocrisy of society and the terror and absurdity of war. An example of such work can be Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* (1948), a play written in 1948 and premiered in 1949 which depicts a misery of an older man who considers himself as a failure and dies chasing the American Dream. In the same year, Norman Mailer published his novel *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) which drags a reader into the war conflict and shows its absurdity, obscenity, and the psychological impacts the war had on soldiers.⁹⁷ James Jones's novel *From Here to Eternity* (1951) realistically describes life in the army during the Pearl Harbor attack and John Horne Burns's *The Gallery* (1947) provides an insight into gay life within the military.⁹⁸

Many critics have suggested that the fundamental and undeniable theme of the late 1960s novels was the alienated relations between the individual and society. Besides *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Catch-22*, novels such as *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969) and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965) by Kurt Vonnegut, *The Graduate* (1963) by Charles Webb and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1963) by Walter Tevis all achieved great popularity among readers.⁹⁹ The anti-heroes such as *Catch-22*'s Yossarian or *Slaughterhouse 5*'s Pilgrim were favored by the readers of the novels because they could easily sympathize with the characters, even though they did not exactly admire them. Both Yossarian and Pilgrim had their flaws, were human, real and their narratives happened during the WWII. Also, these

⁹⁶ Jonah Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 3-4.

⁹⁷ Raskin, *American Scream*, 4.

⁹⁸ Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 569.

⁹⁹ Simmons, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel*, ix.

two novels suggested that the individual can become insane if their potential and the true self is oppressed by the society.¹⁰⁰

Besides of the mentioned, Afro-American writers used the works also as a reflection of their frustration and dissatisfaction with the establishment with the connection to the race issues. One of the most dominant post-war Afro-American authors was Richard Wright who was recognized especially for his novels *Native Son* (1940) or *Black Boy* (1945).¹⁰¹ However, it was his friend to whom he was a mentor who wrote a novel which can be considered as one of the most important post-war novels. *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison is a novel which depicts a man surrounded by the world of absurdity and uncertainty. Thanks to its themes and a combination of several genres and modes, it contributed to the changing climate of Afro-American literature over the States. It deals with the question of existentialism and identity as the protagonist is seen only as a man of a black color, not as an individual. Therefore, he feels to be invisible.¹⁰²

2.1.1 The Beat Generation

The Beat Generation was a reaction to the life and rigid politics with McCarthyism and conservatism involved, social machinery, de-individualizing and conformist society.¹⁰³ However, the Beats soon started to attract attention by the officials with their nonconformist approaches to life. John Edgar Hoover, the first Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, compared them to a threat of such extent as communism. Norman Podhoretz, the author of *The Know-Nothing Bohemians* (1958), labelled the Beats as an anti-intellectual group which encouraged people to violence and drugs.¹⁰⁴ Also, the expression “beat” was coined with a Russian “sputnik” which created a new term, “beatnik.” Its author, a columnist Herb Caen, argued that the term was not about to be meant in a pejorative way. However, the public perceived the term as negative and affected their connotations with the authors.¹⁰⁵ As a reaction, Jack Kerouac argued that the Beat Generation was the “most sensitive,” spiritually-minded and peaceful literary movements in American history.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Simmons, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel*, 17.

¹⁰¹ Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, 256.

¹⁰² Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, 257.

¹⁰³ Allan Johnston, “Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy: Political Economies and Utopian Visions in the Writings of the Beat Generation,” *College Literature* 32, no. 2 (Spring, 2005): 106-7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25115269>.

¹⁰⁴ Raskin, *American Scream*, 202-3.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Rex, “The Origin of Beatnik,” *American Speech* 50, no. 3/4 (Autumn-Winter, 1975): 330, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3088021>.

¹⁰⁶ Raskin, *American Scream*, 204.

Altogether, there were three men behind the shaping of the movement in the 1940s. William S. Burroughs was twelve years older than Allen Ginsberg and eight years older than Jack Kerouac. He impressed both with his ideas, thoughts, education and his literary collection.¹⁰⁷ Together, they represented three pillars of the movement which name, the Beat Generation, was suggested by Jack Kerouac.¹⁰⁸

One of the foremost literary works of the movement was Allen Ginsberg's cry dealing with vicious, manipulating, materialistic society, known as *Howl* (1956). The poem was published in 1956 and represented an indisputable critique of American society and its values and depicted dissatisfaction and frustration of maturing Americans. At first, the poem was about to be censored and all its copies confiscated. However, the case was denied and ironically, thanks to the fuss and public excitement over it, Allen Ginsberg turned from an unknown poet to a leading figure of the Beats.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the judicial conclusion helped to clear the passage to other restricted literary works such as *Naked Lunch* (1959) by William Burroughs or even to other, not necessarily the Beat works, such as *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov. The conclusion was "protecting the freedoms of speech and a free press. It was one of the first rays of hope for the country after the repressive McCarthy era."¹¹⁰ It was reached in 1957 and in the same year, another essential Beat read was published.

Jack Kerouac had been working on his novel, *On the Road* (1957), from 1951 but it was not until September of 1957 when the book was published. It met with a great success and Jack Kerouac was considered to be "the new Marlon Brando of literature."¹¹¹

The furor over the Beat Generation started with those publications and continued throughout the next decade and contributed in the further societal development which peaked in the 1960s by the counterculture. Since Ken Kesey shared the values and ideas of the Beats and was one of the most prominent figures of the counterculture movement, it could be stated that he was a link of these two movements.

¹⁰⁷ Johnston, "Consumption, Addiction, Vision, Energy," 107.

¹⁰⁸ Ann Charters and Samuel Charters, *Brother-Souls: John Clellon Holmes, Jack Kerouac, and the Beat Generation* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2010), 5.

¹⁰⁹ Berkin, et al., *Making America*, 624-5.

¹¹⁰ Charters and Charters, *Brother-Souls*, 257.

¹¹¹ Charters and Charters, *Brother-Souls*, 257.

II. ANALYSIS

3 JOSEPH HELLER

3.1 Coney Island and Young Adulthood

Joseph Heller was born in Coney Island, Brooklyn, in the state of New York on May 1, 1923. However, his parents were Jewish immigrants who moved to the United States from Russia in 1913. He had two older siblings, Lee and Sylvia. The passion for writing and reading appeared already in Heller's childhood. He would read and write and his imagination was vivid. The very first literary work that impressed him was the ancient Greek poem, *Iliad*.¹¹²

One of the first stories he had written were from the years at the elementary school which he even sent to the *Daily News*, *Liberty* and *Collier's*. He studied at Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn and just like Bob Slocum in his novel *Something Happened*, Heller shortly worked as a file clerk after his high school graduation. Then he spent some time in the Norfolk Navy Yard and afterwards, he joined the army. Heller was recruited in 1942 and joined in the United States Air Force.¹¹³ His rank was a first lieutenant and served as a bombardier in Corsica from where he flew missions to France and Italy.¹¹⁴

During WWII, servicemen were assigned to bide in Goodfellow Field, San Angelo, Texas, before they were discharged and go home due to the Adjusted Service Rating Score.¹¹⁵ It was a system implemented in 1944 under which every soldier had to reach at least 85 points before they could be sent home.¹¹⁶ And Joseph Heller too, spent some time in San Angelo after having completed all of his sixty missions. His last combat mission was a bombing of bridges in Italy in 1944. However, it was not until January of 1945 when he came back to the States. The delay of his return could have been the weather, safe passage but also, bureaucracy.¹¹⁷ At first, the duty to fly the missions was not much terrifying to him, nevertheless, that changed during his 37th mission over Avignon. One of his comrades was seriously injured and Heller himself feared for his life. The particular mission was depicted in *Catch-22* by the death of Snowden.¹¹⁸ Heller later admitted that the last missions he had

¹¹² Tracy Daugherty, *Just One Catch: A Biography of Joseph Heller* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011), 25-38.

¹¹³ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 11.

¹¹⁴ "1st Lt Joseph Heller," Together We Served, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://airforce.togetherweserved.com/usaf/servlet/tws.webapp.WebApps?cmd=ShadowBoxProfile&type=Person&ID=114395>.

¹¹⁵ Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 10.

¹¹⁶ "The Points Were All That Mattered: The US Army's Demobilization After World War II," The National WWII Museum, August 27, 2020, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/points-system-us-armys-demobilization>.

¹¹⁷ Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 10-11.

¹¹⁸ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 11.

flown were horrifying and made himself a promise that after the war is ended, he would never fly again.¹¹⁹ The first time he flew after the war was in 1962 to London.

After his return home, to Coney Island, he would become quite lonely and even started to miss the military. Consequently, his older brother Lee suggested him to visit the Grossinger's Catskill Resort, a resort known as "the Jewish Alps" as well, where he met his future wife, to whom he married in 1945 and divorced in 1984, and started to consider his literary career more seriously.¹²⁰

Notwithstanding he studied English at the University of Southern California first, Heller finished his studies and obtained the Bachelor's Degree from New York University in 1948 and a year later he received the Master's Degree from Columbia University. Nevertheless, Heller studied a year from 1949 to 1950 in St Catherine's College, Oxford as well due to the Fulbright Scholarship.¹²¹ When the scholarship was over, Heller spent two years teaching English at Pennsylvania State University, but left the academic spheres for a job in the *Time* magazine. He would change the job and work for other magazines in the years to come but during all this time, he was writing *Catch-22* or more precisely, *Catch-18* at the time. Even though he started to write it in 1953 and work on it every evening for several hours, it was not until 1961 when it was published. However, the plan to write the novel originated already in 1945. Despite the fact the novel has never become a bestseller, its publication was a critical point for Heller's career as his writing ambitions increased. Also, selling its rights for its motion picture adaptation *Catch-22* (1970) directed by Mike Nichols was financially rather beneficial for Heller. However, even though *Catch-22* was his first novel to be published, some of the short stories, which he started to write in 1945, were published before that.¹²²

Generally, the literary works written by Heller are into some degree dark comedies which deal with various points of view of groupthink and explore the ways of how humans think. The aspects of human nature are revealed in a humorous way full of irony, featuring his ingenious linguistic competence and critical view of human behavior.¹²³ The thought to combine the humorous with the tragical was inspired in the works of Vladimir Nabokov and Evelyn Waugh.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 12.

¹²⁰ Daugherty, *Just One Catch*, 15-19.

¹²¹ Together We Served, "1st Lt Joseph Heller."

¹²² Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 12-15.

¹²³ Geoffrey Green, "Joseph Heller: From Your Mouth to God's Ear," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 51, no. 2 (August 2010): 122-125, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111610903445957>.

¹²⁴ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 1.

Heller wrote another novel 13 years after *Catch-22* was published. It was called *Something Happened* and it criticized the American dream and business life through the character of Bob Slocum, a middle-aged Jewish businessman with experiences from the United States Air Force.¹²⁵

Good as Gold (1979) was his third novel. The novel is a direct reference to the author's negative attitudes towards the Vietnam War, the American government and his feelings of dispossession since the area where he had grown up was demolished.¹²⁶

Throughout his life, the author suffered from "a neurological affliction of paralysis and dysfunction" called the Guillain-Barre disease.¹²⁷ Based on these events, Heller wrote his first non-fiction piece of literature, *No Laughing Matter* (1986), along with his friend, Speed Vogel. Unlike to his previous works, he was not attacking any kind of a system throughout the narrative. However, one of the reasons of its publication might have been Heller's denial of his case being thrown into the statistics by the authorities and retaining his own individuality. The narrative was about his survival and the struggles related to the illness.¹²⁸

Some further author's literary work include the play *We Bombed in New Haven* (1967) which extends the *Catch-22*'s themes. It is about war and mockery at the claims made by authorities about the military. Other are the memoir *Now and Then: From Coney Island to Here* (1998) or novels such as *God Knows* (1984), *Picture This* (1988) or *Portrait of an Artist, as an Old Man* (2000). This novel that focused on the absurdity of institutional life and a human need to strive was his very last, and it was published after his death.¹²⁹ Joseph Heller died at the age of 76 in 1999.

3.2 Heller and Conformity

Catch-22 was based on the years Heller had spent in WWII and the basic elements of conformist mentality through which one's rationality is suppressed by the common mentality that justifies insanity, failures and benefits from deception.¹³⁰

The novel is labelled as an anti-war piece of literature, however, "it's certainly not an anti-World War II book. There is never an objection raised in the book to the legitimacy of our participation in World War II." He stated that the conflict is between "individuals being

¹²⁵ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 96.

¹²⁶ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 86.

¹²⁷ Green, *Joseph Heller*, 124.

¹²⁸ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 181-88.

¹²⁹ Green, *Joseph Heller*, 124.

¹³⁰ Green, *Joseph Heller*, 122.

under an authority that has no concern for those individuals and their needs as human beings. The whole sensibility of the book is not about fighting in World War II but about the war between individuals and this inhuman bureaucratic authority.” The basic issue in the book is the question: “What is intelligent behavior in certain circumstances, what is sanity?” Heller revealed that he had not wondered about this question during WWII. It came later, during the Cold War. By using the word crazy so often throughout the narrative, Heller tried “to raise the question as to who really is crazy.”¹³¹

Therefore, the word “crazy” signifies its exact opposite and even the Beat writers used it in a contrasting manner. Jack Kerouac interpreted it as living the life with passion and honesty. Allen Ginsberg used it in *Howl* in an ambiguous way where “crazy” means both insanity but also chastity.¹³²

Thus, the attitude expressed in *Catch-22* was ahead of time and its structure based on repetition of the same events viewed from different perspectives with connection to the absurd logic was rare. Besides, it is a novel charged with emotions. Some parts are hilariously funny and some manage to be extremely sad.

James Nagel, one of the Heller’s critics, described the humor of *Catch-22* as an “attack on the basic principles and fundamental order of society.”¹³³ Yet, in order not to moralize and pontificate in *Catch-22*, Heller used humor and flippancy to express his attitudes.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, this description could be applicable for Heller’s other works since they also deal with an irony aimed at patriotism, conformity, politics and American values.¹³⁵

The concept of authority is repeatedly doubted throughout Heller’s writing. Therefore, whenever the legal system is mentioned, the passages “take on a symbolic value.” Be it *Catch-22*, *We Bombed in New Haven* or *Good as Gold*, all these works represent the loss of fairness and truth in both, judicial and administrative processes.¹³⁶

By the end of the 1960s, the novel was embraced in the movements against the Vietnam War. Its sales peaked to the highest during this period in the United States possibly because of the increasing public frustration over the American military activity abroad and the absurdity of it. Heller even admitted that the novel reflected the Vietnam War rather than WWII. The author expressed his disagreement with the Vietnam War many times and in

¹³¹ Reid, “‘Catch’ 25.”

¹³² Raeburn, “Catch-22 and the Culture of the 1950s,” 121.

¹³³ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 1.

¹³⁴ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 40.

¹³⁵ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 1.

¹³⁶ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 2-3.

1967, he stated that the “American government is making war on the American people” and later added that “sending young American boys, against their will [...] away to be killed” must stop.¹³⁷

3.3 The Genesis of *Catch-22*

“*It is an original. There’s no book like it.*” - Norman Mailer, *Esquire*, 1961

When Joseph Heller was asked why was it that he has never written anything as great as *Catch-22*, he simply responded: “Who has?”¹³⁸

This war novel, which is based on doubts in politics and authorities and is situated in the world where sanity is insane and absurdities of war along with bureaucratic and decision-making machinery is considered sane,¹³⁹ is the most praised and complex Heller’s work. As Heller himself admitted, in 1994 he wrote a “companion” to *Catch-22*, a novel called *Closing Time*. The novel as well explored the ability of human beings to face the absurdities of life.¹⁴⁰

The word “catch” was chosen because of its ambiguous meaning. It can either mean a hidden problem, gripe, discovery, chase, trap, seizing, capturing, or a hook. The number was then chosen to give the word an institutional element.

However, *Catch-22* was not the initial title of the novel. At first, it was called “Catch-18” but in order to avoid confusion with Leon Uris’s *Mila 18* (1961), it had been changed.¹⁴¹ The number 22 was the editor Bob Gottlieb’s idea which was further approved by Heller since it was repetitive, just like the novel.¹⁴²

The novel was published in the author’s thirties in 1961 and despite of its initial unfavorable critical reception, more than 10 million copies has been sold worldwide and the term “Catch-22” is nowadays used in everyday speech.¹⁴³ Due to the themes of the novels such as absurdity and paradox, it nowadays refers to a situation or a problem which is impossible to resolve because “you are prevented from doing one thing until you have done another thing that you cannot do until you have done the first thing.”¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 74-86.

¹³⁸ Green, *Joseph Heller*, 121.

¹³⁹ Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 86.

¹⁴⁰ Green, *Joseph Heller*, 124.

¹⁴¹ Green, *Joseph Heller*, 121.

¹⁴² Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 57.

¹⁴³ Sam Jordison, “Catch-22’s 10m Copies: How a Bitter Satire Became a Bestseller,” *The Guardian*, August 23, 2016, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/aug/23/catch-22s-10m-copies-how-a-bitter-satire-became-a-bestseller>.

¹⁴⁴ “Catch-22,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/catch-22>.

However, the initial reactions to the novel were rather mixed in America and *The New Yorker* book reviewer Whitney Balliett claimed that rather than being written, the novel was “shouted onto paper.” Contrastingly to this claim, the writer Nelson Algren said shortly after the publication that the novel was “the strongest repudiation of our civilization, in fiction, to come out of World War II,” and its publication in the Great Britain resulted in achieving the best seller status immediately.¹⁴⁵

Some of the reasons of the negative reviews could have been the confusing structure of moving backwards and forwards throughout the narrative. However, this complicated organization of the narrative was chosen by Heller on purpose because it supposed to reflect, as he said, the contemporary “atmosphere of chaos, disorganization, absurdity, cruelty.” What’s more, the titles of the chapters, which carry names of the novel’s characters, mostly do not correspond with the chapters themselves because the characters are interconnected and unstable. Since the novel is not written chronologically and offers several perspectives, there is an overlap. The characters affect each other’s consciousnesses.¹⁴⁶

The initial inspiration, besides of his own experiences from the war, originated from James Jones’s *From Here to Eternity* and Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*. Heller divided Jones’s character of Robert Prewitt between his own, John Yossarian and Edward Nately. Yossarian represents Prewitt’s nonconformity while Nately his idealism. There is also an inspiration for Native American characters since Heller’s Chief Half Whitecoat was based on Jones’s Chief Choate. The similarities with Mailer’s *The Naked* can be spotted in the attention to mail, forged reports or Mailer’s character Sam Croft, a sergeant from Texas and Heller’s Texan, but also between Mailer’s Minetta and Yossarian. After being sent to the hospital, Minetta acts like mad and has some other symptoms of shell shock and Yossarian too, often malingers so he could be sent home. However, both their doctors are aware of the true nature of their symptoms.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that the structure based on moving forward and backward was partly inspired by William Faulkner’s novel *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936).¹⁴⁸

Nonetheless, there might be a comparison with Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* or James Patrick Donleavy’s *The Ginger Man* (1955) too because their protagonists too reflect the personality and a state of mind of the author. Both Yossarian and Heller were bombardiers

¹⁴⁵ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 19-22.

¹⁴⁶ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 39-43.

¹⁴⁷ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 23-25.

¹⁴⁸ Reid, “‘Catch’ 25.”

who served during WWII, their bases were islands near Italy, and both experienced moments of terror over Avignon.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, *Catch-22* is the most frequently compared to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* since they are both 1960s absurdist American novels taking place during WWII in which humans try to find sense in the senseless and do not succeed in finding it.¹⁵⁰ The implication suggested throughout the novel, especially by its end and the "The Eternal City" chapter, is that the absurd has become the new standard. *Catch-22* is a novel "where individuality is constantly under threat from the administration," and Heller, as he said, used the Air Force "symbolically for the whole government structure."¹⁵¹

3.3.1 The Names of the Main Characters

John Yossarian is the main protagonist of the novel. Heller later explained that the reason of Yossarian's Assyrian/Armenian name (in *Catch-22* Yossarian is introduced as Assyrian but in *Closing Time*, it is discovered that he is actually of Armenian origin) and his Jewish faith is because he "wanted somebody who would seem to be outside the culture in every way."¹⁵² And indeed, Yossarian feels to be lost and trapped. He feels like that because of the system he is trapped in, both military and political, and he desperately tries to escape because he considers it crazy.¹⁵³ He gradually starts to feel isolated as a consequence of either a disappearance of his friends, their death or as they reveal their true character.¹⁵⁴

Colonel Korn's name was derived from the word "corny," and Orr from the word "or" because he is the representation of another option since he escaped the insane world of the novel. According to Heller, Orr was actually the "most intelligent person" of the novel. The character of Major Major Major refers to a rank that he wants nothing to do with but due to an error, he is ranked as Major and so he is called Major Major Major Major. Milo Minderbinder may refer to the capitalistic "mind" he has or the "binds" he creates through his business. He is the reflection of American capitalism and consumerism. "Innate" or even its adverbial form "innately" was the base for Nately's name whose characters depicts American values. General Scheisskopf's name is of German origin and it can be translated as "shithead."¹⁵⁵ At first, Scheisskopf is a Lieutenant but his obsession with parades leads to his promotion to General.

¹⁴⁹ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 32.

¹⁵⁰ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 569.

¹⁵¹ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 24-50.

¹⁵² Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 27.

¹⁵³ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 569.

¹⁵⁴ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 33.

¹⁵⁵ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 36-7.

4 KEN KESEY

4.1 A Boy from the Northwest

Ken Kesey was born in La Junta, in the state of Colorado on September, 17, 1935. However, he was raised in Oregon, the very same state where *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* takes place and its motion picture version by Milos Forman was shot.

Even though Ken Kesey was born during the Great Depression and his parents were farmers, Ken Kesey had a considerable impact on American literature and culture. After he died in 2001, the *New York Times* paid tribute to him by connotating his name with “an idea of something larger, a time, a possibility, an actual shift in the ways of being.”¹⁵⁶

Kesey studied at the University of Oregon and during his studies, he was devoted to acting and wrestling.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, he wrote columns for the school newspaper and soon, he discovered his passion for writing. After graduation, he studied at Stanford University due to the writing scholarship.¹⁵⁸

In 1959, Kesey was told about drug experiments at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Menlo Park, New Jersey. At the time, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) performed several experiments with the usage of narcotics so they could be potentially used in the Cold War as a kind of a weapon. These experiments were conducted on the patients even without their consensus. However, many volunteered to be part of the experiments and Ken Kesey was one of them.¹⁵⁹ This decision would further shape his life. He applied for a job in the hospital and continued to experiment with drugs. This is where and when his initial inspiration for *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* comes from. The novel is partly based on his compassion with the patients he had met.¹⁶⁰

Besides, his experiments with drugs only increased and Kesey was even arrested couple of times because of drugs and spent several months in jail. Nevertheless, the second half of his life was much more peaceful since he dedicated it especially to his “family and community.”¹⁶¹

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest is undoubtedly Kesey's most praised and famous work. Nevertheless, Kesey wrote several other successful pieces of literature. The second

¹⁵⁶ Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 3-4.

¹⁵⁷ Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 110.

¹⁵⁸ Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 3.

¹⁵⁹ Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 111.

¹⁶⁰ Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution,” 309.

¹⁶¹ Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 4.

novel *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964) “allowed Kesey the opportunity to explore much larger themes about the nature and the place of the individual in modern society.”¹⁶² His other works include for example *Kesey’s Garage Sale* (1973), *Sailor Song* (1992), or *Last Go Round* (1994) written together with Ken Babbs.

4.2 Kesey and Conformity

As already stated, the culture of the late 1950s and 1960s was changing. The changes, however, did not only concerned music, movies, literary authors, and civil rights movements, but the changes concerned the drug usage as well.

Ken Kesey experienced with drugs since they represented a gate to another reality for him. He realized that drugs offered him a new perspective of the world around him and offered him an escape from the world he was living in.¹⁶³

Already one year after the *Cuckoo’s* publication, Kesey could have afforded buying a house in La Honda, near San Francisco, where he would meet with his friends to experiment with LSD.¹⁶⁴ It was here where he started to organize the Acid Tests which resulted in the LSD popularization in 1965. After *Sometimes a Great Notion* was published, Kesey bought a bus as well which was about to take him and his companions, known as the Merry Pranksters, as the sign on the bus said “Furthur.” The members had their nicknames which symbolized their new identities. Kesey was called “The Chief” and Neal Cassady, the inspiration for Dean Moriarty of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, was called “Sir Speed Limit.” Their idea to travel east from the west originated in the American history when the west was still a frontier and experienced immense change after being conquered. Therefore, the Pranksters were eager to discover the possible consequences of bringing their culture and experiments from the west to the east.¹⁶⁵

However, the trip was also a rebellion against conformist American society. In a way, the Pranksters could be compared to Chief Bromden who escaped the insane government-run mental institution full of brutality, oppression and manipulation which was actually Kesey’s metaphor for the conformist and destructive American society. Just like Chief, they did not have an exact final destination of their movement.¹⁶⁶ Their mutual purpose was to

¹⁶² Dodgson, *It’s All a Kind of Magic*, 165.

¹⁶³ Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution,” 299.

¹⁶⁴ Elcock, “From Acid Revolution to Entheogenic Evolution,” 302.

¹⁶⁵ Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 110.

¹⁶⁶ Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 111.

“bring some of it clear” in their heads.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the bus trip and the Acid Tests can be considered as the beginning of the counterculture.¹⁶⁸

As already stated in the background, the American psychologist Timothy Leary was one of the leading figures of advocating LSD and he and the Pranksters met. However, his and Kesey’s opinions on the availability of the drug divided. While Kesey wanted LSD to be available to anyone, Leary believed the availability should be restricted.¹⁶⁹

According to Kesey’s philosophy, drugs were a mean of expression of one’s individuality, a choice, and a way out from the settled and the conformist American society.¹⁷⁰

4.3 The Genesis of *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*

The novel was Ken Kesey’s very first one to be published. Yet, it was well received both by the critics and readers. Only a year after its publication, the novel premiered as a play on Broadway which contributed to the novel’s recognition and it became a best seller. Moreover, the Forman’s adaptation from 1975 was rewarded by nine Oscar nominations and won in five major categories.

The novel is violent. It is full of rebellion, oppression, and even sexuality. It is against the system, raises questions against the system and even though it is a fictional story “it’s the truth even if it didn’t happen.”¹⁷¹

The mental institution where the narrative takes place is a reference to the conformist American society. Whereas the character of Nurse Ratched represents the conformity, power, and control of the American government: “What she dreams of there in the center of those wires is a world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back, a place where the schedule unbreakable and all the patients who aren’t Outside, obedient under her beam, are wheel chair Chronicles [...]”¹⁷²

However, the novel also raises awareness of the state of American mental institutions and the treatment of the hospitalized patients. The patients were forced to take unidentified medication to them, their treatment was of no benefit to them, and they had to follow the

¹⁶⁷ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 281.

¹⁶⁸ Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 112.

¹⁶⁹ Edward Helmore, “How Ken Kesey’s LSD-fuelled Bus Trip Created the Psychedelic 60s,” *The Guardian*, August 6, 2011, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/aug/06/lsd-ken-kesey-pranksters-film>.

¹⁷⁰ Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 80-1.

¹⁷¹ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 8.

¹⁷² Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 26.

Nurse's schedule and rules. If they disobeyed, they could be sent to "the Shock Shop,"¹⁷³ or in other words, the place where an electroshock therapy is performed on them. However, the Nurse can send her patients to lobotomy as well if she finds it necessary. Therefore, she has the power and the others do not see any other option but to conform. This inability to stand for their individuality could be interpreted as "an allegory of American society's own inability to rebel until the 1960s counterculture" movement.¹⁷⁴

This order of things is changed when the nonconformist Randle Patrick McMurphy enters the ward. His attempt to lift the control panel seemed as a crazy idea to the patients because it did not seem possible to lift it. It was made of "steel and cement" and it looked extremely heavy. Therefore, none of them even tried to lift it. He was trying to lift "something he *knows* he can't lift, something *everybody* knows he can't lift." Even though he failed in his attempt, the others heard "the cement grind at our feet," and they thought he might actually succeed. However, even the attempt was important because he "tried, [...] I sure as hell did that much," to do something that seemed impossible to others. It was a "symbolic call to arms." By this act, along with many other, McMurphy revealed to the patients that they do not need to conform to the system and try something to do about it.¹⁷⁵

4.3.1 The Names of the Main Characters

Nurse Ratched represents the system and Randle Patrick McMurphy the individual. The nurse is however often referred to as Big Nurse by the men in the ward. This way of calling her is a reference to George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and its Big Brother, a symbol of power and the governmental interference into the lives of its citizens.

Nevertheless, even her surname has a connotation. Ratched is a homonym of the word "ratchet" which is "a part of a machine that allows movement in one direction only."¹⁷⁶ Therefore, this link to the mechanics stresses the Chief's idea of a society as a machinery called the Combine. Nevertheless, "ratchet" is used in the slang English as well. It was derived from "wretched" and means that something is awful or gross. However, "ratshit"¹⁷⁷ is also a possible origin of the word and the connection with rats is highlighted by McMurphy himself. "Miss Rat-shed,"¹⁷⁸ is how he called her once and by the pause within the syllables,

¹⁷³ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 8.

¹⁷⁴ Simmons, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel*, 10.

¹⁷⁵ Simmons, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ "Ratchet," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed May 3, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ratchet>.

¹⁷⁷ Tony Thorne, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, 3rd ed. (London: A&C Black Publishers, 2005): 359.

¹⁷⁸ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 86.

McMurphy suggested that the mental institution was actually a shed full of rats and by the stress on the first syllable, he might even suggested that she was the biggest rat of them all.

On the other hand, the name Randle Patrick McMurphy indicates his spirit and a strong sense of individualism. The initials of his name suggest a connection with the abbreviation “rpm” which is the abbreviation of “revolutions per minute,” and revolution is one of the themes of the novel he represents. The meaning of Patrick is “nobleman” but the name can be connotated with fatherly authority as well. The sense of protection can be spotted in Randle as well since it originated from the words “shield” and “wolf.”¹⁷⁹ Finally, the surname McMurphy is of the Gaelic origin and it means “sea warrior.”¹⁸⁰ All of these characteristics can be found in his appearance or behavior patterns. In a way, McMurphy was a modern sea warrior because he served during the Korean War and as he tattoo which said “Fighting Leathernecks”¹⁸¹ revealed, he was a member of the US Marine Corps.

¹⁷⁹ William A Francis, “Of Madness and Machines: Names in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*,” *Literary Onomastics Studies* 16, no. 14 (1989): 56-57, <https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los/vol16/iss1/14>.

¹⁸⁰ “McMurphy History, Family Crest & Coats of Arms,” House of Names, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.houseofnames.com/mcmurphy-family-crest>.

¹⁸¹ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 74.

5 THE INDIVIDUAL VS. THE SYSTEM IN THE NOVELS

Both Joseph Heller and Ken Kesey's novels indicated their reluctance to the conformist society and authorities. In order to do that, both authors adverted to the thin line between sanity and insanity. Each novel features a protagonist who is regarded to be insane by the system while they are actually very much sane. However, they do have an "insight into the dangers of the institution's demand for social, political, and cultural conformity."¹⁸²

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the stance of the individual against the system. Firstly, the metaphors for the society, or in other words the system, are analyzed. Further, the adopted strategies of selected characters that they used in order to fight the conformist system is discussed. Finally, the American loss of innocence and its connection to the novels is considered.

5.1 The Military and the Nuthouse - Metaphors for the Society

Both novels suggest that American post-war society had become indecent and inhuman. In order to criticize that, both authors used their novels as metaphors so they could vividly demonstrate the way the system, or in other words the society, works against the individual.

In *Catch-22*, it is the Army Air Force that projects the society. The men in the squadron are not viewed by the military system and the powerful ones in charge as individuals. They are only a mean of how to make the system and its representatives more powerful. The individual's life and death do not matter. The soldiers live in uncertainty, fear, repression, and there is no way out for them because the system has the power and the system is the reason why they live like that in the first place.

The symbol of the system's power is demonstrated in *Catch-22* though the increasing number of missions the soldiers have to fly. The system would rise the number because it has the power to do so and the individuals do not have to power to oppose. Therefore, they conform. This could be demonstrated through the situation when Yossarian argued with Clevinger about getting killed. Clevinger did not understand what was Yossarian so angry about because "they're trying to kill everyone."¹⁸³

In *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, it is the mental institution that projects the society. The head of its ward, Big Nurse, has an ultimate power and control over the ward. Everyone in the ward has to conform to her rules and whenever the rules are disregarded and her

¹⁸² Barbara Tapa Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction: Inmates Running the Asylum* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 2.

¹⁸³ Heller, *Catch-22*, 19.

authority threatened by a patient, she can easily send the patient to electroshock therapy or worse, to a lobotomy. Thus, this is the symbol of the system's power. The nurse can literally kill an individual because she has the power to do so.

According to Chief, she works for the Combine: "Under her rule the ward Inside is almost completely adjusted to surroundings. But the thing is she can't be on the ward all the time. She's got to spend some time Outside. So she works with an eye to adjusting the Outside world too."¹⁸⁴ "Inside" refers to the ward and "Outside" to the world outside the ward.

Therefore, the ward is a place where people who would destroy the perfect image of American society are held and when they conform and do not differ from the standard, they are called products. "When a completed product goes back out into society, all fixed up good as new, better than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart."¹⁸⁵ The nurse is part of the system and demonstrates the power the system has. The system is referred to as Combine by the Chief and described as "a huge organization that aims to adjust the Outside as well as the Inside,"¹⁸⁶ and the "ward is a factory for the Combine" which serves "for fixing up mistakes made."¹⁸⁷

5.2 The Strategies of the Individual against the System

5.2.1 Yossarian

"Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy," is how Doc Daneeka described the Catch to Yossarian. However, it was further described to the reader "that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind."¹⁸⁸ Therefore, an insane person is not really insane if he is concerned with his safety because the concern is a clear evidence of one's sanity. Nevertheless, the Doc Daneeka's explanation is a clear comparison of the chaotic human mind and the confusing systems and mass insanity it is able to create.¹⁸⁹ The novel is about "a dehumanizing institution that negates individuality and celebrates instead the organized

¹⁸⁴ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 25.

¹⁸⁵ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 36.

¹⁸⁶ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 25.

¹⁸⁷ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 36.

¹⁸⁸ Heller, *Catch-22*, 52.

¹⁸⁹ Green, *Joseph Heller*, 122.

chaos of its own bureaucracy,”¹⁹⁰ and Yossarian was aware of that, therefore, he would repeatedly say that “every one of them” was trying to murder him.¹⁹¹

Yossarian strategy was self-preservation. Although he cared deeply about the others, it was his life that mattered to him the most. At first, his attempts to save himself were rather peaceful and unspotted by the system. He would malingering all sorts of illnesses just to stay in the hospital and avoid flying the missions. However, as the number of mission was increasing, therefore, the craziest and more dehumanizing the system got, the more obvious and strong Yossarian’s protests were.

Appearing naked to get his medal after bombing of Avignon was a non-verbal protest that “has traditional connotation of disengagement from society in American literature.” Even the characters of Huck and Jim from the Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) do as well appear naked to demonstrate their disengagement from the society. Moreover, the decision to undress himself demonstrate that after all, all men are equal.¹⁹² Yossarian swore not “to wear a uniform again” and repeatedly explained to others that he simply “don’t want to,” wear his uniform.¹⁹³ The comprehension of this reasoning, however, differed. “Doc Daneeka accepted the explanation,”¹⁹⁴ whereas the authorities wanted to punish him for that and lied to their superiors about his true intentions not to wear the uniform ever again.

Furthermore, the passage when Yossarian “submerged himself head first into the green water several times until he felt clean and wide awake”¹⁹⁵ was an illustration of his estrangement towards the military and his rank as well. Nakedness was his way of refusal and detachment from his roles connected with the military, from the authorities and an expression of his individuality. His uniform was connotated to the conformist system he was living in and throwing it away was an act of purification for him.¹⁹⁶ A complete opposite of Scheisskopf who was pleased “to wear an officer’s uniform every day.”¹⁹⁷

Yossarian’s another protest was to simply refuse to fly more missions. However, the morale within the squadron started to worsen and Yossarian was blamed for it. It was mainly Colonel Korn who reproached him because “men were perfectly content to fly as many

¹⁹⁰ Lupack, *Insanity as Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction*, 21.

¹⁹¹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 19.

¹⁹² Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 29-30.

¹⁹³ Heller, *Catch-22*, 250.

¹⁹⁴ Heller, *Catch-22*, 299.

¹⁹⁵ Heller, *Catch-22*, 165.

¹⁹⁶ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 29-30.

¹⁹⁷ Heller, *Catch-22*, 79.

missions as we asked as long as they thought they had no alternative,” but with hopes that there was a way out, they started to oppose the system and refused to fly.¹⁹⁸ This scene demonstrates that the values of authorities coming from a country which prides itself on its democratic values, freedom and equal opportunities are not entirely true. Korn continued: “You’ll enjoy a rich, rewarding, luxurious, privileged existence. You’d have to be a fool to throw it all away just for a moral principle, and you’re not a fool.”¹⁹⁹ In other words, Korn revealed that being just and moral is a silly thing to do. Besides, Korn himself acknowledged the system was decayed: “I like the way you lie. You’ll go far in this world if you ever acquire some decent ambition.”²⁰⁰

The last chapters indicate Yossarian’s absolute determination to fight the system and save his life. He even started to question the existence of the catch: “I bet it wasn’t even really there.”²⁰¹

Even though his life was the most precious to him, Yossarian tried to save lives of the future generations as well. This was symbolized by his effort to save the little sister of Nately’s “whore.” “Someone had to do something,” and Yossarian was the someone. Heller further developed the thought as following: “Every victim was a culprit, every culprit a victim, and somebody had to stand up sometime to try to break the lousy chain of inherited habit that was imperiling them all.”²⁰²

Plunging and scrolling through the ancient city of Rome at the end of the novel, destructed by the human force, Yossarian comprehended that he entered a hell on earth “created both spiritually and physically” by humankind.²⁰³ He realized the earth was indeed a “lousy” place and could not stop thinking about how much injustice must be happening at the moment in this “world that never yet had provided enough heat and food and justice for all but an ingenious and unscrupulous handful.”²⁰⁴ He wondered how much poverty and hunger there was in “his own prosperous country,” how many innocent were “abused,” how many insane were sane and vice versa, how many rich became richer and poor became poorer, “how many wise” ones were “stupid” and the “honest” were “liars.”²⁰⁵ This stream

¹⁹⁸ Heller, *Catch-22*, 483.

¹⁹⁹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 491.

²⁰⁰ Heller, *Catch-22*, 485.

²⁰¹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 467.

²⁰² Heller, *Catch-22*, 465.

²⁰³ Minna Doskow, “The Night Journey in *Catch-22*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 12, no. 4 (January 1967): 187, <https://doi.org/10.2307/440667>.

²⁰⁴ Heller, *Catch-22*, 472.

²⁰⁵ Heller, *Catch-22*, 472-3.

of consciousness of his was in a way related to the seven deadly sins. Yossarian does mention lust, greed, gluttony, wrath, envy, pride and even compares himself to Christ and how he “must have felt as he walked through the world.”²⁰⁶

It was quiet in Rome. The only sounds Yossarian could hear were “human cries, the sobs and screams of the victims of hell.”²⁰⁷ One of these sounds was an Italian man’s desperate scream as he was being seized by the police. There were too many of them a he could not escape, he just continued screaming: “Police! Help! Police!”²⁰⁸ It was rather ironical, Yossarian thought, that man was “screaming for help to the police while policemen were all around him.”²⁰⁹ Only then he realized that the man’s scream was ambiguous. His scream was a “heroic warning from the grave” to all of those who could hear him to warn them about the present danger. Yossarian answered to his calls by “slipping away.”²¹⁰ The police had authoritative power and used its power to quiet the man with the help of another state-run institution that should help and protect. The rebelling man was taken away by the ambulance while there was a bleeding soldier who needed medical help a block away. However, his wounds and pain were irrelevant at the moment. A confinement of the nonconformist man was of a much bigger importance.

As he scrolled through Rome and saw and heard all the horrors, Yossarian acknowledged that “mobs with clubs were in control everywhere” and he had no power nor the ability to fight the system and those who were in control.²¹¹

It seemed that the only thing that could soothe him was a girl called Michaela, a pure “happy, simple-minded, hard-working” maid untouched by any of the men.²¹² Michaela was his only hope and in a way a proof that the world was not such a desperate place, yet, Yossarian’s hopes were once again dashed. He found her body lying in the streets, raped and murdered. She was an “apparent departure from the picture of universal deformity and perversion” and yet, she became “the sacrificial victim of that deformity and perversion.”²¹³ After being an observer the whole night, Yossarian’s role changed and argued with Aarfy who did that to her. He was certain that this particular act would be punished and Aarfy put

²⁰⁶ Heller, *Catch-22*, 475.

²⁰⁷ Doskow, “The Night Journey in *Catch-22*,” 188.

²⁰⁸ Heller, *Catch-22*, 476.

²⁰⁹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 476.

²¹⁰ Heller, *Catch-22*, 476.

²¹¹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 477.

²¹² Heller, *Catch-22*, 478.

²¹³ Doskow, “The Night Journey in *Catch-22*,” 190-1.

in jail. Yet, it was Yossarian who was put in jail “for being in Rome without pass.”²¹⁴ The laws created by humans were no longer in favor of human rights and did not punish the unhuman acts. Therefore, those who arrested Yossarian were not described as humans but as cold figures made of “steel.”²¹⁵

At the end of the novel, Yossarian started to lose hope that he can win his war with the system. Thus, he firstly accepted the offer by Cathcart and Korn that enabled him to leave Pianosa. Yossarian was not against the war nor was he a coward. His aim was to save his life before it was too late. Upon hearing of Orr and his arrival in Sweden, Yossarian planned to escape. The news raised the hope in him once again. He had 70 missions flown already and knew the war was won, his “country’s not in danger any more,” but his life was. “If I were to give up my life now, it wouldn’t be for my country. It would be for Cathcart and Korn. [...] From now on I’m thinking only of me.”²¹⁶ Yossarian wanted to escape the fate of the others, such as Hungry Joe’s who had finished the number of missions several times and yet was not allowed to return home. Before the paperwork was done, the number of required missions raised and during this vicious circle, Hungry Joe died.

Major Danby tried to convince Yossarian to stay because deserting would mean living his life alone, with no one by his side, “in danger of betrayal” and accused him from running away from his responsibilities. However, leaving Pianosa was not an escape from his responsibilities and Yossarian said that himself: “I’m not running away from my responsibilities. I’m running to them. There’s nothing negative about running away to save my life.” Yossarian reaction to the rest of Danby’s speech is: “I live that way now.”²¹⁷

Yossarian “had decided to live forever or die in the attempt.”²¹⁸ His goal was to live and he had done everything to do so. He would play with the system to his advantage and postponed several missions, aborted some of them, or checked into the hospital and malingered all sort of illnesses. He demonstrated the others the irrationality, absurdity, injustice, and craziness of the system but he himself was considered crazy by most. Yet, it was him who survived and most of his friends who died. Yossarian was determined not to let the system take his life. Therefore, the strategy of self-preservation was successful.

²¹⁴ Heller, *Catch-22*, 480.

²¹⁵ Heller, *Catch-22*, 480.

²¹⁶ Heller, *Catch-22*, 510.

²¹⁷ Heller, *Catch-22*, 516.

²¹⁸ Heller, *Catch-22*, 33.

5.2.2 Orr

Heller once described Orr as the most intelligent character of the novel and indeed, he had a point. Orr realized there was no way one could win over the system and its catch. It was kind of a vicious circle to him and to escape the circle, he understood that he had to play by the system's rules. Therefore, he fooled everybody and created a kind of a false self and this strategy happened to be extremely successful since he was the only one airman of the squadron who managed to flee the system.

Orr was a handyman and technician and would keep improving the tent he shared with Yossarian such as by installing "running water, wood-burning, fireplace, cement floor."²¹⁹ Orr knew what the others thought of him, alongside with Yossarian, therefore he was not sure whether he would join him and escape with him. That is why he kept improving their tent. Shortly before his escape, Orr said that "the days are getting shorter," and wanted to fix the stove for Yossarian "while there's still time," because he didn't "know where [he is] going to be."²²⁰ While Orr wanted Yossarian to join him: "If you had any brains [...] you'd go right to Piltchard and Wren and tell them you want to fly with me," Orr was still only a "small and ugly" friend to Yossarian who needed his protection.²²¹ And since Orr knew what Yossarian thought, he gave him little hidden clues about his true self such as: "Just because they're small doesn't mean they're unimportant."²²²

Yossarian would often talk with Orr about "Spain, Switzerland and Sweden where American fliers could be interned for the duration of the war."²²³ Yet, Yossarian preferred Sweden out of the three countries the most because it was a place "where the level of intelligence was high" but on the other hand it "was out of reach, too far away" therefore Yossarian did not consider it as a reasonable option of a country where he could live.

Nevertheless, Yossarian himself even considered "'scheming with some pilot he trusted to fake a crippled engine and then destroy the evidence of deception with belly landing."²²⁴ However, most of the men were out of question, Orr included. Even though he tried to convince Yossarian that he was "the best pilot around now when it comes to ditching or making landings"²²⁵ and his repeated crashes were described as gentle and his skill

²¹⁹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 20.

²²⁰ Heller, *Catch-22*, 357.

²²¹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 358.

²²² Heller, *Catch-22*, 356.

²²³ Heller, *Catch-22*, 355.

²²⁴ Heller, *Catch-22*, 355.

²²⁵ Heller, *Catch-22*, 358.

“flawless” since “not one member of the six-man crew suffered the slightest bruise,”²²⁶ Yossarian ignored Orr. Orr was only the simple, optimistic, smiling guy from the “wilderness outside New York City”²²⁷ who “was knocked down into the water or had an engine shot out almost every time he went up”²²⁸ and never worried about the rising number of missions and therefore, was considered to be “crazy.”²²⁹ On the other hand, Yossarian considered him to be dumb only: “Orr hasn’t got brains enough to be unhappy.”²³⁰

Since no one saw through his strategy, Yossarian included, Orr decided to escape alone: “He was late getting out of the plane and ended up alone in a raft and was out of sight by the time the Air-Sea Rescue launch came [...]”²³¹ He knew the superior officers cared only about themselves and would not investigate his possible death as long as it did not look as an escape. For that reason he did not fly to Sweden but sailed in a raft to get there. By this assumption, he proved his brightness once again. Besides Sergeant Whitcomb, none of the authorities cared about his death and the only reason Whitcomb cared was Cathcart’s obsession with *The Saturday Evening Post* where he wanted his name to be printed which would bring him recognition and a bigger change to become a general. Therefore, upon hearing of Orr’s death, Whitcomb “with commendable dispatch and considerable hope, dropped reminder in his tickler file to send a form letter over Colonel Cathcart’s signature” to Orr’s relatives.²³²

5.2.3 McMurphy

The character of McMurphy was an embodiment of the nonconformity, individualism, and freedom. Upon his arrival to the ward, the patients and the system of the ward started to change. The men started to see through the Nurse’s true self and through her tactics more clearly, they had the courage to stand against her and McMurphy gave them new, rational perspectives on life. Moreover, the perceptions of their own selves had changed.

At first, the patients perceived themselves and the whole society as a bunch of rabbits: “The rabbits accept their role in the ritual and recognize the wolf as the strong. In defense, the rabbit becomes sly and frightened and elusive and he digs holes and hides when the wolf

²²⁶ Heller, *Catch-22*, 352.

²²⁷ Heller, *Catch-22*, 52.

²²⁸ Heller, *Catch-22*, 262.

²²⁹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 52.

²³⁰ Heller, *Catch-22*, 352.

²³¹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 363.

²³² Heller, *Catch-22*, 365.

is about. [...] He most certainly doesn't challenge the wolf to combat."²³³ Furthermore, it was explained that the reason they are at the mental institution is because they "can't adjust to our rabbithood. We need a good strong wolf like the nurse to teach us our place."²³⁴ McMurphy, however, strongly disagreed: "Man, you're talkin' like a fool," and tried to convince them they were "no damned" rabbits.²³⁵

By the end, however, their perception of themselves completely changed thanks to McMurphy. They were not rabbits anymore, only "sick men now,"²³⁶ and many were ready and actually left the mental institution.

Harding, for example, labelled himself to be a rabbit as well. However, his homosexual orientation indicated that he was "different," and therefore, he "got sick." He repressed his homosexual urges because in the American society of the 1960s was intolerant towards homosexuals. He admits that he felt: "Guilt. Shame. Fear. Self-belittlement." Moreover, he had a constant "feeling that the great, deadly, pointing forefinger of society was pointing at me – and the great voice of millions chanting, 'Shame. Shame. Shame.' It's society's way of dealing with someone different."²³⁷ However, Harding did not consider himself to be a rabbit anymore and hide in a hole nor wanted he leave the hospital as one. He wanted to leave the hospital as a man of honor and let "them" know he was "able to do it" like that.²³⁸ And indeed, he left the hospital as one of the first after McMurphy was taken away.

McMurphy passed on his rebellious and nonconformist spirit onto the other patients and the nurse could not allow it to spread. The patients started to rebel and oppose her and before McMurphy came, all the patients conformed to her rules. This was the main strategy of McMurphy's. To break the system and to break her. He would make fun of her, challenge her to show her true self, and trolled her. He constantly played his power-games with her and wanted to make her angry. He would fight the system but the problem was that the more he fought, the more power they used against him, and he did not realize how much powerful the system was. Therefore, she had to destroy him before he could destroy her and all the rules and values she represented. In other words, the system was in danger and those who endangered it were themselves in danger. However, there was another reason why his defeat

²³³ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 57.

²³⁴ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 58.

²³⁵ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 58.

²³⁶ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 265.

²³⁷ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 265.

²³⁸ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 265.

was substantial for the nurse. She wanted to demonstrate that no individual can triumph over the system.

By ridiculing her along with her rules, McMurphy wanted to undermine her authority and to show the others that even though she had power, she was not almighty. He already knew the system was corrupt which could be an explanation of some of his personality traits. He is a cynical, selfish, gambling, and manipulative con man who tries to manipulate the system to his own prosperity. This is clear even from his arrival to the hospital. In order not to stay at the work farm McMurphy manipulated the system so he would be transferred to the ward.

Even the very first conversation between McMurphy and the Big Nurse indicated that the two were complete opposites. The nurse told him: “everyone... must follow the rules.” They looked and smiled at each other and then McMurphy replied: “ya know – that is the ex-act thing somebody always tells me about the rules [...] just when they figure I’m about to do the dead opposite.”²³⁹ Basically, the nurse told him that she was the highest authority in the ward and everyone has to and will follow her rules. McMurphy, on the other hand, recognized her true self along with her falseness immediately, that might be why the word “exact” was divided into two syllables. He knew her smile was fake and she was acting it. What’s more, his answer to her meant that he was not going to conform, not to her nor to anybody else.

The power-games they played with each other evolved. One of the first happened during a group meeting. Nurse Ratched mispronounced McMurphy’s name and his reaction was to struck back with a story about his uncle who “stopped” a girl who ruined his name “for good, too.” However, McMurphy did not reveal what his uncle exactly did because the method could be useful to him as well someday. He said it “right at the nurse,” and they both smiled at each other.²⁴⁰ Regarding the group meetings, McMurphy instantly observed they were of no real help to the Acutes. They were only a way to make the patients feel worse, more ashamed for themselves and according to McMurphy, the meetings were “crap” and provided the nurse the pleasure to peck “at your balls, buddy, at your everlovin’ balls.”²⁴¹

She fooled him with the fake smile of hers “for maybe three minutes when I came this morning, but no longer,”²⁴² and he was certain the others were not fooled neither. Yet, they

²³⁹ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 24.

²⁴⁰ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 41.

²⁴¹ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 53.

²⁴² Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 54.

still insisted she was a “veritable angel of mercy,” and an “unselfish” women who was “toiling thanklessly for the good of all.” However, as McMurphy continued to say what he really thought of her and referred to her as one of those “people who try to make you weak so they can get you to the line, to follow their rules, to live like they want you to.” And even thought the Acutes felt the same about her, they never had to courage to say that out loud. However, McMurphy gave them the courage, strength and voice. Not only did he need them to join him at the power-games he played with her, but he did want to let these men to be the “victims of a matriarchy” any longer.²⁴³ He succeed and they revealed that “no one’s ever dared come out and say it before, but there’s not a man among us that doesn’t think it.”²⁴⁴

McMurphy embraced their individuality and it was part of his strategy. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: “There is power in numbers and there is power in unity,” and McMurphy knew that too. Letting the others admit what they really thought of her was the first step to undermine her authority and power. Then, some action needed to be done and as an example, watching of the World Series can serve.

McMurphy wanted to watch the World Series on TV, but in order to do that, the set schedule had to change. Therefore, there is a vote but all the men were afraid to raise their hand because they were too afraid of the consequences. “Bunch of old ladies,” is how McMurphy called them.²⁴⁵ He challenges them and tries to “pull people out of the fog.”²⁴⁶ He used psychological pressure against the Acutes. When a revote took place, McMurphy wanted to “see the hands” that would go up but also “the hands that don’t go up, too.”²⁴⁷ The tactic worked and all of them raised their hands. However, the vote was not about the World Series only. They raised their hands “against the Big Nurse, against her trying to send McMurphy to Disturbed, against the way she’s talked and acted and beat them down for years.”²⁴⁸ She was rather surprised and did not expect this to happen. Therefore, she had to quickly find a way how to defeat the vote. Thus, she counted the votes of those who did not vote, the Chronics. Still, the nurse’s strategy failed because Chief raised his hand. She was “red and swelling like she’ll blow apart any second.”²⁴⁹ She could not let this happen. McMurphy, the individual could not win over her, the system. Therefore, she disrupted the

²⁴³ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 56.

²⁴⁴ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 56.

²⁴⁵ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 107.

²⁴⁶ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 120.

²⁴⁷ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 121.

²⁴⁸ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 121.

²⁴⁹ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 124.

signal but even though the picture was turned off, McMurphy completely ignored it. He pretended the game was still on so he could make her angry. She started to be furious and reminded him that he was “under the jurisdiction and control” of her. Yet, he was joined in his rebellion by others: “Then Cheswick goes and gets him a chair, and then Billy Bibbit goes, and then Scanlon and then Frederickson and Sefelt, and then we all put down our mops and brooms and scouring rags and we all go pull us chairs up.” She was “ranting and screaming behind”²⁵⁰ her but it was too late, McMurphy changed the men and changed the ward, there was “no more fog.”²⁵¹

So sum McMurphy’s strategy up, it was both successful and destructive. McMurphy was sent to the lobotomy and was later killed by the Chief who understood the nurse’s plan to use McMurphy “as an example of what can happen if you buck the system.”²⁵² Yet, the nurse failed in dampening the McMurphy’s free spirit: “She tried to get her ward back into shape, but it was difficult with McMurphy’s presence still tromping up and down the halls and laughing out loud in the meetings and singing in the latrines. She couldn’t rule with her old power any more,” and she started to “losing her patients one after the other.”²⁵³

5.2.4 Chief

The Chief’s strategy was to pretend to be deaf and dumb because by doing so “they don’t bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when I’m nearby.”²⁵⁴ It was a way to defend himself from the system because the system did not regard the numb, quiet, unproblematic, conformed individuals as a threat. Besides, by fooling the system like this, Chief was able to hear all the “hate secrets” of the hospital staff and he realizes that is was a smart tactics: “I’m cagey enough to fool them that much.”²⁵⁵

McMurphy, however, immediately saw through the Chief’s strategy and his reaction “was laughing because he wasn’t fooled for one minute by my deaf-and-dumb act; it didn’t make any difference how cagey the act was, he was onto me and was laughing and winking to let me know it.”²⁵⁶ McMurphy was a con man, non-educated man, unexperienced in medicine and yet, it was instantly clear to him what the Chief was doing. Not only could this signify his perceptivity and the ability to see what others did not see, refused to see or simply

²⁵⁰ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 125.

²⁵¹ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 129.

²⁵² Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 278.

²⁵³ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 277.

²⁵⁴ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 4.

²⁵⁵ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 4.

²⁵⁶ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 22.

ignored to see because Chief had been “on the ward longer’n anybody,”²⁵⁷ but also his awareness of how rotten the system was and what it did to the distinct individuals. On the other hand, in the film *McMurphy* does not realize until much later that Chief is faking being deaf and dumb, i.e. that Chief is pretending to be more disabled than he actually is so the staff (the system) will leave him alone. Jack Nicholson’s *McMurphy* reacts with great surprise and admiration at Chief’s rather sophisticated strategy of avoidance.

Nevertheless, the idea to pretend being deaf-mute was based on the way society treated Chief: “it wasn’t me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all.”²⁵⁸ The very first time he saw advantage in this was when the authorities came to his family’s tribal lands in order to “inform them of the government’s plans”²⁵⁹ so a hydroelectric dam could be built on the grounds. Since the authorities were not aware he could speak English, they openly talked about their intentions. According to Chief, “giving in” was the “smartest thing to do.” He learned this from his father who agreed to sell the tribal lands because “the government would of got it anyhow, sooner or later [...]”²⁶⁰ If he “wanted to hear at all,” there was no other way for him but to “keep on acting deaf.”²⁶¹

However, *McMurphy* represented hope and freedom to Chief and after all those years, he started to talk. Chief thanked *McMurphy* for a package of Juicy Fruit and told *McMurphy* about his life, his father, the Combine but more importantly, he warned him. He told *McMurphy* the Combine would “beat” and “bust” him because he was “big” and represented a threat.²⁶²

The Chief was right about his prediction. Pretending to be deaf-mute gave him the advantage to understand the system better and anticipate its future moves. Therefore, the strategy was successful because he survived and escaped so he could retain his individuality.

5.3 The Loss of Innocence

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the 35th president of the United States and by the beginning of 1963, the year when he was killed, his approval rating had been about 70% high.²⁶³ He was

²⁵⁷ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 17.

²⁵⁸ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 179.

²⁵⁹ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 181.

²⁶⁰ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 150.

²⁶¹ Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 179.

²⁶² Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, 189.

²⁶³ Andrew Kohut, “From the Archives: JFK’s America,” *Pew Research Center*, July 5, 2019, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/05/jfks-america/>.

a civil rights movement supporter, proposed the Tax Reduction Act which was about to ensure economic growth of America, but he was a Cold Warrior as well and a firm believer of America as the “city upon a hill.”

Yet, he was assassinated on November, 1963. This event was one of the first that contributed to the destruction of all the American innocence of the 1950s. Several major events which kept destroying sanity and belief in democracy in the USA occurred in the following years, such as the assassination of his brother, Robert Kennedy, or the assassinations of Afro-American activists Malcolm X or Martin Luther King Jr. However, it was John Kennedy’s death that triggered the change. The sense that American tolerance towards violence was too low appeared, the questions regarding running of the country raised and people even blamed themselves for his death. The institutions and their power along with the contemporary way of life started to be questioned.²⁶⁴ Several conspiracy theories appeared and some implied the assassination was an inside job. Therefore, the belief in the system was undermined since it appeared to be corrupt. Moreover, the United States House (of Representatives) Select Committee on Assassinations of the American Congress even admitted by the end of the 1970s that “the available evidence does not preclude the possibility that individual members may have been involved.”²⁶⁵ Therefore, even the U.S. government acknowledged it was possible that more than one person was involved in the assassination.

Thus, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* was ahead of its time. Even though the novel was published one year before this event, it is rather dark and reflects the dark mood of the late 1960s after the assassination. The novel does refer to the loss of innocence and destruction of sanity, along with democracy. Besides, the novel warns against violence and foremost, against the institutions and their power. Therefore, it predicted what America was going to look like in the decades to come. *Catch-22*, on the other hand, is more optimistic and less dark. It takes place during World War II when America was more innocent and more naive. Contrastingly, *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* takes place much later when America was losing its innocence.

The Kennedy’s optimism was replaced by doubts and pessimistic views on the future of America and its system. More protests against the Vietnam War were organized and

²⁶⁴ James Piereson, “The Day the Nation Lost Its Innocence,” *New York Post*, November 10, 2013, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://nypost.com/2013/11/10/the-day-the-nation-lost-its-innocence/>.

²⁶⁵“Findings,” JFK Assassination Records, National Archives, accessed May, 6, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html>.

counterculture was rising.²⁶⁶ In 1963, there were only 2 protests lodged throughout the States. The number was rising year by year and peaked in the 1970s when 204 protests were staged.²⁶⁷ Moreover, the key event of the counterculture movement, the Woodstock Music Festival, took place in 1969. That is why the two novels became widely read by the end of the decade when the mainstream society “caught up” with the cynicism and disorientation expressed in the works.

5.3.1 The Endings of the Novels

Towards the end in *Catch-22*, Yossarian could either choose to stay at the hospital, accept Korn and Cathcart’s offer of becoming a war hero but afterwards, he decided on the third option. Upon hearing Orr survived and is in Sweden, a country that symbolized a place without corruption and omnipresent death, he decided to join him. It was a “crucial note of hope” for Yossarian.²⁶⁸ At first, Yossarian considered returning home as a hero. However, accepting the deal with Colonel Korn was “a way to lose myself” for Yossarian.²⁶⁹ Yossarian would be the one who surrendered to those in control. They would win. Besides, it would also mean a betrayal of his friends. Therefore, he changed his mind and did not do it. His hope and faith for a better tomorrow and his determination to escape the insane world and live freely could have been one of the reasons the novel became popular by the end of the 1960s. The ending could serve as an inspiration and motivation and suggests that the individual, no matter how much the system tries, can still triumph over the system.

One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest, however, offers much darker ending. McMurphy died and the Big Nurse still hold power over the ward. The government controlled every aspects of its citizens’ lives and there was no escape besides escaping. This is where the novels differ. Contrastingly to Chief, Yossarian does believe there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Therefore he escapes to another country, hoping to have a better life in there. Whereas Chief is convinced that the civilization is terrible and an individual cannot win over the system. There was no way out for Chief. Not unless one conforms and fulfils the rules set by the society. Therefore, he heads for the Columbia River and Hood River, back to nature.

²⁶⁶ Piereson, “The Day the Nation Lost Its Innocence.”

²⁶⁷ Amanda Miller, “Vietnam-era Antiwar Protests - Timeline and Maps 1963-1975,” *Mapping American Social Movements*, accessed May 1, 2021, https://depts.washington.edu/moves/antiwar_map_protests.shtml.

²⁶⁸ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 31.

²⁶⁹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 512.

5.3.2 The Differing Perceptions of the Society by Yossarian and McMurphy

“Catch-22 did not exist, he was positive of that, but it made no difference. What did matter was that everyone thought it existed, and that was much worse, for there was no object or text to ridicule or refute, to accuse, criticize, attack, amend, hate, revile, spit at, rip to shreds, trample upon or burn up.”²⁷⁰ Therefore, Yossarian was powerless and the authorities had the power to do anything they wanted because Catch-22 allowed them to do so and the law said Catch-22 does not have to be shown to anybody; that law was Catch-22 itself. Everyone, not only Yossarian, was trapped in this bureaucratic absurdity. Yet, Yossarian tried to fight it and even though many of his friends died, became murderers, bureaucratic zombies, and powerful became more powerful, Yossarian believed life could be better and the system is not going to get him. By the end of the novel, after all the injustice, irrationality, and deaths, Yossarian believed that: “There is hope, after all.”²⁷¹ For that reason, the tone of the novel is much less darker than the one in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

McMurphy, on the other hand, did not believe one could win over the system and that there was any way to change it. Thus, he tried to take advantage of the system in his own benefit. McMurphy knew the system was corrupt and not in favor of nonconformity. Therefore, he was corrupt himself because he would not conform. He would mock the system and have fun.

Both characters realized the system was crazy. However, Yossarian was naive and innocent and believed there was hope. He believed that the good can defeat the evil. Yet, he was not perceived as a real threat to the system because he was considered crazy and this perception was shared even among those to whom he told the system was crazy. Yossarian was only a silly and crazy man for the system. While McMurphy was perceived as a real threat. Therefore, he had to be destroyed.

Thus, the narrative techniques that were used in the novels were of utmost importance. The narrator of *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is Chief Bromden who himself, as the reader finds out eventually, hates the system. Throughout his first person perspective, it is revealed what the system is really like. Either through the memories of his past or through all the knowledge he acquired in the ward. McMurphy represents a source of inspiration to Chief. The system despised McMurphy and McMurphy along with Chief despised the system. However, McMurphy is a loud nonconformist who does not hide like Chief. For that

²⁷⁰ Heller, *Catch-22*, 469.

²⁷¹ Heller, *Catch-22*, 514.

reason, it is essential for the message of the novel that it is narrated by Chief. He is in favor of the individual and it is revealed how the individual, in other words McMurphy, fights and plays with the system, in other words Nurse Ratched. By the end of the novel, Chief started to talk, oppose the system and after all those years he was locked up in the ward, he escaped the system to live his life in nature where he would not be forced to conform. Therefore, it is the Chief's character who undergoes the most considerable change.

Contrastingly, *Catch-22* is narrated by an omniscient narrator, so the narrative is not affected by a character's point-of-view. Therefore, the narrative seems more objective, whereas in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the narrative, language etc. is clearly subjective. Moreover, while the events of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* are told in a chronological order with several flashbacks into the Chief's past, *Catch-22* and its structure is more complex. The novel starts from the middle in medias res. It is repetitive, not chronological, and there are many flash backs into the past of several characters. It is rather chaotic and absurd which is why these narrative techniques were chosen for this absurd novel full of chaos, which is revealed and highlighted in the themes of the novel.²⁷²

²⁷² Yan Jun, "The Role of the Catch-22's Narrative Techniques in Reveling the Theme," *World Journal of English Language* 5, no. 3 (2015): 46-7, <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v5n3p46>.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the position of the the individual in the post-war American society in the novels *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey. Both novels criticize the post-war American society, hypocrisy, conformity, and power of the authorities. Thus, the metaphors for the system - the military and the mental institution - that the authors used for their critiques were important. Further, the various strategies, such as pretending to be deaf and dumb, the protagonists used against the system and how successful they were is examined. Since *Catch-22* is written in a rather lighter tone than *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the reasons for this contrast were explained and their consequences on the differing endings and perspectives of the protagonists of the novels were explored. The fundamental reason of their contrast was the American loss of innocence. *Catch-22* takes place in the times when America was still innocent. That's why the ending of the novel is filled with hope. *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, on the other hand, takes place much later when America was losing its innocence. The hope faded in this novel, it suggests that the individual cannot win over the system. The ending is dark because the mood in the society was getting darker.

The attitude expressed in the novels is ahead of its time, which is why the works were so culturally significant. When they were published, they did not express the opinion of mainstream America. World War II was extremely economically profitable for the United States and it brought great changes to the country. People were happy the war was over and wanted a comfortable life in the suburbs and the American government encouraged them to do that. The economy was growing, people had better work opportunities; the number of nuclear families was rising and so was the standard of living.

However, the system was getting more and more powerful and the governmental and social institutions began to disregard individuality. People began to feel as if they had to conform and live as the powerful authorities demanded. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, this was implied by the great power of the Big Nurse who could literally kill those who would not conform. In *Catch-22*, the power of the system was demonstrated through the rising number of missions. At first, the number of missions required was 25. Yet, Colonel Cathcart managed to raise the number to 80 while he himself flew less than 5 missions. Cathcart did not "give a damn about the men or the airplane. It's just that it [their deaths] looks so lousy on the report."²⁷³

²⁷³ Heller, *Catch-22*, 159.

Another great example from *Catch-22* is the so-called “death” of Doc Daneeka. Even though he hated flying, Doc was sent to the 256th Squadron, a unit of the US Army Air Forces. For that reason, some of the flight rosters are falsified with his name on it. Unfortunately for him, he is recorded to be in the airplane with McWatt who commits suicide and so, Doc is regarded dead as well. No one in the squadron cares that he is actually alive as long as bureaucracy states the opposite. He wrote his wife, who informed the War Department that he is alive. However, it refused to admit any possible error and the letter she sent him back was returned to her, and other institutions such as the Social Security Administration and the Veterans Administration suddenly offered her money to keep quiet. Thus, the system does not acknowledge making a mistake and rather suppresses Doc’s basic human rights. This is implied by her astonishment itself at how “many separate organizations were willing to do so much to bury Doc Daneeka.”²⁷⁴ This is a clear representation of the ultimate power of the system over truth and over life and death and what it can do to the individual.

Heller once said that “any organized effort must contain the germ of continuing disorganization.” Therefore, it is frequently highlighted throughout the novel how bureaucracy can lead to disorganization, false information and instability of the contemporary world. This is demonstrated throughout Yossarian’s duty to censor letters which is actually a game of power since the letters become instruments manipulation and control.²⁷⁵ Yossarian undermines the power of the system by signing as Washington Irving.

Nevertheless, the sense of fear, paranoia, uncertainty, and powerlessness was increasing in the United States as the power of the system rose. Many people were investigated due to the Communist threat and the system could accuse them from having ties to the Communist party without any evidence. Joseph Heller reflected this practices through the character of chaplain Shipman who is a true, honest, kind, trustworthy and innocent person that deeply cares about the others, so much that “Nately’s death almost killed” him.²⁷⁶ Yet, he is interrogated by members of “the government”²⁷⁷ who, however, could not tell him what crime he had committed, but they were “going to find out.”²⁷⁸ Several absurd accusations were made towards him and they found him guilty. Not because he was guilty but simply because they could, they had the power.

²⁷⁴ Heller, *Catch-22*, 394.

²⁷⁵ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 54.

²⁷⁶ Heller, *Catch-22*, 432.

²⁷⁷ Heller, *Catch-22*, 434.

²⁷⁸ Heller, *Catch-22*, 435.

The basis for these events were inquisitions during McCarthyism but an inspiration can be found in Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925) as well - a novel in which one of the protagonists is accused, and further found guilty, of an unknown crime.²⁷⁹ The truth was not rational and did not matter. There was no escape for an individual and no way an individual could win over the system. The system always wins. However, *Catch-22* signified that "there is hope, after all."²⁸⁰

As it has been determined in the analysis, this is where the novels differ. *Catch-22* has a lighter tone that provides more optimistic prospects of the future. Even though the Air Force which represents the society is conformist, oppresses individuality and uses its power in order to become more powerful, no matter how many lives would be lost in the process, Yossarian and Orr manage to escape to Sweden, where they can live their lives away from the crazy system they know. Unlike Yossarian, Orr realized the system was too powerful. Therefore, he fooled everybody and quietly escaped. This was his strategy that was successful. However, even Yossarian's strategy of self-preservation via various means succeeded. His determination not to sacrifice and be the system's victim saved his life. Contrastingly to this, the protagonist of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is killed by the system. McMurphy challenges, undermines the system, and motivates the others not to conform right in front of Big Nurse, the system. Therefore, he had to be destroyed. He was a real threat to the system. Thus, his strategy to overthrow the system did not succeed. On the other hand, Chief's strategy to pretend not to hear was advantageous because it allowed him to survive the system. By the end of the novel, he escapes to nature because he realizes it is the only way to sustain his individuality.

To conclude, both the novels ingeniously depicted the conformist post-war American society and warned against its power and influence upon the lives of its citizens. They indicate what the system is capable of and remind us that individuality matters. The works inspire its readers to fight for truth and independence, which is a message that is relevant even in the contemporary world.

²⁷⁹ Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller*, 64.

²⁸⁰ Heller, *Catch-22*, 514.

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