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## **Renegades: From Homer to Heller**

### **Abstract**

*In this paper I will be focused on the war principles and its consequences from Homer up to Heller. In a research on century Homeric epos called "Iliad or a poem of power?" Simon Wail wrote : The only people who impress us and give the impression that they stay higher than ordinary people, who have do a superiority over pain, sadness and human suffering, are those people who self accommodate in the furrows of illusion, excitement and fanaticism to hide the icy roughness in their eyes, in their spirits that plows only pain. The man who does not wear the armor of lie cannot survive violence without touching himself up to its spirit depths! Insanity of inherent war which turns the stable morality of human values of everybody's, as well as the material and immaterial institutions in a big grabable hollow of values up siding them down. It is not weird, at least in the literature. The best critics of war literature are insane or ridiculous, or bastards or perverted. Although we (even the authors) can laugh with them, we can distance ourselves from what they say, our laughter can illuminate our minds in a moment, even it influences in transforming our mindset, questioning in our common sense on war in general. Renegades always are in war with the evil without excluding themselves from being defeated from the evil.*

*In conclusion, a renegade is someone who rebels, a deserter. He or she betrays or deserts his or her cause, faith or political party. A renegade can be a rebel who breaks the conventional rules, a coward, a recreant that quits from a cause or a principle. Renegades have existed since the antiquity up to postmodern times.*

**Key words:** *renegade, Heller, postmodern literature, power, rebel, deserter.*

## I. Introduction

In a research work on the Homeric century epos called "Iliad a poem of power" wrote Simone Weil. The only people that impress us for being in a higher status than ordinary people who have advantage on pain, sadness and human suffering are those people who self-accommodate in the furrow of illusions, excitement and fanaticism to hide the icy rudeness in their eyes, in their spirit that plows only pain. "A person who doesn't wear the armor of lie cannot feel the violence without touching himself up to the depth of soul." (Weil; 2005, 36)

The inherent craziness of war which transforms the morality of stable human values in everybody as well as the material and non-material institutions in huge hollow engulfing values upsidings them down. It is not weird, at least in literature, the most renowned critics of war literature are either insane, or comic, or bastards, or beyond themselves. Even though we (even the authors themselves) can laugh with them; we can be distanced from what they might say. Our laughter can illuminate our minds being aware for a moment; even can influence transforming our mindset, doubting our rationality on war generally.

A renegade is a person who rebels, a bandit, a deserter. He or she betrays or his or her cause, religion belief or political party. A renegade can be a rebel that can break the traditional rules, a coward that quit a cause or a principle. Renegades have existed since in antiquity till postmodern times. They have wandered to the long, hard ways not silently but blatantly, even though the triumph is not always a part of theirs. We can mention Thersites in Iliad of Homer, Trellis and Cressida of Shakespeare, Sir John Falstaff in Henry VII, Joseph Schweik from Jaroslav Hasek "the good soldier Schweik", the captain John Yossarian in "Catch-22" by Joseph Heller. All these protagonists are inherent antagonists as their world is defined by the terrors of war, a world we don't want to be in. Their existence in the merciless volcano of deathly war is more than a dramatization for them. "Shame on you! Such a powerful commander leads the sons of Akea to the bloody slaughter!" (Homer; The Iliad (1990) lines 262-277). Thersites ridicules on Agamemnon laughing at him. "Don't kill me, forgive me, and forgive my life!" (Shakespeare, Henry IV, 1998) – begged and cried Falstaff in the battlefield of Shrubbery. "be mad ...you will die" (Heller;1961) shouts Yossarian, "and don't tell me God works mysteriously; He is doing nothing for us, on the contrary He is playing with us, even worse He has forgotten our existence in our real world", - cried Yossarian desperately.

These six depersonalized protagonists tear up the futility of the war, disrepute its hypocrisy: who is fighting, what for and for whom? Mother Courage continued to benefit for twelve years war. Her children and almost a third of world were in fire of that war. They were slaughtered mercilessly from that black cloud war so painfully. Differently from a character in Iliad, Hector for a moment when is abandoned from all Gods, he said "Oh, Alas now I'm invited by Gods to the death gate; there is no more escapes! I don't want to be killed without fights and fame! The mission is going to be committed by me and this is to be known by my grandsons!" (Homer; Iliad; lines 265). Yossarian and others do not share the same thought and do not support the death for an aim; he does not the equality sign between death for a reason and life. Life for them is ABOVE THE ALL. The term "Thersitism" is discovered by George Vilhem (Friedrich Hegel in his essay "The individual as a subject of history" (Friedrich Hegel; 1984) to manifest and scorn rudely the kings. It is an embodiment

of all times. The theme and subject of Iliad, as the core of western literature, is war, of course.

For the first time in literature, comes out a character called Thersite with strong and powerful principles against the war. Thersites was an ordinary man. Homer has described him as the ugliest person that has ever come in Troy. He was a short, humped backed, carved into his shoulder distortion. On the other hand, this character is never skipped by the author. His words are well carved, resonated in literature and philosophy. He became a model of all renegades who fought eagerly, thoughtfully against all participations in futile wars without any certain and useful reason apart from the personal benefits of military leaders. Homer achieved to transform the ridicule authorities into rational and sensible message he wanted to transmit to the reader.

A very similar analogy is the creation of the character, Mother Courage, a creation of century XX, by a poet and a communist playwright, a character rarely depicted from the humor sense. Homer is one those writers, whose the real, painful war plagues, has described in the most masterful style ever. Almost everything about war in literature after Homer writings did not have that alive greatness and horrendous magic, it had. The difference between Homer and lately writers is based on an extend: even though the appeal of the fighters is still admitted and demonstrated. The Hotspur of Shakespeare and Henry V are examples of echo and strong appeals against the war that became more and more sophisticated and deep in all its consequences. This voice has been heard in the sky of all worlds and of all times.

A voice for characters in antiquity, in modernity and for postmodern ones prevailing such a strong influence. It called for justice, a voice that plows only sufferings and pain, an eager desire to live, for which the war is seen as black hollow absorbing anyone approaches nearby. "The good soldier Schweik" by Hasek is a spark that cannot be extinguished to feed himself by a sweet desire to live the precious life. He is an angel who snuggles in safe corners to save his alive soul, to be saved from icy demons, from irrationality of the World War Two.

These characters try to escape from the claws of death, try to ignore the fake superiority of absurd wars, try to rebel strongly enough toward all this absurdity. The same thing happens with a postmodern writer Joseph Heller. The captain Yossarian expresses a total indifference and an obvious revolt toward the irrationality of the Second World War, whereas the protagonist of Brecht is a revolt of thirty world wars. Both for Brecht and Heller, Hasek is a model and an inspiration for their writings. The term "Thersitism" by Hegel is a tribute for the power of Homer "a memorable personality with worldwide dimensions" (Hasek; 1974), whereas "Schweikism" approaches to the naive person, a passive resistance toward the power of authority, trapped by the bureaucratic war machine Schweik is either a full idiot or a hidden ember using masterfully the sarcastic irony.

He simply denies be using and turning into an instrument of authorities' hands. He simply denies being a part of a world wherein the death is present in every second of it. Yossarian like Schweik demonstrates an absolute indifference toward the rules of war, of prestige the war might bring, the military arms, of patriot sentimentalism. In the very first lines of the novel, when the cleaning woman told him that Ferdinand

had died, he replied, “who’s Ferdinand” (Hasek; 1974) “because I know two, one the currier of the pharmacist and one who gathers animals shits”. “None of them might a loss for us”. (Hasek; 1974). This is a sharp irony for leaders, not for spiritual leaders but for leaders of wars, darkness and hell.

During a Russian military advance, Schweik wears the enemy’s uniform as “an experiment” he declares, “just to prove how he would feel under foreign uniform”. Soon he is arrested by his troops as a spy and here begins all the chain reactions depicting the army of Austrian- Hungary as bureaucrats’ sanguinary carnivals. Facing with the execution, indifference and winding of Svejik can make fool of everybody. In a depressed moment Schweik states:

“That’s why, we are soldiers”, he cried desperately, “that’s the reason why our mothers gave birth to us that one day we could be turned into mince meat as soon as we wear these uniforms”. (Hasek; 1974)... We gladly do this because we know for sure that our bones are not going to be decayed in vain. We are going to be martyrs for the Majesty, for the royal family, and for the grace. They will make refinery sugar with our bones”. (Hasek; 1974)

What joins these rebels is their mindset concerning the war, for them a war is not “either a rebellion, o a business but a disaster” (Brecht; 1994). Brecht warned his natives that war will bring nothing to them but death, sufferings and misfortunate. The drama of war brings endless drama, pain, death, innocent victims and all these are the product of evil insane war. This panorama takes place even in “Catch-22” focusing especially the reality of war hints where the commanders of military just benefit personal profits. The captain John Yossarian just like Thersite thinks that nothing can excuse the aim of war, as the life values on everything. How ugly to profit on victims, on innocents deaths, on chains spirits, on blood in the horrible battlefield! Just like a worm and a mosquito Milo Minderbinder wanders up and down profiting upon any soldiers back and breaking any common sense, any conventional rules and moreover nobody punish him for what he does every now and then, on the contrary everybody profit a little bit form all this “sweet sin” (Heller; 1961) donating ostensibly “shares” to the soldiers in the camp.

This is another wound of war because each of them is deceived, exploited, violated from all humane aspects. Good people, naïve, moderate ones were really insulted when all of them found out what Milo, the officer mess, has done behind their backs only to raise his benefits. He could reimburse government for all the people and properties he had destructed and again he had enough to restart his buying Egyptian wool. Anyone of course profit shares from Milo’s business. “In democracy people are the government” Milo explains, “we are the people, aren’t we”? (Heller; 1961;p 269)

Battles can be sometimes a source of profiteering for many people especially the superiors of that military system. Yossarian cannot hold a world filled with horrors, murders, injustice. Between the reality of war and every ideal, Yossarian sees only the closure of life phase and approaches to the death line. In a passage in the novel, he stated, “Wherever I have a look at, I see people with money on their hands giving and taking. I cannot see Heaven, God, angels. I can smell only money and money nothing else ...in every cell of human tragedy.” (Heller; 1961; p 455) Renegades are always in fight with the evil without excluding the possibility of

defeating themselves from it. If they do not fight for justice, at least they fight for rescuing themselves. This is their principle that only God can prevent them from possessing this motto.

In conclusion, I want to say that inhabitants of this world are confronted by the antagonistic nature of the army. They feel trapped and threatened but also feel compelled to try to make common sense out of an essentially non-sense system. As soon as they reach a conclusion, such as understanding one definition of Catch-22, completing their final mission, the initial figure mutates into something else, spiraling beyond their grasp once again. Ironically, this puts the characters in a position similar to that of the reader as they are confronted by a text (the Air-Corps) that will never yield any substantive conclusions.

As Seed points out, the reader cannot substantiate any of the connections he feels are there and, similarly, the characters cannot substantiate any conclusions. For the soldiers then, "Interpretation becomes nothing but sedimenting one layer of language upon another to produce an illusory depth which gives us the temporary spectacle of things beyond words." (Seed; 1989). Interpretation is futile because each evaluation proves inconclusive and points towards the idea that there is nothing beyond words.

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