

# *Johnny Got His Gun* and “One”: Remembering Basket Case Joe Bonham

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I feel that the great war [sic] picture has not yet been filmed. And I feel that it will not be filmed until some director with stark genius transplants pure insanity on the screen.

—Dalton Trumbo<sup>1</sup>

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## Prologue: “One” resurrects *Johnny*, and *Johnny* launches Metallica.

Certain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons.

—Tim O’Brien<sup>2</sup>

**R**eleased thirty-one years ago, Metallica’s platinum album ... *And Justice for All* (1988), nominated for its first Grammy Award in the new Best Hard Rock/Metal Performance Vocal or Instrumental, was first runner up to Jethro Tull’s *Crest of a Knave*, one of the “Grammy’s 10 Biggest Upsets” according to Michael Endelman in *Entertainment Weekly*.<sup>3</sup> And their début music video “One” (20 January 1989), remixed with sequences from Dalton Trumbo’s award-winning war film *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971) based on his eponymous First World War novel (1939), ranked number one on MTV shortly after its release<sup>4</sup> and thirty-eight in MTV’s “Top 100 Videos of All Time” countdown (1999), giving many viewers not only their first glimpse of the band but also of the film. David Hale, James Hetfield’s older half brother, introduced the novel to him, and James and Lars Ulrich—Metallica’s principal composers—wrote the song in November 1987 with many of the lyrics as well as the title borrowed directly from the novel:

How could a man lose as much of himself as I have and still live? When a man buys a lottery ticket you never expect him to win because it's a million to one shot. But if he does win, you'll believe it because one in a million still leaves one. If I'd read about a guy like me in the paper I wouldn't believe it, cos it's a million to one. But a million to ONE always leaves one. I'd never expect it to happen to me because the odds of it happening are a million to one. But a million to one always leaves one. One. (86)<sup>5</sup>

And that Metallica entitles their album verbatim *sine* the ellipsis from Norman Jewison's film *And Justice for All* (1979) starring Al Pacino as incorruptible impassioned attorney Arthur Kirkland who shouts one of the film's most memorable lines, "You're out of order! You're out of order! The whole trial is out of order! They're out of order!"<sup>6</sup> is no coincidence. It encapsulates the general theme of all the songs as a whole as well as Trumbo's *Johnny*. i.e., Joe Bonham, who never understood the true reason he had to go "over there" to fight a war, is protesting the "out-of-order" rich and powerful who dictate the terms and conditions of war yet who do not imperil themselves, for they send, instead, the working class "over there" to fight other working-class soldiers, a recurrent subtheme of war films well depicted, for example, in Michael Cimino's Oscar-winning *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's César-winning *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (2004), his cinematic adaptation of Sébastien Japrisot's World War I novel. In the latter, for example, *soudeur* (welder) Francis Gaignard desperately tries to explain that reality to other soldiers in the following: "[...] les pauvres font de leurs mains les canons pour se faire tuer mais que ce sont les riches qui les vendent" (13).<sup>7</sup> Based on Trumbo's ideology, Joe probably would go to war for a good reason, such as defending the homeland or fight in the Second World War, "the good war," as Trumbo exemplifies in the characters of fighter pilots

Pete Sandridge (Spencer Tracy) in *A Guy Named Joe* (1943) and Captain Ted Lawson (Van Johnson) in *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944) where the Axis powers are an obvious enemy. The dichotomy between Trumbo's *Johnny* and his other war films illustrates the full gamut of his art in that he completely repudiates war in one and commemorates it in others.

After the album's release, Michael Azzerad, in observing that heavy metal encompasses bands as disparate as Bon Jovi and Metallica, lauds Metallica's universal allure in the following:

Metallica appeals both to critics and to angry, pimply adolescent males [...]; Bon Jovi is a band for 'the kids' [...]. Metallica makes challenging music worthy of considered analysis. [...] The album is crammed with diatribes about nuclear winter, the right to die and judicial corruption, delivered in an aggressive bark by rhythm guitarist James Hetfield. [...] Bon Jovi is safe as milk; Metallica harks back to the time when rock's bite was worse than its bark."<sup>8</sup>

Thanks to Metallica's pharmakonic "bite" in "One," Trumbo's film is "alive" with post-millennials in that cinéphiles and musicophiles alike have arguably viewed perhaps the best sequences of *Johnny Got His Gun*, and consequently one could argue that Metallica reached its zenith thanks to Trumbo's *Johnny*.

### **Introduction: Trumbo—auteur, screenwriter, and producer.**

[They] went to war with Rupert Brooke but came home with Siegfried Sassoon.<sup>9</sup>

In an interview with Guy Flatley of *The New York Times* a year before the release of the only film Trumbo directed, he recounts two World War I atrocities that inspired him to write his third novel *Johnny Got His Gun*, a thought-provoking narrative that J. B. Lippincott strategically

published 3 September 1939—two days after the onset of World War II when Germany invaded Poland. The first one involves Prince Edward VIII of Wales visiting a Canadian hospital where a nonpareil limbless soldier was kept alive via a feeding tube in a secreted room:

At the end of a hallway, there was a door marked “No Admittance.” “What’s in there?” he [Prince of Wales] asked. “We’d rather you not go in there,” they told him. But the Prince of Wales insisted, and when he came out of the room, he was weeping. “The only way I could salute, the only way I could *communicate* with that man,” he said, “was to kiss his cheek.”<sup>10</sup>

Although not as severely injured as the character Joe, the soldier in question may well have been Ethelbert “Curley” Christian, one of the only surviving quadruple amputees of the Great War and thus the allegory to one in a million by Trumbo and “One” by Metallica.<sup>11</sup> The second one involves a British major so mangled that he was purposely reported missing in action. His family discovered years after his death that he had passed away isolated in a military hospital.<sup>12</sup> Those two horrific phantasmagorias so marked Trumbo that they inspired him to write what is perhaps, according to Ben Ray Redman, “one of the most horrifying books ever written. [...] a book that can never be forgotten by anyone who reads it.”<sup>13</sup> That year, it won the prize of Most Original Book at the National Book Awards.

In addition to being moved by the tragic stories of those two soldiers, Trumbo was, likewise, inspired by the personal events in his own life which also appear in *Johnny*, particularly those impressionable moments during his youth and adolescence in Grand Junction, Colorado—referred to as Shale City in the novel—such as fishing with his father, his father’s death, and his night shifts wrapping bread for almost a decade at the Davis Perfection Bakery in Los Angeles, just to name a few. In fact, Bonham’s life almost mirrors Trumbo’s, except Trumbo did not go to

war, for he was too young to fight in *la der des ders*; however, he was, nonetheless, marked by the grimness of the wounds that his hometown soldiers had suffered “over there,” and he believed that the United States should have never entered the Great War: “His reasons had their roots in his experience as a boy, seeing young veterans he had known returning from World War I—some maimed, blind, and broken—to Grand Junction.”<sup>14</sup> For example, Trumbo’s biographer Bruce Cook traces the creation of character Joe Bonham early in the writer’s life when, as a janitor and part-time clerk in Roy Chapman’s bookstore, he would help the young, recently blinded veteran by ritually fitting the shop owner’s glass eyes into his eye sockets every day.<sup>15</sup> Film historian Bob Herzberg, however, strongly criticizes Trumbo’s inserting much of his personal life, accusing him of abandoning his “[...] creative imagination, something that is sorely needed when writing a novel.”<sup>16</sup> Actually, all the flashbacks and the reminiscences of home are central to the theme of the novel and the motion picture, for they re-enforce the understanding of Joe’s retrospective thoughts on World War I: what was the point of fighting in that “far-away war” anyway? Whatever creativity Trumbo lacked in inventing Bonham’s youth, he requited it by choosing to show a masked face instead of a gored one, an effective concept later used by David Lynch in *Elephant Man* (1980) and François Dupeyron in *La Chambre des officiers* (2001) in the first half of their films.

The novel’s title is a play on the verse “Johnny get your gun” from George M. Cohan’s jingoistic song “Over There” (1917), an effective ditty that persuaded many American men to enlist in the military during both world wars, one that Trumbo echoes thrice as Joe boards the train to go off to war so that “democracy may not perish from the face of the earth” (36), a reference to President Woodrow Wilson’s 2 April 1917 request to congress seeking a declaration of war against Germany for which he received a standing ovation. However, it was an onerous

decision, as he afterwards told his secretary Joseph Tumulty the following in a broken voice with tears: "Think of what it was they were applauding. My message today was a message of death for our young men. How strange it seems to applaud that."<sup>17</sup> Immediately ensuing Joe's departure is a reference to the song's title: "And we won't be back till it's over over there" (36). The plot centers on twenty-year-old army soldier Joe Bonham who, after being hit by an artillery shell at the closing of the Great War, loses his entire face—eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Shortly after he regains consciousness in an unknown hospital, the doctors amputate all his limbs, imprisoning him in an unending nightmare as a permanently bedridden stump—a.k.a. a "basket case," a First World War slang denoting a soldier who was so "badly injured that he had to be carried from the battlefield in a barrow or basket, usually with the implication that he had lost all four of his limbs."<sup>18</sup> Although initially unbeknown to them, the only remnants of what the confounded doctors consider a curious "living cadaver" are his humanity and his ability to think and to remember. A prisoner both of his trunk of a body and of the hospital, Joe's mission is to convince the doctors either to kill him or to release him so he can be displayed as an educational exhibit to show people what the carnage of modern warfare entails; thus, the crux of the plot lies in if they will grant "the-dead-living-man-who-is-alive" or "the live-man-who-is-dead" (226) his last request. To mirror the thoughts of the faceless, bedridden, quadruple amputee, Trumbo writes in the modernist stream-of-consciousness style similar to William Faulkner's, for example, with his lack of punctuation in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Book critic Ralph Thompson of *The New York Times* lauds the novel, writing that, "Mr. Trumbo sets his story down almost without pause or punctuation and with a fury amounting to eloquence,"<sup>19</sup> but Herzberg, perhaps not too appreciative about this early twentieth-century writing style, disparages his book, claiming that it needed "[...] a little thing called *editing* [and that he]

ridiculously dispenses with little things like periods, commas and semi-colons, making already awkwardly written sentences truly a chore to decipher."<sup>20</sup> *Chacun a son goût*, or to each his own. Trumbo logically divides the novel in two equal parts: Book I, entitled "The Dead," is primarily a synthesis of memories and soliloquies in Joe's head while Book II, "The Living," focuses on Joe as a Lazarus figure trying to free himself. Even though an award-winning novel, it was taken out of circulation shortly after Pearl Harbor for being "Pro-Axis" and was not republished until 1959 by Lyle Stuart with a new preface by Trumbo and again in 1967 by Bantam just before the 1968 Tet Offensive, the height of the Vietnam War.

Shortly after 1936 when Trumbo started writing movie scripts, he quickly became one of the highest-paid screenwriters in the 1940s, and despite being perhaps the most famous of the "Hollywood Ten," he nonetheless scripted many Academy-Award winning films, notably *Kitty Foyle* (1940), *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944), *Roman Holiday* (1953), *The Brave One* (1956), *Exodus* (1960), *Spartacus* (1960), and *The Fixer* (1968). However, the film for which he may be best remembered happens to be the only one he directed: *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971), starring nineteen-year-old *débutant* actor Timothy Bottoms as Joe Bonham (Trumbo originally had his son Chris in mind),<sup>21</sup> Kathy Fields as Kareen (Joe's girlfriend), Marsha Hunt as Joe's mother, Jason Robards as Joe's father (but Trumbo actually wanted Walter Matthau),<sup>22</sup> Diane Varsi as the new day nurse, and pro bono Donald Sutherland as Christ. Although not a box office hit upon its release in the United States, it nevertheless won *le Grand Prix Spécial du Jury* at Cannes and the FIPRESCI Prize, and Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter—who insisted that his cabinet watch it—said, "it should be required viewing for every American,"<sup>23</sup> just as President John F. Kennedy required his staff to read Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August* (1962).

Trumbo's film was not the first to limelight incommensurable war-mutilated soldiers on the silver screen. Abel Gance's "Army of the dead" sequence in his *J'accuse* (1937) showcased forty actual World War I *gueules cassées*, or "smashed faces," where interred soldiers from the Verdun Douaumont Ossuary rise from the dead to horrify the living so that they not be swept into "the war of tomorrow." Like Gance's sequence of "living gargoyles," Trumbo's filming of Joe's disfigurement and dismemberment, albeit as an entirely sheet-covered quadruple amputee with a full-facial disinfectant drape, was his attempt to provocatively convey the *ne plus ultra* impressionable representation of the violence that the Great War had engendered.

With the end of the centennial anniversary of the Great War, and because of its entrenched legacy, it is imperative to keep the memory of the First World War in the public imagination, and with the eightieth anniversary of the publication of Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun*, the soon to be fiftieth anniversary of the release of his landmark film adaptation, and the thirtieth anniversary of Metallica's "One," it is also befitting and necessary to continue remembering, as Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker observe, that "[t]he history of violence in the 1914-1918 war [...] cannot be separated from the body, for bodies had never previously suffered so much and on such scale."<sup>24</sup> By limelighting Joe Bonham, the average Joe who readily answered the call to serve and survived—albeit as war's most extreme victim, that hapless one in a million—Trumbo symbolically illustrates the horrific consequences of that unprecedented 1914-1918 violence. Thus, the purpose of this essay is to examine and analyze how Trumbo as auteur, scriptwriter, and director adapted his novel to the big screen by focusing on the portrayal of protagonist Joe Bonham's "four faces": "(1) Wounded Joe on the bed in the hospital; (2) Joe's Image, unwounded but trapped in the hospital with the Wounded Joe; (3) Flashback Joe . . . as he was in those incidents from his past which he thinks about and which we



dramatize on the screen; (4) Fantasy Joe, or the Joe of his dreams, of fantasies, nightmares and hallucinations<sup>25</sup>—all within the context of Metallica’s “One.” The only one of the four who is physically different from the other three is “Wounded Joe,” and Trumbo indicates in the script notes that it might be “[...] desirable to costume them differently.”<sup>26</sup> Viewers never see “Joe’s Image,” for he is actually the camera lens looking at “Wounded Joe.”

### Setting: Occupation Forces Base Hospital N° 3, 1918—

A hospital alone shows what war is.

—Paul’s observation in *All Quiet on the Western Front*<sup>27</sup>

The novel begins with Joe lying in a hospital bed remembering the day his mother phoned him at the bakery to tell him to come home because his father had just died; however, after credits roll, the film commences with an entirely black screen and the sound of labored breathing for twenty seconds—it is “Wounded Joe” inhaling and exhaling (Trumbo, 0:2:22-0:2:42). “Joe’s Image” sees “Wounded Joe” lying on a field-hospital table somewhere along the Western Front, and the lens captures the masked faces of three doctors hovering above him as they discuss the severity of his wounds. Once transferred to a temporary hospital, Joe is officially referred to as “unidentified casualty number 47” (Trumbo, 0:4:39), and with the camera in the corner of the room, viewers see the on-call nurse tending to him, a medical orderly disinfecting the room with a sprayer, and Joe—his “stump” completely draped, face entirely bandaged, and four tubes connected to his body to keep him alive. A second completely black screen—accompanied by the ticking of a pendulum clock with the camera personifying “Joe’s Image” in the corner—slowly illuminates to reveal “Wounded Joe” lying in a hospital bed as Bottoms’ distressed voiceover shouts for Kareen, asking, “What happened? [*neque vocem* as the clock’s ticking

ensues] Where am I? [another tick-tock] It's dark in here" (Trumbo, 0:5:58-0:6:47). Thoughts of Kareen make him homesick, but he does not know if he is in an English, French, or American hospital. When he dove into the dugout, he recalls seeing two Americans and the rest "Limeys," so he assumes he is "[...] in some crummy English hospital" (146), intensifying the sense of loneliness because "[...] those Limeys were a funny bunch of guys. They were more like foreigners than a Frenchmen. A Frenchmen you could understand but a Limey was always twitching his nose and you couldn't understand him at all" (146). Eventually, when he senses someone pinning a medal on his chest and mustached person kissing his left and right temple, he presumes he is in France (159-160)—a detail reminiscent of the Prince of Wales kissing Ethelbert "Curley" Christian, the Canadian quadruple amputee soldier who survived the Battle of Vimy Ridge.<sup>28</sup>

After a ten-minute flashback prurient sequence of Joe consummating his love for Kareen, Trumbo resumes his present predicament with the clock ticking and the terrorizing bomb hissing as it falls to the shell hole where he sought shelter. Having lost all his senses but touch, Bonham desperately luttles against obscurity to know time, whether it be the hour, or day or night, or even year. At the overture of Book II in the novel, Trumbo dedicates much to Joe's understanding the importance of time, referencing how Edmond Dantès and Robinson Crusoe kept track of it, and it becomes for Joe "[...] the most important thing in the world. It was the only real thing. It was everything" (126), as he first recollects the one day in September 1918 when he lost it. Eventually, Bonham discovers a way of estimating the sun's rise and set by counting the number of nurse's visits that happen with the number of times his sheets are changed. Then, the day he counted 365 days marks the first year of "his new time" in the hospital and "[his] new year's eve" (141), the falling of a night nurse marks "his second year"

(154), the new hospital room his third, and his tapping “SOS. Help” with his head against the pillow the fourth (163). He finally grasps “real time” thanks to the new nurse who traces the letters that spell “Merry Christmas” against the skin of his breast (198-199).

While scripting the film in 1964-1965, Trumbo had to resolve the problem of breaking the tedium of a long shot of a “Wounded Joe” lying in darkness and, at the same time, portray scenes other than those of his inevitable dire destiny; therefore, he and Bruñuel decided to incorporate “Joe’s Image” as explained in the following voice-over:

When Joe awakens for the first time and asks, “Where am I?” the script describes a camera shot: “medium shot toward a darkened corner of the room.” Then, the script says: “Something sits on the floor. As we INTERCUT back and forth between this corner area and the bed area we realize that JOE’S IMAGE (i.e., Joe as he was before his accident) has been lying unconscious in the corner on the floor, waiting for the WOUNDED JOE on the bed to regain consciousness, thus permitting Joe’s Image also to awaken.” Joe’s Image is awake only when Joe is.<sup>29</sup>

For the setting of the hospital room, production designer Harold Michelson—Academy Award nominee for *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) and *Terms of Endearment* (1983)—explains that, after much search, he decided to use the starkest room with the highest windows in the Doheny Mansion, for “it had an eerie feeling to it.”<sup>30</sup> With director of photography Jules Brenner’s unfiltered black-and-white celluloid, Michelson’s hospital room establishes the desired atmosphere of an austere, sterile, ether-permeated *début-du-siècle* infirmary, an archetypal ambiance recaptured in color by Tetsuo Nagata in Dupeyron’s *La Chambre* for which he won a César. In both films, the viewer can almost smell the crude anesthetic. However, Trumbo’s cameo appearance, for example, as a fantasy surgeon doing a monologue (Trumbo,

0:32:11) with a Vaseline covered iris lens did not enhance the movie and also exemplifies Trumbo's lack of experience as a director.<sup>31</sup>

### **Opening Sequence: From the 1989 U.S. West Coast to the 1918 Western Front.**

Hell is empty, and all the Devils are here.

—Ariel to Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*<sup>32</sup>

Keen on synchronizing sequences of *Johnny* with a live performance of their "One," Metallica savvily bought the rights to the film to avoid paying royalties and charged Michael Salomon and Bill Pope to film the quartet in an empty Long Beach, CA warehouse where the camera crew used monochromatic wash instead of the *à la mode* Technicolor to picture them in their daily attire of jeans and t-shirts doing a jam session. All the band members shine in their premier performance in front of the lens, ignoring the cameras and concentrating on their instruments: James Hetfield on rhythm guitar, Kirk Hammett on lead guitar, Jason Newsted on bass, and Lars Ulrich on drums.<sup>33</sup> Metallica's video opens with a black-and-white clip of guitarist-vocalist James Hetfield, the lens focusing first on the back of his head with long unbridled hair, then on his holding the guitar the way a guard soldier grips a machine gun, and finally on a three-quarter frontal-facial shot centering on his horseshoe moustache as the shadows of ceiling-fan blades spin across him, almost as if they could surgically slice off his face and limbs, foreshadowing Joe's imminent fate (Metallica, 0:0:00-0:0:15).<sup>34</sup> The camera then cuts to the opening sequence of Trumbo's film: we hear the sound of machine guns, a helicopter—a Metallica anachronism, for helicopters had not yet been invented—and the whistling of a bomb falling to the ground immediately followed by its explosion, blasting tons of earth in the air (Metallica, 0:0:17), an

image almost identical to the one in the unforgettable opening sequence of Joseph Losey's *King and Country* (1964).<sup>35</sup>

As the deadly projectile stridently hurdles toward its target in Trumbo's film, the frame fades to a series of documentary shots: first, an extreme zoom shot of President Woodrow Wilson signing the declaration of war followed by the headline of the *Los Angeles Evening Herald* of Friday 6 April 1917, "U.S. Calls For Volunteers"; then a packed crowd of young patriotic Americans waving their Old Glory and a military parade; and finally armed soldiers boarding ship (Metallica, 0:2:04-0:2:17). After a quick cut of the full-frame close up of the bomb's terrifying explosion, the six-second, dead-silent black screen—broken only by the sound of someone taking long, slow breathes—gradually illuminates, revealing three completely masked doctors resembling the Ku Klux Klan because the camera looks upward, thus elongating their fully covered faces. They are in a field hospital where one inquires about the unique, perplexing survival of the unidentifiable wounded soldier lying before them; another wonders how he was able to get such quick treatment; and another explains that his chest and belly are unmarked because soldiers often instinctively curl into a fetal position to protect their genitals and that "[...] this young man, unfortunately, succeeded" (Metallica, 0:2:44-0:3:00). Without battles or bloodshed, the flash-cut sequence effectively captures that devastating loss-of-innocence moment supplanted by the solid reality of war. Finding Joe's survival almost unbelievable, Colonel M. F. Tillery, selfishly wanting to seize a unique opportunity to dedicate a year to study such an odd patient who presumably will never know what has happened to him, takes "[...] personal charge of this case until repairs are completed" (Metallica, 0:3:00-0:3:07). Once outside the infirmary and mask removed, dispassionate Tillery, maimed himself and sporting crutches, reveals that, because the patient's medulla oblongata escaped damage, "[...] his heart, facial,

motor, and respiratory centers still function, in short, that he lives" (Metallica, 0:3:20-0:3:33). By compressing time through the use of montage, Trumbo starkly contrasts the lively enthusiasm with which tens of thousands of Americans enlisted in the war with the most horrific outcome: a living dead, bringing to mind Robert Graves's memoir *Goodbye To All That* (1929), an autobiography describing the destruction and trauma of the Great War that he experienced both in the trenches and in a French hospital where he was pronounced dead while convalescing from shrapnel in his lung at la Somme.<sup>36</sup> Not too unlike Graves, Bonham also becomes a Lazarus figure in that he initially showed no signs of existence other than what the gauges of the life-sustaining machines indicated until the moment when a day nurse realizes that what the doctors had originally diagnosed as "involuntary spasms" are, in fact, his attempts to communicate with them. As Joe is being rushed from the ambulance and into the hospital, Tillery in the following imperturbable voice-over informs the audience of his post-operational orders regarding "unidentified casualty number 47":

Although the cerebellum still permits limited physical movement, such movement signifies nothing. If bodily actions become violent and persistently repetitive, it must be treated as reflexive muscular spasms, which is to say by sedation. [...] There's no justification for his continued existence, unless we learn from him how to help others. We must care for him as gently as if he knew what you were doing and would feel the pain [...]. (Trumbo, 0:4:36 - 0:5:31)

At this moment, five minutes into the film in that cold and sterile hospital room, with a reverse-angle showing the obtuse medical team towering over the "human wreck" who is in an out-of-field frame, thus removing the voyeurism element, the black-and-white one-minute scene marks the moment when Bonham—perhaps an Anglicized contraction of the name *Bon Homme*

indicating that he truly is a good fellow—comes to the realization of the gravity of his condition and of the absurd entourage that now controls his destiny.<sup>37</sup> It is one of the most significant and indelible scenes of the film. Metallica well selected that moment when the uninitiated doctors attempt to treat a never-before-seen “basket case,” and many more gravely disfigured would follow as Dupeyron illustrates with Adrien Fournier in *La Chambre*. Disfiguration, gas gangrene, and left-arm amputations (the left arm was generally unprotected when shooting in the trenches) are examples of “wounds specialties of the Western front.”<sup>38</sup>

In the instrumental overture with studio lights behind him, Hetfield is a black shadow as he picks the first clear tone of alternating Bm-GM chords, immediately forewarning us of the overwhelming serious, solitary, and melancholic destiny of Joe (“Metallica,” 0:0:15-0:0:19). In his concise musical treatise entitled *Règles de composition* (c. 1692), French Baroque composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier outlines the various emotions associated with the keys, or *énergie des modes*,<sup>39</sup> which are still applicable to “One” four hundred years later. That shot fades to the three doctors examining Joe on the operating table, the point when the camera lens first becomes his eyes: he is prostrate, staring at the surgeons and listening to their diagnosis; the first one says, “The cerebrum has suffered massive and irreparable damage,” and the second, “He’ll never know what has happened to him.” In a flash cut, “Joe’s Image” watches an entourage of Catholic nurses, guards, and medics wheel Joe on a covered gurney down the hospital corridor and into the operating room, and in a flash cut back to the present, Joe hears the first surgeon’s sobering conclusion about his condition: “If I had been sure of this, I would not have permitted him to live” (Metallica, 0:0:20-0:0:34).

As the door closes, “Joe’s Image,” upon seeing “Wounded Joe” lying on the table with a protective drape covering his face, torpidly asks, “Where am I?,” followed by a crying echo for

succor: "Father, father, I need help, I need help" (Metallica, 0:0:35-0:0:38)—the all encompassing leitmotif of the film. The camera switches to Hetfield's left hand playing the cords on the guitar neck and then retracts to show only his torso, which, besides the head, is all that remains of "Wounded Joe" (Metallica, 0:0:39-0:0:40). Placing the audience inside wounded Joe's mind for 111 minutes presented an enormous challenge in transposing the novel to the screen, and in addition to relying on voiceover technique, Trumbo also called on the talents of cinematographer Jules Brenner who explains that, in the script, Trumbo describes three colors: the color of memory, the color of drug-induced fantasy, and the desaturated color stock—without filters or manipulations—of reality, and as the cinematographer, "it represented a wonderful challenge."<sup>40</sup> Both techniques, the voiceover and the alternation of black and white with color, had been successfully utilized by Trumbo's collaborator and friend Otto Preminger in *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958).<sup>41</sup> Brenner's unfiltered black and white with the interplay of light and shadow contributes immensely to the making of what some critics had called *Johnny* the "unfilmable" book; however, Trumbo's film was not the only war motion picture to carry that label: earlier critics had said the same about Mike Nichols' *Catch 22* (1970), just as later critics did about Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979).<sup>42</sup>



## From Innocence to Experience:

In many ways he was like America itself, [...], always there when you needed him, a believer in the virtues of simplicity and directness and hard labor.

—Tim O'Brien<sup>43</sup>

Like reminiscing seventeen-year-old Cécile (Jean Seberg) in Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958), "Flashback Joe" always remembers his past in color, not black and white, and by vividly and trenchantly recapturing his youth and happy home life, Trumbo fittingly depicts the state of mind of much of the nation prior to April 1917, i.e., the American population was less than enthusiastic about wanting to go and fight a war "over there," for "[t]he vehemently isolationist nation needed enticement" explains Jia-Rui Cook in "The Posters That Sold World War I to the American Public."<sup>44</sup> Initially, President Woodrow Wilson wanted an all-volunteer army, but six weeks into the war, only 73,000 had done so, forcing him to accept Secretary of War Newton D. Baker's proposal to establish the Selective Service Act of 1917. Thus, the numerous and the lengthy sequences of home "over here" in the novel and in the film constitute a central part of the narration and are crucial to understanding not only the face of "Flashback Joe" but also the three other faces as well. Why was he fighting a war in Europe five thousand miles from Shale City? *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—or the more things change, the more they remain the same—for fifty years later on the other side of the globe, GIs were asking themselves the same question, prompting Trumbo more than ever to adapt his novel to the big screen.

When Joe echoes the question, "What is democracy?", his father replies, "It's got something to do with young men killing each other," and when he pursues his inquiry with, "When it comes my turn, would you want me to go?", his Father replies, "For democracy, any man would give his only begotten son" (Metallica, 0:0:41-0:0:55). In this "artificial" father-son

dialogue, Trumbo portrays Joe's stream-of-consciousness flashback as he lies in the hospital bed, which Peter Hanson explains in the following:

The stilted dialogue of this scene is a means to an end. By having characters speak to themes directly instead of alluding to themes through artful dialogue, Trumbo is able to make leaps of logic that would otherwise have been impossible. Thus, the conversation gets stretched from the odd fishing pole allusion to the question of war, responsibility, and morality.<sup>45</sup>

It is during this sequence that we catch our first glimpse of founding band member and drummer Lars Ulrich—who plays until the beginning of each chorus when the guitars become heavy and distorted before returning to clean—and of guitarist Kirk Hammett who comes in with a solo (Metallica, 0:0:55-0:0:57).

In the video's second color flashback, Joe is at a train station waving goodbye with a 70's peace sign—which is also the cover of the more recent editions of the book—to Karen as he boards the train to go off to war, a scene that Dupeyron imitates in *La Chambre*.<sup>46</sup> The goodbyes end with a seven-second split screen: on the left is Karen standing and waving on the quay, and on the right is a terrified, shell-shocked Joe taking shelter in a muddy shell crater as the bomb plummets toward him. Abel Gance's invention and use of polyvision in *Napoléon* (1927), a technique also called cross cutting, was widely used in the 60s, such as in Norman Jewison's *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968) and in Richard Fleisher's Golden Globe Award-winning *The Boston Strangler* (1968). In the case of *Johnny*, the time travel juxtaposition dramatically depicts not only the near-instant death of Joe's former, whole self but also the birth of his becoming a *gueule cassée* as well as the first black and white shot of all four members getting into their groove ("Metallica," 0:1:08-0:1:15). The split screen constitutes one of the powerful and

memorable sequences of the movie—one which no words can better express and convey, one that contributes to the art and the science of making motion pictures.

In that scene, the lens—fading from Metallica’s recording studio to the military hospital room—acts as “Joe’s Image” walking from behind the door toward the foot of the bed and gradually to the bedside, seeing “Wounded Joe” with both body and face draped, and we hear stolid head surgeon Tillery in his monotone voiceover assuredly confirming that, “[i]t is impossible for a decerebrated individual to experience pain, pleasure, memory, reason, or thought with any kind. This young man will be as unfeeling and as unthinking as the dead until the day he joins them” (Metallica, 0:1:15-0:1:33). Little does the colonel know how inaccurate his diagnosis is, for Joe spends all his time in thought—either remembering, or hallucinating, or reasoning—and he can, indeed, experience pleasure, as depicted in the film when the new day nurse stimulates his penis until he climaxes (Trumbo, 1:11:21-1:12:06).

The video then flashes a superimposed image of Hetfield playing the guitar over bedridden “Wounded Joe” saying, “I don’t know whether I’m alive and dreaming or dead, and remembering. How can you tell what’s a dream and what’s real when you can’t even tell when you’re awake and when you’re asleep. Where am I?” (Metallica, 0:1:35-0:1:45), and then Hetfield, as if awakening from a waning post-surgical anesthesia, calmly and softly begins the song’s first verse with a continued alternation of Bm and G7M chords<sup>47</sup> which well depict Joe’s initial amnesia and confusion, his trying to decipher reality from hallucinations and dreams, as well as introduce the gruesome severity of his injuries—there is barely anything left of his body:

I can’t remember anything  
Can’t tell if this is true or dream  
Deep down inside I feel to scream

This terrible silence stops me  
Now that the war is through with me  
I'm waking up, I cannot see  
That there's not much left of me  
Nothing is real but pain now. (Metallica, 0:1:46-0:2:13)

This opening verse encapsulates the description of "Fantasy Joe" in Book I of the novel, particularly chapter i when Joe, wounded and terrified, cannot distinguish reality from reveries: "He drifted again. He was hurt. He was bad hurt. The bell was fading. He was dreaming. He wasn't dreaming. He was awake even though he couldn't see. He was awake even though he couldn't hear a thing except a telephone that really wasn't ringing. He was mighty scared" (9). Later in the novel and also in the film, Joe imagines that the fat rat that had gnawed away at a Prussian captain's face was now eating on him: "He could feel the sharp little teeth as they bit into the edge of the wound [...] as it chewed. Then it would [...] scoop out a bit more flesh that would hurt and then it would chew again" (91-92). Rats have always played a special role in war films, particularly the fat ones in that apocalyptic "mythical trench landscape of the Great War,"<sup>48</sup> and Joseph Losey's *King and Country* (1964) showcases it perhaps better than any other in the scene when the privates capture a huge, ear-biting rat, put it on trial, find it guilty, and give it a death sentence, just like the officers do Private Hamp. Joe eventually realizes that the rat's gnawing at his body was a dream and recounts that his worst nightmare of all was of that when he believed he was "[...] an ant walking across a sidewalk and the sidewalk was so big and he was so small that he awakened yelling he was so scared. That was the way to stop nightmares by yelling so hard you had to wake yourself up. But hell that wouldn't work for him now. In the first place he couldn't yell and in the second place he was so deaf he couldn't hear the noise

anyhow" (95). Trumbo's message is clear: every volunteer in the Great War is a like a mere ant among millions, and the losing of one for any nation has little impact, if none at all, on the power elite; however, it most certainly does on at least "one."

### **Life vs. Death:**

The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?

—Edgar Allen Poe<sup>49</sup>

Metallica's first chorus—with increasingly aggressive guitar distortion of alternating serious, plaintive, and furious tones of G5-A5-F5 chords<sup>50</sup> accompanied by the lyrics, "Hold my breath as I wish for death / Oh please God, wake me" (Metallica, 0:2:13-0:2:20)—conveys the impotence of the hopeful yet pessimistic ultimate casualty of war: the private who volunteered, the half-dead half-alive "small man," an antithetical being who simultaneously wishes for death and for life. In Fred Zinemmann's *The Men* (1950), upon being shot, Marlon Brando as wretched Lieutenant Wilchuck also expresses Joe's very same fears: "It was a bad shot, or else he was impatient. He must have aimed for my head, but he got me in the back. I couldn't feel anything from my waist down. I thought I was dying. That's funny. That's very very funny. I was afraid I was gonna die. Now, I'm afraid I'm gonna live."<sup>51</sup> The cost of "one" soldier in a million may seem insignificant to an entire country, but that one loss is, however, extremely significant to at least "one,"—the "One"—if not many, at least enough for Trumbo to write an award-winning novel about it, to constantly think about it for three decades, and to direct a movie about it thirty-two years later, and enough for Metallica to sing about it angrily. When "Joe's Image" sees "Wounded Joe" for the first time, he is desperately begging God for help and then whimpers as he imagines his fate:

“They left my head and chopped off everything. Oh god, please make them hear me. They won’t listen; they won’t hear me. If you don’t wake me up, I’ll be like this for years. Hear me” (Metallica, 0:2:20-0:2:34). Joe’s visceral cry for God’s help echoes loudly in “One,” and the entire music world heard it, too, for, in 1989, it won the Grammy Award for best Metal Performance.

To lead into the second verse, a *retour en arrière* from the novel, Metallica uses Trumbo’s shot of the nurse inserting a feeding tube and of the oscillation of the respiratory gauge needle as Hetfield metaphorically describes Joe as a fetus—not the unaware one of which we typically think but rather the conscious, logical, discerning one—with a death wish:

Back in the womb it’s much too real  
In pumps life that I must feel  
But can’t look forward to reveal  
Look to the time when I’ll live  
Fed through the tube that sticks in me  
Just like a wartime novelty  
Tied to machines that make me be  
Cut this life off from me. (Metallica, 0:2:35-0:3:01)

Regarding Joe’s unusual fetus-like condition, Trumbo vividly describes in the novel that there was one operation that none of the doctors could perform: that was to get a “[...] a guy back out of the womb again [because] he was there for good. All the parts that were gone from him were gone forever” (86). Upon realizing his actual predicament, “Wounded Joe” relaxes and thinks more clearly, and he detects from a tugging sensation on his forehead that the doctors had made the “thoughtful arrangement” of placing a soft-cloth mask over his face so the nurse would not vomit at the sight of his *gueule cassée* (87). After the second chorus, “Joe’s Image” at

“Wounded Joe’s” bedside makes the following evaluation: “It’s like a piece of meat that keeps on living. It won’t always be like this, will it?” (Metallica, 0:3:10-0:3:25), a comparison that Joe makes in the novel where the only difference between him and the piece of cartilage in Prof Vogel’s biology class is “[h]e had a mind and it was thinking” (63). As Hammett calmly picks the serious, furious, and plaintive D-G-F-Em chords<sup>52</sup> with Ulrich aggressively beating his drums, we see Joe crying for his mother like a child does when waking up from a frightful dream: “I can’t live like this! I, I can’t! Please no, I can’t! I can’t! Help me, help me, help me! Mother where are ya, mommy, mother? I’m having I nightmare, and I can’t wake up” (Metallica, 0:3:25-0:3:37). A good soldier like Joe is always mindful of and thankful to his mother, the one who gave him life and nurtured him, and many battlefield witnesses have often heard “mother” as the final word of dying combatant. Harry Patch, “the Last Fighting Tommy” of World War I who died 25 July 2009 at the age of 111, witnessed this bond as he was “[...] crawling across no-man’s land with the wounded crying out in agony all around him and just passing them by...He remembered coming across a still-living shattered bleeding wreck of a man who begged Patch to shoot him, but in the time of Patch’s indecision the man uttered the cry ‘Mother!’ and died.”<sup>53</sup>

### **Joe’s Existential Quandary:**

To be, or not to be, that is the question: [...]

—Hamlet in Shakespeare’s *Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*<sup>54</sup>

Director Michael Salomon, wanting to capture the essence of Joe’s desperate plea to God for death, does a series of tight shots of all the band members à la Orson Welles—first a full facial of Hetfield so close that, like the snow flakes on the moustache of Charles Foster Kane, we can

almost see the band leader's teeth fillings; then of Hammett's fingers on the guitar neck; followed by one of Ulrich violently hammering his drums; and finally of the entire quartet jamming—angrily yelling the chorus, "Now the world is gone, I'm just one / Oh, God help me / Hold my breath as I wish for death / Oh please God, help me (Metallica, 0:3:37-0:3:54), which is ensued by a one-minute instrumental during which we see images from the four "Joes". The first is of "Fantasy Joe" seeing himself as a curious oddity in a circus: "Me lying here, like, like some freak in a carnival show," while his father as the ring leader attempting to earn some pennies by attracting potential onlookers in the desert, roars, "Here is the armless, legless wonder of the twentieth century" (Metallica, 0:4:00-0:4:04). The second is of "Wounded Joe" tapping "SOS. Help" (210) with his head on his pillow. At this point in the novel's dénouement, Joe's ultimate wish is to be released from the hospital where his "one room one bed in a jail like an asylum like in a grave with six feet of earth above" (222); however, Trumbo, well aware that the government would not financially support "basket cases" such as him, has Joe fantasize that he "[...] had it in his own power to make money and plenty of it enough to pay his own expenses and the expenses of the people who took care of him too" (224), all while believing he would be serving the general public as a nomadic "educational exhibit" about war, as he expresses in the following:

That would be a great thing to concentrate war in one stump of a body and to show it to people so they could see the difference between a war that's in newspaper headlines and liberty loan drives and a war that is fought out lonesomely in the mud somewhere a war between a man and a high explosive shell. [...] He would show himself to the little guys and to their mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters and wives and sweethearts and grandmothers



and grandfathers and he would have a sign over himself and the sign would say here is a war and he would concentrate the whole war into such a small piece of meat and bone and hair that they never would forget it as long as they lived.

(224-225)

In one regard, Bonham shares the author's entrepreneurial acumen penchant, and thus one lives forever on the page, the other on the screen, and both are unforgettable. If seemingly far-fetched or superfluous, this passage about a basket case imagining a lucrative idea for self-support is quite revealing about Trumbo himself who, having grown up during World War One as a young boy and having known the Great Depression as a man, told Bruce Cook: "I've never been without a job in my life, [...] even during the Depression, even during the blacklist" (21). That aspect of the narrative not only further denotes the verisimilitude between the writer-director and his protagonist, but also renders Bonham's loss of hope and his desire to end it all that much more poignant.

In the third, the camera lens as "Flashback Joe" captures the memory of Corporal Timlon in a trench remarking in his thick Manchester accent upon seeing a dead Bavarian entangled in barbed wire in No Man's land, "Death has a dignity of its own" (Metallica, 0:4:25-0:4:27), illustrating Trumbo's understanding of the respect that the trench brothers shared for each other, regardless of their allegiance. In the novel, Timlon refers to the Hun as Lazarus because he rose from his burial site not once but twice: the first occurs shortly after the "Limeys" had pushed him into a hole and a "Heinie" shell hit him, catapulting him "[...] into the air like a slow motion picture and [he] landed high and dry again on the wire with his finger pointing toward the Limey regiment exactly like a stool pigeon" (150); and the second occurs a couple of weeks after a full, six-foot-deep, Church-of-England burial service when a second shell disinterred him,

throwing his body against a fence “with his [burial] sheets flapping in the wind and parts of him dripping toward the ground” (151). This grim shot reminds viewers of the haunting 1917 photograph of the unknown dead American soldier entangled in the barbed wire in No Man’s land somewhere along the Western Front.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, “Flashback Joe” remembers the moment he dove into a shell hole and sees the bomb that would rip off his face plummeting toward him as “Joe’s Image” echoes, “Father! I need help, I’m in terrible trouble, and I need help” (Metallica, 0:4:38-0:4:42). “Flashback Joe” also recalls his dad giving him the one advice that will eventually allow to communicate with the hospital staff: “Don’t you remember when you were little, how you and Bill Harper used to string a wire between the two houses so you could telegraph to each other. You’ll remember the Morse code?” (Metallica, 0:4:43-0:4:54), and indeed he does. His recollecting it allows him to communicate with his day nurse—the angel Gabriel of the hospital who trumpets to the staff to come listen to the voice of the dead—as he resurrects from the dead not too unlike Lazarus, the only difference being that “[n]ever before in the world had the dead spoken never since Lazarus and Lazarus didn’t say anything” (216), illustrating that Trumbo’s “Wounded Joe” not only represents a miracle of God but also the almighty risen Savior Himself in the following passage: “It was as if all the people in the world the whole two billion of them had been against him pushing the lid of the coffin down on him tamping the dirt solid against the lid rearing great stones above the dirt to keep him in the earth. Yet he had risen. [...] He had done so much he was like god” (214).

In the song’s bridge, a rapid succession of images alternating between the band’s jam session and Trumbo’s film, in the montage the lens first catches the guitarists’ fast repetition of E5-F5 chords<sup>56</sup> like the emptying of a full metal jacket in the furiously rapid firing of a Hotchkiss

M1914 machine gun, followed by a series of quick flashbacks—Bonham diving into a shell crater, the bomb's explosion, his lying on the hospital table, and his cry for help—which prepare us for the gloomy climax with Hetfield yelling, "Darkness imprisoning me / All that I see / Absolute horror / I cannot live / I cannot die / Trapped in myself / Body my holding cell" (Metallica, 0:4:55-0:5:04), as Joe's frantically jerks his head while the attending nurse watches in bewilderment. The image then fades back to the film with a sequence of "Joe's Image" observing the entire medical staff as well as the commanding officers around "Wounded Joe's" bed with one finally deciphering his "involuntary head spasms" to the clueless entourage: "It's Morse code. [...] SOS. Help" (Metallica, 0:5:05 - 0:5:12). As Hetfield shouts "Wounded Joe's" thoughts, "Landmine has taken my sight / Taken my speech / Taken my hearing / Taken my arms / Taken my legs / Taken my soul / Left me with life in hell" (Metallica, 0:5:13-0:5:23), the brigadier general in the film asks, "What's he saying?", to which the chaplain replies, "He said, 'Kill me,' over and over again, 'kill me'" (Metallica, 0:5:24—0:5:30). This line reflects Metallica's poetic license, for both in the novel and in the film, it was not a landmine that almost killed Joe but rather a bomb that disfigured him and wounded his limbs beyond repair, thus the amputations, all culminating in his death wish. Thoughts of suicide are well documented in the *sorties de guerre* (returning veterans) suffering from shell shock and PTSD, especially in the disfigured as Henriette Rémi describes in *Hommes sans visage*, a 1939 autobiographical work recounting her volunteer service in a hospital for *gueules cassées*, and as Dupeyron portrays in *La Chambre's* suicide victim officer Louis Levauchelle whose character most likely represents M. Lazé, the soldier who slit his wrists with a pen knife shortly after his young son, horrified upon first seeing his father's disfigurement, screamed, "C'est pas papa...pas papa!"<sup>57</sup> As Europe was inexorably marching to the unthinkable, Rémi, like Gance, felt obligated to tell her story. Similar

to Lazé's horrified son, Joe's day nurse can not hide her disbelief and dismay as she hears brigadier general asking Parker, "Don't you have some message for him?" to which he replies with disgust, "He's a product of your profession, not mine" (Metallica, 0:5:35 - 0:5:40).

### **Hell on Earth:**

For it would be better to die once and for all than to suffer pain for all one's life.  
—Aeschylus<sup>58</sup>

Following Hammett's twenty-second tapping solo, we see the last doctor leave the room, closing the door behind him, and we hear "Wounded Joe" expressing his death wish to the nurse, "Kill me, I'm asking you to kill me" (Metallica, 0:5:46-0:6:09). Instinctively understanding his non-verbal request, she, similar to Korean War veteran medic Dr. Jack Kevorkian—a.k.a. "Dr. Death" to some, "the angel of mercy" to others with his administering euthanasia to the terminally ill twenty years later—clamps his breathing tube and applies all her weight on his chest to smother him, for which he is thankful; however, she is unable to complete this mercy killing, for the obdurate general re-enters the room, spoiling her efforts. As he forces her out of the room, Joe begs in a gasping whisper, "Wait for me, please" (Metallica, 0:6:24-0:6:26), and then calls for his father once again as "Flashback Joe" recalls his father's adage, "Each man faces death by himself, alone" (Metallica, 0:6:27-0:6:33), and then bids him adieu, "Good-bye father" (Metallica, 0:6:35).

The music video comes full circle to mirror the opening scene, combining shots of the four Joes and the band: first, there is the final close-up of the quartet jamming ensued by Joe calling for help, but for the dénouement, the lens captures an extreme close-up of "Wounded

Joe's" covered face, and as it retracts, we gradually see for the first time the sheet-covered stump of Joe's body as he contemplates in a morphine-induced whisper his helpless chthonic state: "Inside me I'm screaming nobody pays any attention. If I had arms, I could kill myself. If I had legs, I could run away. If I had a voice I could talk and be some kind of company for myself. Why don't they get it over with and kill me? I could yell for help, but nobody'd help me. I just gotta do something. I don't see how I can go on like this" (Metallica, 0:6:42-0:7:13). Then, "Fantasy Joe" imagines a Christmas Eve celebration in the shipping room of the Perfection Bakery where the manager Jody Simmons sporting a tuxedo and his employees dressed in their aprons raise a glass of champagne to welcome Christmas day by singing the verses, "Keep the Home Fires Burning / While your hearts are yearning," from the British patriotic World War I song, "Till The Boys Come Home" (1914). In the film, this scene is significant in that Trumbo illustrates the belligerent dogmatism of the old and wealthy when the "puppet" manager, robotically turning sideways while holding a glass of champagne in one hand, repeats twenty-six times, "I am the boss; this is champagne; Merry Christmas" (Trumbo, 1:19:42-1:25:28), and concludes with his announcing the immediate urgency to fight, "Fellow workers, due to the war emergency, our little holiday will end in just three more minutes, but the ovens are hot, and we must keep the home fires burning. Let us sing" (Trumbo, 1:25:58-1:26:10). Similar to Simmons, the clerk-accountant, dancing like a marionette and wanting to cut in on a young couple, tells the young man, "The time has come for you to go out and fight. [...] We must have a just and lasting peace," to which the lad retorts, "Are you going fight, too?" the clerk-accountant's reply, "I'm over aged, I can't, but somebody's got to fight. We must have a just and lasting peace" (Trumbo, 1:20:45-1:20:59), reflects how Trumbo viewed the modern operandi of the politicians: i.e., neither they nor their family members fight. As the young dancing man expresses his

happiness at having both arms and legs and a girlfriend, he rhetorically asks the bakery account what more could he want, to which replies three times, "Liberty and justice" (Trumbo, 1:21:14-1:21:21). Also, in this scene, we see Joe dancing with Kareen who begs him not to go, but conditioned by the propaganda promulgated by his father and politicians, Joe replies, "I love you, Kareen. You don't understand. I have to make the world safe for democracy" (Trumbo, 1:21:22-1:21:29). It is only once Doughboys such as Joe had experienced the unprecedented violence in the trenches and in No Man's Land that they realized they had been deceived, which Trumbo has Joe express in the novel: "No sir anybody who went out and got into the frontline trenches to fight for liberty was a goddamn fool and the guy who got them there was a liar" (110-111). Denying him his last wishes by tapping the following Morse code message on his forehead, "WHAT YOU ASK IS AGAINST REGULATIONS" (234-235), the medics decide to leave him a prisoner of his own, reduced amorphous body in a hospital utility room to die of old age, only to satisfy their desire to clinically observe this curious "basket case." As Joe falls into a morphine-induced sleep and whispers eight times "SOS. Help me" into oblivion, the movie ends in a fade out with a black screen and the following three lines in an orange-red courier font, all in upper case and the last—Wilfred Owen's "The old Lie"—in bold:

WAR DEAD SINCE 1914: OVER 80,000,000

MISSING OR MUTILATED: OVER 150,000,000

**"DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI".** (Trumbo, 1:45:25)

After his loss of innocence and identity, the annihilation of "unidentified casualty number 47" is now complete.

## Conclusion:

Numbers have dehumanized us. Over breakfast coffee we read of 40,000 American dead in Vietnam. Instead of vomiting, we reach for the toast.

—Dalton Trumbo<sup>59</sup>

If lost on some viewers, Wilfred Owen's citation is perhaps best contextualized by critic Hrundi Bashki who explains that only the dead are glorified while the scarred veterans—the "Johnnies who came marching home"—are forsaken in the following: "Comme le laisse supposer la citation à la fin du film, il est bien plus facile de glorifier les millions de soldats morts pour la patrie en leur rendant un vibrant hommage [...]. Les morts deviennent des héros et les blessés sont tenus à l'abri, seuls et coupés du monde."<sup>60</sup> To attempt to better grasp the effects of the war, one must visit those scarred soldiers as Eleanor Roosevelt did at the mental ward of Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington D.C. where, in order to be allowed to talk to battle-shocked soldier, she had to be locked in the ward with them, " [...] some chained to their beds, others unable to stop shouting of the horrors they had seen."<sup>61</sup> Trumbo's maimed protagonist personifies the unprecedented violence of the Great War which Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker perceptively explain in the following: "[...] the gravity and type of wounds inflicted in 1914-18 had no precedent. A direct hit from large-caliber shell literally pulverized the body, leaving no identifiable remains, [and grasping the severity of that violence is] an indispensable prerequisite to any basic understanding of the 1914-18 conflict, and to any interpretation of the mark it left on the western world."<sup>62</sup> That mark did not go unnoticed to film makers in the post-Treaty of Versailles years, as one critic, for example, likened Joe Bonham's fate to the noir element in the motion pictures of Friedrich "Fritz" Lang—the "Master of Darkness"—who explains that suffering is more frightening than death: "Fritz Lang disait que ce n'est pas la mort qui effraie les gens

mais la souffrance,"<sup>63</sup> which *Johnny* with his continuously rejected SOSs poignantly illustrates.

In the 1960s, as the Vietnam War kept escalating so was Trumbo's desire to create the screen adaptation of *Johnny Got His Gun*, for he wanted to shock us in order to help bring a halt to the bloodletting in Southeast Asia like Abel Gance did with his protagonist Jean Diaz in *J'accuse* (1919) who "develops the mystic power to call back the ghosts of the war dead (played by real soldiers from the front, [...]) to accuse the living and demand to know the reason for their sacrifice" and who in the 1938 version "denounces the coming Second World War, [...] once again summoning forth the spirit of the war dead (played this time by mutilated veterans of the first conflagration) to indict the living at a time of renewed war hysteria."<sup>64</sup> Similarly, almost twenty years after the film's lukewarm reception in the U.S. in 1971, Metallica's choosing to feature *Johnny's* black-and-white, three-and-a-half minute tenebrous hospital sequence for their 1989 blockbuster MTV video "One" represents a momentous contribution of the new medium to the cultural memory of the Great War by reaching mass audiences around the world, particularly the young.

Because the film was released well into the Vietnam War, some critics tend to too broadly catalog *Johnny Got His Gun* simply as another anti-war motion picture and forget the *déjà-vu* parallelism that exists between Joe "over there" on the Western Front and the GIs "over there" in Vietnam, thus minimizing or perhaps even ignoring the time, place, and meaning of the title and the narrative on which it is based—a novel written nineteen years after the First World War, the war that was to end all wars, and one year before the Second, the story of a young American volunteer, a foot-soldier who, like many of his young European counterparts swayed by the jingoistic slogans, answered the call to serve three years later. That lacuna overlooks the abiding impact and legacy of the Great War for Americans. Unlike the Tommies for whom "over



there" lied only twenty miles away, for the Doughboys, it was thirty-five hundred. The greater the distance from the homeland, the further they felt removed from the conflict as many GIs did with Vietnam. That contemporaneity, that unprecedented scale of the violence of 1914-1918, that "new brutality which left enduring marks on the bodies and souls of the participants,"<sup>65</sup> and that gradual acceptance of that new violence is the contribution of *Johnny Got His Gun* to the annals of war motion pictures.

### Epilogue:

Johnny held a different meaning for three different wars. Its present meaning is what each reader conceives it to be, and each reader is gloriously different from every other reader, and each is also changing.

—Dalton Trumbo<sup>66</sup>

As the centennial commemorations of the First World War have come to an end and those of the Second World War are looming, for baby boomers and later generations particularly, revisiting the memory of the Great War remains urgently essential, as violence and armed conflicts in the twenty-first century are almost always taking place "over there," such as in Afghanistan and in Iraq where victims of IEDs and quadruple amputees are no longer medical curiosities. In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Jay Winter laments that, instead of learning from history in order to avoid repeating past tragic mistakes, we seem to be replicating similar ominous circumstances that precipitated the war to end all wars a century ago: "In some ways, the end of the twentieth century appears disturbingly close to its beginnings. [...] The end of the 'Cold War' has brought us back not to 1939 or 1945, but in a sense to 1914. Ethnic and national splits that seemed past history are painfully present today."<sup>67</sup> Since Winter wrote that percipient

observation, the rhetoric of nationalism has disconcertingly accelerated, becoming the dominant force in nations around the globe.<sup>68</sup> The First World War was an exceptional catastrophic event set in motion by an unremarkable assassination in Sarajevo, an unremarkable small, picturesque, provincial capital where ethnic and nationalistic sentiments had been simmering, but soon, with unbelievable rapidity, it embroiled the whole world.

Trumbo's witnessing the consequences of its violence first-hand as a young boy with Roy Chapman's blindness and that of three subsequent wars as an adult were his motivation and his sense of urgency to direct and produce *Johnny* during the Vietnam War in the same manner that Gance and Rémi acted on their convictions on the eve of the Second World War. By the 1960s and early 70s, he was not only well known in the movie industry but also around the nation as well, "[...] especially to that two-thirds of it [the nation] under the age of thirty. [...] He is well known to them, first of all, as the author of *Johnny Got His Gun*, the novel that has spoken more directly to the Vietnam generation."<sup>69</sup> If not considered trailblazing, part of his legacy can, however, be ascribed as his paving a path for portraying the themes of deception and horror for the era of Vietnam War cinema, beginning with Sidney J. Furie's *The Boys in Company C* (1978), Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* (1978), Ted Post's *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978), Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

Dalton Trumbo's cinematic adaptation of *Johnny* may never be inscribed in the National Film Registry; however, it does succeed in capturing the essence of his chosen title: a Doughboy who did get his gun, fought "over there," escaped death, but is now ineluctably condemned to keep on existing, hidden and alone. Similarly, in seven minutes, Metallica conveys visually—with the Cimmerian hospital scenes—and musically—with mordant lyrics borrowed directly from the novel—not only the essence of the motion picture but that of the novel as well. Thus, in step

with the changing face of war and the ever-changing face of the arts, the heavy metal band has passed the torch to the next generation of artists to keep it lit. Like Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son" which was added to the National Recording Registry by the Library of Congress forty-five years after its release in 1969 for being "culturally, historically, and aesthetically significant," Metallica also merits to be included in that American Pantheon.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Larry Ceplair and Christopher Trumbo, *Dalton Trumbo: Blacklisted Hollywood Radical* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 486.

<sup>2</sup> Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Endelman, "Grammy's 10 Biggest Upsets," *Entertainment Weekly*, 2 February 2007, accessed 10 September 2018, <https://ew.com/gallery/grammys-10-biggest-upsets/>.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Crouse, *Who Wrote the Book of Love?: the stories behind the hits—from Chuck Berry to Chumbawamba* (Doubleday Canada: Random House, 2012), 156.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all references to the novel are from Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> "And for All You're Out of Order," MSN, 25 April 2018, accessed 31 October 2018, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/crime/and-justice-for-all-youre-out-of-order/vp-AAwjBsG>.

<sup>7</sup> My translation: "[...] the poor build with their own hands the very cannons that kill them, but it is the rich who sell them," is a line from Sébastien Japrisot's novel, *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (Paris: Denoël, 1991), 13, which is echoed in the eponymous film directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Azzerad, "Metallica: ... *And Justice for All*," *Rolling Stone*, 3 November 1988, accessed 5 September 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/and-justice-for-all-249897>.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph E. Persico, *Eleventh Month, Eleventh Day, Eleventh Hour: Armistice Day, 1918 World War I and Its Violent Climax* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005), 388.

<sup>10</sup> Guy Flatley, "Thirty Years Later, Johnny Gets His Gun Again," *The New York Times*, 28 June 1970, accessed 7 October 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/06/28/>

[archives/thirty-years-later-johnny-gets-his-gun-again-johnny-gets-his-gun.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1970/06/28/archives/thirty-years-later-johnny-gets-his-gun-again-johnny-gets-his-gun.html).

<sup>11</sup> Eric Milzarski, "How this WWI veteran became Metallica's 'One'," *We Are The Mighty*, 14 September 2017, accessed 7 October 2018,

<https://www.werehemighty.com/articles/how-this-wwi-veteran-became-metallicas-one>.

<sup>12</sup> Guy Flatley.

<sup>13</sup> Ben Ray Redman, "In the Midst of Death," *Saturday Review*, 9 September 1939, <http://www.unz.com/print/SaturdayRev-1939sep09-00005/>.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Cook, *Dalton Trumbo* (New York: Scribner, 1977), 124.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>16</sup> Bob Herzberg, *The Left Side of the Screen: Communist and Left-Wing Ideology in Hollywood, 1929-2009* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011), 92.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph E. Persico, 137.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Anthony Jones, "20 Slang Terms from World War I," *Mental Floss*, 11 November 2018, accessed 11 January 2019, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/58233/21-slang-terms-world-war-i>.

<sup>19</sup> Ralph Thompson, "Book of the Times; The Symbol," *The New York Times*, 7 September 1939, Society p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Bob Herzberg, 93.

<sup>21</sup> Chris Trumbo, *Dalton Trumbo: Rebel in Hollywood*, directed by Robert Fischer, (2006; Los Angeles, California: Shout! Factory, 2009), DVD, 0:24:30.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> "Johnny Got His Gun," *Scene, Channel 2 and 17*, volume 8 (St. Paul, Minn.: Twin City Area Educational Television Corp., 1982), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understand the Great War*, translated from the French by Catherine Temerson, (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 24.

<sup>25</sup> Larry Ceplair and Christopher Trumbo, 489.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, translated by A. W. Wheen, (Toronto, ON: Little, Brown & Company, 1929), 266.

<sup>28</sup> Stephanie MacLellan, "World War I Encyclopedia: Christian, Curley," *The Star*, 1 August 1914, accessed 11 December 2018, [https://www.thestar.com/news/world/ww1/2014/08/01/world\\_war\\_1\\_encyclopedia\\_christian\\_curley.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/world/ww1/2014/08/01/world_war_1_encyclopedia_christian_curley.html).

<sup>29</sup> Larry Ceplair and Christopher Trumbo, 489.

<sup>30</sup> Harold Michelson, *Dalton Trumbo: Rebel in Hollywood*, directed by Robert Fischer, (2006; Los Angeles, California: Shout! Factory, 2009), DVD, 0:45:30-0:47:05.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Hanson, *Dalton Trumbo, Hollywood Rebel: A Critical Survey and Filmography* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Co., 2007), 188-189.

<sup>32</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, edited by Horace Howard Furness, (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1892), 397.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Brannigan and Ian Winwood, *Birth School Metallica Death: The Biography, Volume 1* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2013), 305.

<sup>34</sup> All time stamps for Metallica's music video "One" are from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM8bTdBs-cw>.

<sup>35</sup> *King and Country*, directed by Joseph Losey (1964; Tulsa, OK: VCI Entertainment, 2014), DVD, 0:2:42-0:2:45

and 0:4:15-0:4:20.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That: an Autobiography* (Providence, Oxford: Bergham Books, 1995), 196.

<sup>37</sup> Kalopani, "Left Me with Life in Hell," *Sens Critique*, 13 octobre 2017, accessed 11 December 2018, [https://www.senscritique.com/film/Johnny\\_s\\_en\\_va\\_t\\_en\\_guerre/critique/23846592](https://www.senscritique.com/film/Johnny_s_en_va_t_en_guerre/critique/23846592).

<sup>38</sup> Meirion Harries and Susie Harries, *The Last Days of Innocence: America at War 1917-1918* (New York: Random House, 1997), 452.

<sup>39</sup> For a complete list of his *énergie des modes*, see Catherine Cessac's transcription of Charpentier's *Règles de composition* in *Marc-Antoine Charpentier*, ed. rev. et augm (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 491. Also, see Mary Cyr, *Performing Baroque Music* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 32-34.

<sup>40</sup> Jules Brenner, *Dalton Trumbo: Rebel in Hollywood*, directed by Robert Fischer, (2006; Los Angeles, California: Shout! Factory, 2009), DVD, 0:39:00-0:39:47.

<sup>41</sup> Tony Ripley, "Bonjour Tristesse, a golden-age masterpiece ripe for rediscovery," *The Guardian*, 10 October 2012, accessed 30 October 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/oct/10/bonjour-tristesse-masterpiece-ripe-rediscovery>.

<sup>42</sup> Tony Hinds, "The Greatest Films Based on Supposedly 'Unfilmable' Novels," 11 May 2016, accessed 21 October 2018, <https://thefilmstage.com/features/the-greatest-films-based-on-supposedly-unfilmable-novels/2/>.

<sup>43</sup> Tim O'Brien, 111.

<sup>44</sup> Jia-Rui Cook, "The Posters That Sold World War I to the American Public," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 28 July 2014, accessed 6 December 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/posters-sold-world-war-i-american-public-180952179/#slLwRBjHlKkQpSq0.99>.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Hanson, 191.

<sup>46</sup> *La Chambre des officiers*, directed by François Dupeyron, (2001; Paris: ARP—France 2 Cinéma, 2014), DVD, 0:4:09-0:4:50.

<sup>47</sup> See Catherine Cessac, 491, and Mary Cyr, 32-34.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 321.

<sup>49</sup> Edgar Allen Poe, *The Premature Burial* (Bookclassic, 2015), 6.

<sup>50</sup> See Catherine Cessac, 491, and Mary Cyr, 32-34.

<sup>51</sup> *The Men*, directed by Fred Zinnemann (1950; Los Angeles, CA.: Paramount Pictures, 2013), DVD, 0:4:03-0:4:33.

<sup>52</sup> See Catherine Cessac, 491, and Mary Cyr, 32-34.

<sup>53</sup> "Harry Patch," *The War Poetry Website*, accessed 1 November 2018, <http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/Harry.Patch.html>.

<sup>54</sup> William Shakespeare, *Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, edited by William J. Rolfe, (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1881), 95.

<sup>55</sup> American Stock/Getty Images, "Unknown Soldier," see Getty Images, accessed 14 November 2018, <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/an-american-soldier-lies-dead-tangled-in-the-barbed-wire-news-photo/3208123>.

<sup>56</sup> See Catherine Cessac, 491, and Mary Cyr, 32-34.

<sup>57</sup> Henriette Rémi, *Hommes sans visage* (Genève: Slatkine, 2014), 80.

<sup>58</sup> Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, translated by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, (Harmondsworth: London: A.J. Valpy, 1833), lines 750-751.

<sup>59</sup> Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1970), xxix.

<sup>60</sup> My translation: "It is so much easier to glorify the millions of dead soldiers who died *pour la patrie* by rendering them a vibrant homage [...]. The dead become heroes and the maimed are kept hidden, alone and cut-off from the world." Hrundi Bashki, "Critique de film: *Johnny s'en va-t-en guerre*," 28 février 2003, accessed 29 December 2018, <http://www.dvdclassik.com/critique/johnny-s-en-va-t-en-guerre-trumbo>.

<sup>61</sup> Meirion and Susie Harries, 453.

<sup>62</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 20.

<sup>63</sup> My translation: "Fritz Lang used to say that it is not death that scares people but suffering." The Vug, "Critique de *Johnny s'en va-t-en guerre*," *Celluloidz* 23 août 2013, accessed 12 December 2018, <http://www.celluloidz.com/2013/08/johnny-sen-va-t-en-guerre/>.

<sup>64</sup> William Drew, "Abel Gance (1889-1981)," *Gilda's Attic*, accessed 11 December 2018, <http://www.gildasattic.com/gance.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 36.

<sup>66</sup> Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1970), xxix.

<sup>67</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>68</sup> Palavi Gogoi, "How the Rise of the Far Right Threatens Democracy Worldwide," NPR, 21 January 2019, accessed 23 January 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/21/687128474/analysis-how-the-rise-of-the-far-right-threatens-democracy-worldwide>.

<sup>69</sup> Bruce Cook, 21.

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