

## A STUDY OF *CATCH-22*

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### CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Since its publication in 1961, *Catch-22* has been hailed as one of the greatest war books and has already looked like a classic of war literature. Till recently this novel remained its author Joseph Heller's single claim to fame. In praise of *Catch-22* Robert Brustein says, "I believe that Joseph Heller is one of the most extraordinary talents now among us. He has Bellow's gusto...Salinger's wit...He has technical similarities to the Marx Brothers, Max Shulman, Kingsley Amis and S.J. Perelman,...."<sup>1</sup> Born in Brooklyn, Joseph Heller studied literature at New York University, Columbia and Oxford. He has taught writing at Pennsylvania State College but spent more time in advertising. Serving in the air force in the Second World War as a bombardier, he flew 60 combat missions from Corsica over Italy and France. This is an underlying experience for his writing of *Catch-22*, the most fantastic anti-war novel to appear since the war.

*Catch-22*, which Joseph Heller spent sixteen years in conceiving and writing, is really an "eccentric" book. The epithets used by the critics to describe this novel is contradictory and confusing. Eric Mottram and Malcolm Bradbury claim that "it is funny, compassionate, technically original and morally concerned,"<sup>2</sup> while G.G. Urwin declares that the mood of *Catch-22* is "one of farce, zany and unpredictable eccentricity."<sup>3</sup> Shimon Wincelberg's comment that this book is "a sprawling, hilarious, irresponsible, compassio-

1. Quoted from the jacket of *Catch-22* (copyright 1955, 1961 by Joseph Heller, reprinted by 海洋出版社, Keelung, Taiwan, 1971.)

2. *The Penguin Companion to Literature* 3 (Penguin Books Ltd. 1971), p. 121.

3. *The American Novel Today* (Faber and Faber Ltd.), p. 174.

nate, cynical, surrealistic, farcical, lacerating and enormously readable account"<sup>4</sup> is comparable to Frank N. Magill's epithets "comic", "horrifying", "Rabelaisian", "devastating", "exhilarating", "rowdy", "cruelly sane" and "compellingly moving."<sup>5</sup> In a nutshell, *Catch-22* is a novel of the Absurd. This is reminiscent of farce, gibberish, surrealism and even that sub-branch of show-business called "sick humor". Its splendid and honorable roots can be traced back to "Aristophanes, Homer, Cervantes, Swift and just about every other writer, painter or poet who ever had the audacity to attempt works of art out of the meaningless death, tortures and degradation some men undergo at the instance of others."<sup>6</sup> To be more precise, *Catch-22* is a novel using the methods of black humor and the theatre of the absurd to satirize the army, the capitalist state and the horde of doctors and psychiatrists which modern living demands. It is misleading to mistake the novel for a comic book; its comedy, however, is but a veil for its bitterness, as Joseph Heller plays fool to American (and international) militarism.

*Catch-22* is acclaimed to have tremendously appealed to various walks of life. It obviously is an attraction to all those who want the good life and nevertheless reject its particularities, or even avoid defining them. It appeals to the students, who despite their complacency and hipster frigidity are confused and afraid. It appeals to the sophisticated professionals--the educators, lawyers, professors--who must work at something they cannot completely trust. It appeals to the businessmen, who do not fully believe that their power mainly serves the public good. It does appeal to all the new professionals--the advertisers, publicity men, television writers--whose world is almost the same as the absurd one Joseph Heller presents. As a matter of fact, *Catch-22* is somewhat less and something more than the conventional novel. At a time when most of the young American writers appeared so much immersed in the idea of the well-made novel that their books were inclined to be like carefully composed mood studies or tone poems, Joseph Heller violated all the rules. And this unconventional novel pronounces success. We all agree that the older great writers still move us profoundly, but their vision cannot appeal to us: Dostoyevsky was a reactionary and a religious fanatic; Conrad, an anti-liberal; Thomas Mann, a nationalist; Hesse, a

4. "A Deadly Serious Lunacy" in *On Contemporary Literature* (Avon Book Division, 1964), p. 388.

5. *Masterpieces of World Literature Fourth Series* (copyright 1968 by Frank N. Magill), p. 118.

6. Shimon Wincelberg, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

mystic recommending asceticism. "They offer only a diagnosis, not a course of action true in its details. We read them with admiration, respect, even involvement. What they say is intensely true. But when we turn away from their printed pages, we face a different world. They are too idealistic for us...."<sup>7</sup> Thus, among the vast number of books which came after a great war, *Catch-22* made a seasonal appearance. For those who find life nauseating and frustrating, *Catch-22* provides a moral, affirmative way out. No novel of the last decade has spoken better than *Catch-22* to such type of individuals as are portrayed by Frederick R. Karl:

They may wish to do right, but are compromised by the wrongness of their situation. They see themselves as defeated victims, but are forced to carry themselves as victors. They want to love, but find that hate is more sophisticated, and viable. They want to pursue self, but are admonished and shamed into embracing the public good. They desire to aid society, but are warned that only a fool puts self last. They wish for authenticity, good faith, decency, but find that inauthenticity brings immediate and often sensational results. Trying to believe, they more frequently are shocked by the very forces they desire to accept. Wishing to embrace the great world, they find themselves successes in the little.<sup>8</sup>

And the technique Joseph Heller manipulates to speak the mind of the people in the age of anxiety renders the novel at once hilarious and compassionate, and thus presents a grim comedy or tragedy-comedy. The multiplicity or variety of the style of *Catch-22* is very much enjoyed. We can have a clear conception of how multifarious the style of this novel is from Frank N. Magill's delineation: "The book is what one might expect in a collaboration between Kafka and Krazy Kat, to which have been added dialogue passages by a Hemingwayesque master of speech patterns, some scatological scenes suggested by Henry Miller, hallucinated nonsense out of Lewis Carroll, and some chunks of the most undisciplined writing since Thomas Wolfe...It is a collage of wartime violence, sex, military snafu, black market dealing, hymns of hate, and guffaws of gutty humor."<sup>9</sup>

*Catch-22* is the story of a bombardier called Yossarian who flies with the U.S. air force in Italy during the latter parts of the Second World War;

7. Frederick R. Karl, "Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*: Only Fools Walk in Darkness" in *Contemporary American Novelists* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 134.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

9. *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

he thinks he has done enough fighting, but he is not able to get out of combat duty, what with the malignancy of his commanding officer who keeps raising the number of missions, and what with the general stupidity of the military bureaucracy. Yet such a summary will do injustice to the complexity and ingenuity of Heller's style in this novel. Since Chapter II and Chapter III of this thesis are to be devoted to the discussion of the content of *Catch-22*, in this introductory chapter, I propose to give a survey of Heller's method or style. In fact, we ought to attribute the success of this novel to Heller's extraordinary method. Burwell Dodd has pointed out that "It is Heller's method as a novelist which is in question...the novelist who presents fear, pain, and boredom directly may produce a frightened, pained, and bored reader,...Moreover, writing that produces a direct emotive impact often partially or completely precludes intelligent analysis by the reader, at least at the time. And Heller is trying to make us think. He does not want us merely to feel."<sup>10</sup>

But what is Heller's method? Heller's method can be properly discussed under three items: structure, plot incidents, and style. The structure of *Catch-22* is extraordinary since the book has no plot in the usual sense; rather it consists of a series of incidents. Each incident is taken up, partially completed, and so on, over and over. The construction is based on events ending where they began, and still pursuing a mad logic of their own; the seeming unrelatedness of episodes is but an obliqueness which eventually enables one to understand more fully. We may reduce the novel's structure to a diagram like this:

Scenes: A, B, C, D, E, etc. then

Scenes: B, D, E, A, C, etc. etc.

In the second repetition, the order of scenes is shuffled, individual scenes drop out, and new ones are added. The purposefully confused and incomplete structure provides a feeling of sameness and hence a sense of full understanding.

The specific incidents which underlie the structure of *Catch-22* are often improbable and even impossible. Take for instance the luckless flyers who are forced to abandon their plane in the waters off Marseilles. After deserting the plane, they find that their Mae Wests wouldn't inflate because

10. "Social Commentary and Narrative Technique" in *Approaches to the Novel* (Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh London, 1967), p. 73.

their mess officer, the remarkable Milo Minderbinder, has stolen the carbon-dioxide capsules to make ice cream sodas for the officers' mess. And there is the famous scene in which Yossarian, the hero of this book, takes off his clothes and presents himself nude on parade to receive a medal. The third incident worth mentioning is Doc Daneeka's "death". As a group flight surgeon, he dislikes flying and arranges for a friendly pilot to put him on the flight roster while he actually stays on the ground. But the plane he is "in" crashes, and he is considered dead and cannot receive pay or food. Of course, the crowning impossible incident is Orr's escape. He crashes his plane in the Mediterranean, climbs into a rubber dinghy, and "paddles all the way" to Sweden. Nevertheless, a good reader accepts all these happenings, because they are logical extensions of the world of the book. "And since Heller uses these events to comment upon life, our attention is focused not upon the events themselves, but upon their meaning. We do not ask ourselves about the possibility or impossibility of what happens, because we are too busy seeing the significance behind the particular happenings."<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Heller's style is best illustrated in his handling of language. Since he sees the world as a place in topsy-turvy condition, it is desirable for him to turn language inside out. For example, after Yossarian sleeps with his face down in the sand, he "woke up blinking with a slight pain in his head and opened his eyes upon a world boiling in chaos in which everything was in proper order"<sup>12</sup>. The novel is full of many such paradoxical statements and not only does Heller confuse the reader, but also his characters become caught in language. In Chapter VIII we see that Clevinger is put on trial for he says that the military authorities have no right to punish him. A hostile prosecutor is questioning him:

"All right", said the colonel. "Just what the hell did you mean?"

"I didn't say you couldn't punish me, sir".

"When?" asked the colonel.

"When what, sir?"

"Now you're asking me questions again."

"I'm sorry, sir. I'm afraid I don't understand your question."

"When didn't you say we couldn't punish you? Don't you understand my question?"

11. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

12. Joseph Heller, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143. Hereafter only page numbers will be given in parentheses immediately after each quotation.

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"No, sir. I don't understand."

"You've just told us that. Now suppose you answer my question."

"But how can I answer it?"

"That's another question you're asking me."

"I'm sorry, sir. But I don't know how to answer it. I never said you couldn't punish me."

"Now you're telling us when you did say it. I'm asking you to tell us when you didn't say it."

Clevinger took a deep breath. "I always didn't say you couldn't punish me, sir." (76)

Heller makes us conscious of the power of language by confusing us and his characters with it. We see language as a part of the proper, chaotic order of the world, and we are compelled to distrust language.

Thus, in *Catch-22*, structure, plot incidents and style are all muddled on purpose, because Heller has been stressing one of his themes that the world has become a nightmare of chaos. So the structure and style of *Catch-22* successfully reinforces the subject matter of a masterpiece.

## CHAPTER II THE VICTIMS OF *CATCH-22*

*Catch-22* is set in the closing months of World War II, in an American bomber squadron on a small island of Italy. As a matter of fact, we can view the squadron as a circus of clowns. But in spite of all the quips and jokes, the burlesque acts and the funny-face characters, there is a macabre prevalence of death. The comedy is derived from the fear of painful death lightly planned by those officers who are beyond death's reach. Those officers can be best described as the devils of the pandemonium in the nightmarish world of *Catch-22*.

In this circus of clowns or in this pandemonium, almost all the aircrews are cowards: they try to avoid flying missions, they drop their bombs anywhere and run, they think only of how to desert or escape into the hospital. And their logic asks, "Why not?" They have all flown numerous missions and watched their friends die; the war is plodding towards its inevitable end; and the highranking officers who control their lives and deaths are careerists, fools or sadistic tyrants. And almost all the air-crews are doomed to be the victims of those tyrants who bring *Catch-22* into play. *Catch-22* is the principle which keeps the half-crazed and exhausted bomber crews of the

unspeakable Colonel Cathcart's squadron flying a quota of mission irrationally raised each time they are about to reach it. One of its definitions runs, "they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing." (398) As Shimon Wincelberg has pointed out, "'They' are Heller's preposterous (perhaps just a shade too preposterous) colonels and generals, a gallery of childish, senile, vain, malicious, frightened incompetents playing a paper-helmet war for the gratification of their corkscrew egos and titanic insecurities, for some nebulous form of social or commercial advancement, . . . or simply to get themselves written up in the *Saturday Evening Post*."<sup>1</sup> To crown it all, one of the craziest aspects of *Catch-22* presents itself in the following absurd dialogue:

Yossarian looked at him soberly and tried another approach. "Is Orr crazy?"

"He sure is", Doc Daneeka said.

"Can you ground him?"

"I sure can. But first he has to ask me to. That's part of the rule."

"Then why doesn't he ask you to?"

"Because he's crazy," Doc Daneeka said. "He has to be crazy to keep flying combat missions after all the close calls he's had. Sure, I can ground Orr. But first he has to ask me to."

"That's all he has to do to be grounded?"

"That's all. Let him ask me."

"And then you can ground him?" Yossarian asked.

"No. Then I can't ground him."

"You mean there's a catch?"

"Sure there's a catch," Doc Daneeka replied. "*Catch-22*. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy." (45)

and in the following passage:

There was only one catch and that was *Catch-22*, which specified 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. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was

1. "A Deadly Serious Lunacy" in *On Contemporary Literature* (Avon Book Division, 1964), p. 389.

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sane and has to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of *Catch-22* and let out a respectful whistle.  
(46)

As Doc Daneeka, the medical officer, explains, he can ground anyone who is crazy, but anyone who wants to avoid combat duty is not crazy and therefore he cannot be grounded. This is *Catch-22*, the inevitable loophole in the scheme of justice. *Catch-22* explains Colonel Catchart, who continues to raise the number of missions and volunteers his enlisted men for every dangerous operation. It explains the struggle for power between General Dreedle, who wants a fighting outfit, and General Peckem, who wants to see tighter bombing patterns and issues a directive ordering all tents in the Mediterranean theatre to be pitched with their fronts facing toward the Washington Monument. It explains Captain Black, the intelligence officer who forces the officers to sign a new loyalty oath each time they get their map cases, flak suits and parachutes, pay checks, haircuts, and meals in the mess. It especially explains Lieutenant Milo Minderbinder, the mess officer, who dedicates himself to parlay black market operations into an international syndicate in which every man, as he says, has a share.

Before we come to those who really fall prey to *Catch-22*, it is fitting and proper that we pause for a moment to look into Colonel Catchart who puts *Catch-22* into practice, because in a certain sense, he himself is also a victim of *Catch-22* which symbolizes the dark side of the war. Catchart, the group commander, is actually the embodiment of the nasty *Catch-22*. His sadistic pleasure lies in keeping raising the number of missions the men have to fly. And what makes things worse is that none of the generals seem to be against what he is doing, although as far as he can detect they aren't particularly impressed either, which makes him suspect that perhaps sixty combat missions are not enough and that he ought to increase the number at once to seventy, eighty, a hundred, or even two hundred, three hundred, or six hundred! Psychologically speaking he is the devil of a sadist. This can be best illustrated in the instance of the mission to Bologna. Before the mission, there is a continuing rainfall which delays the mission to Bologna. But despite that each day's delay deepens the shadow of death, which spreads with the continual rain, Colonel Catchart tries to pour oil on fire. The medical tent "had been ordered closed by Colonel Korn so that no one could report for sick call, . . . With sick call suspended and the door to the medical

tent nailed shut, Doc Daneeka spent the intervals between rain perched on a high stool, wordlessly absorbing the bleak outbreak of fear with a sorrowing neutrality...The sign was bordered in dark crayon and read: 'CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. DEATH IN THE FAMILY.'" (107) This is really a farce performed in cold blood by a Mephistopheles who sells his soul for the exchange of fame and wealth—in Cathcart's case, it is for the exchange of promotion (to be a general) and fame.

As Heller has shown us, Cathcart is a "military tactician who calculated day and night in the service of himself. He was his own sarcophagus...He was tense irritable, bitter and smug. He was a valorous opportunist who pounced hoggishly upon every opportunity Colonel Korn discovered for him and trembled in damp despair immediately afterward at the possible consequences he might suffer." (186) In short, Cathcart is actually a self-centered and self-interested opportunist. He wants desperately to be a general at any cost, so he tries anything, even religion. And it follows that one day he summons the chaplain to the office and points abruptly down toward his desk to a copy of *The Saturday Evening Post*. The chaplain sees an editorial spread dealing with an American bomber group in England whose chaplain says prayers in the briefing room before each mission. Cathcart wants to know if saying prayers before each mission will work in his squadron. All that is in his mind is "May be if we say prayers, they'll put my picture in *The Saturday Evening Post*." (188) (He gives up this idea when he learns that officers and enlisted men must pray to the same god.) Finally he tells the chaplain, "You'll let me know if you can think of anything for getting our names into *The Saturday Evening Post*, wou't you?" (194) Even Corporal Whitcomb gets promotion because he reminds Cathcart that the letters to the families of casualties can carry the latter's signature. Cathcart "is absolutely sure they'll get him into *The Saturday Evening Post*." (274) He'll try to get in touch with the editors of *The Saturday Evening Post*. This mania for getting his name and picture into *The Saturday Evening Post* urges him to increase for his outfit the number of required missions above those required by 27th Air Force Headquarters. By the time he has set the number at eighty, Kraft, McWatt, Kid Sampson, and Natelly die their tragic death, Clevinger and Orr have disappeared, the chaplain has been disgraced, Aarfy has committed a brutal murder, Hungry Joe screams in his sleep night after night, and Yossarian is still searching for new ways to stay alive.

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General Dreedle is another high-ranking officer who in Heller's mind becomes a victim of the war and who cuts a poor figure because he never conceives of the possibility of limits upon his authority. He, like Cathcart, enjoys inflicting pain on others as he likes. This can be exemplified by an incident in which he attends a briefing. During the briefing the men start to moan because they compare their lot, dangerous combat, with his. He is accompanied by his "nurse," a succulent young woman, who never leaves his side. He is irritated to hear the men's moaning and orders them to stop. At the same time, Major Danby, the officer conducting in the briefing, has been synchronizing watches and hears neither the moans nor the general's order. He reaches the end of his count-down of seconds, looks up, and finds that no one has been paying attentions. He moans too.

"What was that?" roared General Dreedle incredulously, and whirled around in a murderous rage upon Major Danby, who staggered back in terrified confusion and began to quail and perspire. "Who is this man?"

"M-major Danby, sir," Colonel Cathcart stammered. "My group operations officer."

"Take him out and shoot him," ordered General Dreedle.

"S-sir?"

"I said take him out and shoot him. Can't you hear?" (218)

When he is intervened by Colonel Moodus, General Dreedle bellows, "You mean I can't shoot anyone I want to?" (219) It seems that in Dreedle's mind to shoot one of his men is a matter of crashing an ant, for on another occasion when Colonel Cathcart complains about the chaplain, Dreedle also blurts out, "If he wasn't a chaplain, I'd have him taken outside and shot." (279) General Dreedle is actually a man who tries to sway his power merely to obtain safety and morbid pleasure for himself:

Furthermore, General Dreedle addicts himself to sexual perversion and is also a sadist. His nurse is depicted as a girl with "asinine smile," "full red lip and dimpled cheeks." (216) Her bosom is lush and is irresistible. But Dreedle tries to use this nurse as a bait to tantalize his son-in-law Colonel Moodus rather than to have himself driven crazy:

"You should see her naked," General Dreedle chortled with croupy relish, while his nurse stood smiling proudly right at his shoulder. "Back at Wing she's got a uniform in my room made of purple silk that's so tight her nipples stand out like bing cherries...I make her

wear it some nights when Moodus is around just to drive him crazy." General Dreedle laughed hoarsely. "You should see what goes on inside that blouse of hers every time she shifts her weight. She drives him out of his mind. The first time I catch him putting a hand on her or any other woman I'll bust the horny bastard right down to private and put him on K.P. for a year." (213)

General Dreedle's propensity for abnormal pleasure is also evident when he says he does not mind seeing Yossarian receive the medal without any clothes on. But this will be dealt with in the next chapter concerning Yossarian.

In the world of *Catch-22* in which patriotism and profit are indistinguishable, Lieutenant Milo Minderbinder, the mess officer, becomes the personification of international commerce. He is a victim of the war in the sense that he has been doing his best to turn black marketing into Big Business. As Heller tells us, he is a man with "a simple, sincere face that was incapable of subtlety or guile, an honest, frank face with disunited eyes, ... It was a face of a man of hardened integrity who could no more consciously violate the moral principles on which his virtue rested than he could transform himself into a despicable toad." (63) But we can hardly absorb the shock of irony when Heller says in the immediate following sentence that "one of these moral principles was that it was never a sin to charge as much as the traffic would bear. He was capable of mighty paroxysms of righteous indignation, and he was indignant as could be when he learned that a C.I.D. man was in the area looking for him". (63) He claims that bribery is against the law but it is not against the law to make a profit, therefore it can't be against the law for him to bribe someone in order to make a fair profit. This claim assures us that his crookedness is not consistent with his simple and sincere face. As a mess officer and an opportunist, he tries to win over every senior officer, for he knows that senior officers think only of their stomachs. Once he even goes so far as to steal the carbon-dioxide capsules to make the strawberry and crushed-pineapple ice-cream sodas for the officers' mess and replace them with mimeographed notes that read: "What's good for M & M Enterprises is good for the country." As a result, when Orr and his five crew are forced to abandon their plane in the waters, they find their orange Mae West life jackets fail to inflate and dangle limp around their necks and waists because of the stealing of twin carbon-dioxide cylinders by Milo.

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Milo's career of "turning black marketing into Big Business" begins with "buying eggs for seven cents apiece and selling them for five cents". The smell of fresh eggs snapping in pools of fresh butter brings General Dreedle to devour all his meals in Milo's mess hall. Then the other three squadrons in Colonel Cathcart's group turn over their mess halls to Milo and give him an airplane and a pilot each so that he can buy fresh eggs and fresh butter for them. And finally the three other bomb groups in General Dreedle's combat wing jealously dispatch their own planes to Malta to buy fresh eggs, but find that eggs are sold there for seven cents apiece. Since they can buy them from Milo for five cents apiece, it is advisable for them to turn over their mess halls to his syndicate too, and give him the planes and the pilots to ferry in all the other food he promises to supply as well. But what is puzzling is how Milo buys eggs "for seven cents apiece and sells them for five cents" and at the same time still makes a profit? It is of course the operation of black market that enables him to do so. He buys the eggs in Sicily for one cent apiece and transfers them to Malta secretly at four and a half cents apiece in order to get the price of eggs up to seven cents apiece. He sells them to his mess halls for five cents apiece while they are sold in Malta for seven cents apiece. People have to buy them from him and he is obliged to make a profit of four cents apiece. Although his profit-oriented mind once almost makes a mistake by cornering the market on Egyptian cotton, after some judicious bribery, he sells it to the United States Government.

The climax of his career comes when he lands a contract with the Germans (who make him a reasonable offer: cost plus 6%) and rents his fleet of private planes to the Germans and from the Pianosa control tower directs the bombing and strafing of his own outfit:

They (Milo's planes) bombed with their landing lights on, since no one was shooting back. They bombed all four squadrons, ... Men bolted from their tents in sheer terror and did not know in which direction to turn. Wounded soon lay screaming everywhere. A cluster of fragmentation bombs exploded in the yard of the officer's club and punched jagged holes in the side of the wooden building and in the bellies and backs of a row of lieutenants and captains... They doubled over in agony and dropped. The rest of the officers fled toward the two exits in panic and jumped up the doorways like

a dense, howling dam of human flesh as they shrank from going farther. (252)

This is really terrible and incredible! Milo deals with the enemy on the ground that the Germans are not enemies and that "The Germans are also members in good standing of the syndicate," (251) and it is his job to protect their rights as shareholders. But it goes without saying that this highly treacherous action of bombing his own outfit outrages men of public decency. "High-ranking government officials poured to investigate. Newspapers inveighed against Milo with glaring headlines, and Congressmen denounced the atrocity in stentorian wrath and clamored for punishment. Mothers with children in the service organized into militant groups and demanded revenge." (254) But Milo opens his books for public inspection and shows the profit he has made. He can pay back the government for all the people and property he has destroyed and still have enough money left over to keep on buying Egyptian cotton. And of course everybody owns a share. Then everything is all right, for, as has been mentioned, in the strange and mad world of *Catch-22*, patriotism and profit can not be distinguished; the world lives by Milo's motto, the claim that whatever is good for the syndicate is good for the nation. Milo continues to take to black market operation. He flies fearlessly into danger and criticism by selling petroleum and ball bearings to Germany at high prices to make a good profit. He raises the price of food in his mess halls so high that all officers and enlisted men have to transfer all their pay to him in order to eat. He becomes indispensable. He is not allowed to fly missions (though he wants to win medals), because the whole system would fall apart if anything happened to him. He becomes more than a syndicate: he is ironically a ruler of men and countries, a mystical omnipresent figure--the Vice-Shah of Oran, the Caliph of Baghdad and Major Sir Milo Minderbinder of the Welch Fusiliers, to name but a few of his dignities. But the crucial point is, in him we actually see the reflection of the 20th century world where commerce and opportunism reign and combine to create the finest state of chaos or methodical anarchy.

Doc Daneeka may be categorized as one of those who refuse to fall a sacrifice to the cruel *Catch-22* or the maddening war. But since he goes so far as to become a self-pitying coward, it is proper to include him in those who are victimized by the war. Doc Daneeka is a flight surgeon, but it is ironical to see him brood over his health and go almost every day to

the medical tent to have his temperature taken by one enlisted man. Besides his health, he worries about the Pacific Ocean and flight time. He is afraid that if he ever displeases Colonel Cathcart by grounding Yossarian who is the challenger of *Catch-22*, he may suddenly find himself transferred to the dreadful Pacific. But what he fears most is the flight time. He hates to fly, but he still likes to draw his flight pay. Yossarian helps him to realize the wish. Yossarian persuades McWatt to put Daneeka's name on the flight log for training missions or trips to Rome. Unfortunately, the plane he is "in" crashes, and since he is not seen to parachute out, he is "dead" and cannot receive pay or food. This is really a ridiculous dilemma a coward deserves to suffer from. His wife "split the peaceful Staten Island night with woeful shrieks of lamentation when she learned by War Department telegram that her husband had been killed in action." (335) And just as she is growing resigned to the loss of her husband, the postman rings with a letter from overseas that is signed with Daneeka's signature and urges her to neglect any bad news concerning him. She dashes off a note to her husband demanding for details and sends a wire informing the War Department of the error, but the War Department replies that there has been no mistake and that she must be the victim of some sadistic and psychotic forgers in her husband's squadron. The letter to her husband was returned unopened. So she is cruelly widowed again, but she is mitigated by a notification from Washington that she is sole beneficiary of her husband's \$10,000 GI insurance policy. As a result, "The husbands of her closest friends began to flirt with her. Mrs. Daneeka was simply delighted with the way things were turning out and had her hair dyed." (337) At the same time, Doc Daneeks, back in Pianosa, is having a miserable time wondering with apprehension why his wife fails to answer his letter. He draws no pay or PX rations and depends on the charity of Sergeant Towser and Milo. His wife collects his life insurance, moves away with her children, and is lost to him. Presumably, he is trapped forever in Italy, a living "dead" man.

The enlisted man who is really made mad by the war and who dies in his sleeping is Hungry Joe. The most pitiful part of Hungry Joe lies in the fact that his nerve has broken down. Even the steady tickling of a watch in a quiet room tortures his unshielded brain:

"Listen, kid," he explained harshly to Huple very late one evening, "if you want to live in this tent, you've got to do like I

do. You've got to roll your wrist watch up in a pair of wool socks every night and keep it on the bottom of your foot locker on the other side of the room."

Huple thrust his jaw out defiantly to let Hungry Joe know he couldn't be pushed around and then did exactly as he had been told. (51)

And as a way to give vent to the fear pent up in his subconscious depth, he has screaming nightmares and wins fist fights with Huple's cat each time he finishes his missions. One night Havermeyer fires a shot at a mouse and Hungry Joe bolts out at him barefoot, "ranting at the top of his screechy voice and emptying his own .45 into Havermeyer's tent as he came charging...and vanished all at once inside one of the slit trenches...Hungry Joe was babbling incoherently when they fished him out from the dank bottom of the slit trench, babbling of snakes, rats and spiders....There was nothing inside but a few inches of stagnant rain water." (30-31) It is small wonder and a great pity that at last he dies in a nightmarish sleep, leaving no end of lamentation on the part of all concerned.

Compared with Hungry Joe, the mad hermit who hides himself in the woods is lucky. But this Captain Flume, who intends to live in the woods until he finds out that Chief White Halfoat dies of pneumonia, is also a victim of war or *Catch-22*, for his "body was a bony shell inside rumpled clothing that hung on him like a disorderly collection of sacks. Wisps of dried grass were glued over him; he needed a haircut badly. There were great, dark circles under his eyes." (272-273) He sneaks into the mess hall through the back and eats in the kitchen. Whenever it rains, he just gets wet. He tries to run away from *Catch-22*, but he is doomed to fail, for he still has to eat stealthily in the mess kitchen and be provided with sandwiches and milk by Milo, the entrepreneur of the black market.

Major Major becomes a tragic-comic character under the sway of *Catch-22*. The secret that he is an illegitimate child kills his mother, which is just fine with his father, who has decided to marry the girl at the A & P if he has to. The funny part is that Major Major is an ineffectual squardon commander who is promoted by an I.B.M. machine and who spends the better part of his day forging Washington Irving's name to official documents and listening to "the isolated clinks and thumps of Major---de Coverley's horseshoes falling to the ground outside the window of his small

office in the rear of the orderly-room tent." (89) Still more funny is the scene where he reports to Lieutenant Scheisskopf:

Lieutenant Scheisskopf turned white as a sheet when Major Major reported to him in California with bare feet and mud-caked toes....The civilian clothing in which he reported for duty to Lieutenant Scheisskopf was rumpled and dirty. Lieutenant Scheisskopf...shuddered violently at the picture Major Major would make marching barefoot in the squadron that coming Sunday.

"Go to the hospital quickly," he mumbled, when he had recovered sufficiently to speak, "and tell them you're sick. Stay there until your allowance for uniforms catches up with you and you have some money to buy some clothes. And some shoes. Buy some shoes."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't think you have to call me 'sir,' sir," Lieutenant Scheisskopf pointed out. "You outrank me."

"Yes, sir. I may outrank you, sir, but you're still my commanding officer."

"Yes, sir, that's right," Lieutenant Scheisskopf agreed. "You may outrank me, sir, but I'm still your commanding officer. So you better do what I tell you, sir, or you'll get into trouble. Go to the hospital and tell them you're sick, sir. Stay there until your uniform allowance catches up with you and you have some money to buy some uniforms."

"Yes, sir."

"And some shoes, sir. Buy some shoes the first chance you get, sir."

"Yes, sir. I will, sir."

"Thank you, sir." (86)

And to crown it all, one day he is soundly busted when he camouflages in his false mustache and dark glasses and goes to the basketball game to have fun. Those pretending not to recognize him use his disguise as a license to kick him and gouge him. He is beaten spinning to the edge of the ditch and sent sliding down on his head and shoulder. He finds his footing at the bottom, clambers up the other wall and shambles away beneath a hail of blows until he lurches into a corner of the orderly room tent. But his chief concern throughout the entire assault is to keep his dark glasses and false mustache in place so as to keep on pretending he is somebody else. Despite all the farcical performances on the part of Major Major the incompetent Colonel Cathcart still chooses Major Major instead of Captain Black to

succeed Major Duluth as squadron commander, to the great dismay and embittered resentment of Captain Black who has been imagining himself to be the logical man to succeed Major Duluth. When the fellow officers express surprise at Colonel Cathcar's choice of Major Major, Captain Black mutters that there is something funny going on; when they speculate about the political value of Major Major's likeness to Henry Fonda, Captain Black asserts that Major Major is really Henry Fonda; and when they say that Major Major is somewhat odd, Captain Black declares that he is a Communist. The preposterous scene ends with Captain Black's decision that he will try to "turn that bastard Major Major out of his trailer" (114) and to turn his wife and kids out into the woods (the latter he can't do because Major Major has no wife and kids).

Need we go on? It will make an unbearably long list of the victimized enlisted men if we keep on, although we can still add Nately's whore, her kid sister and the wounded gunner Snowden to the list. So far we have already had a clear picture of Heller's creative comic vision, in which we can see that all the generals want only honor, all the flyers want only peace, and everybody wants comfort. We should also be conscious of Heller's underlying rage at the homicidal and suicidal stupidity with which wars are fought. However, since in a certain sense those who turn the scale in the novel are the challengers of *Catch-22* rather than the victims of *Catch-22*, it is time to hurry to the next chapter to observe closely how the challengers of *Catch-22* play their parts.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE CHALLENGERS OF CATCH-22

The challengers of *Catch-22* are those who refuse to be crushed down by the maddening war and who succeed in running away from it. In this sense, only two persons are to come under our discussion, that is Yossarian and Orr. Since Yossarian is the protagonist of this novel, it is natural to dwell on his role as a challenger in the best part of this chapter.

As is shown in the preceding chapter, the world of *Catch-22* is one of madmen at war. It is an absurd microcosm in which those who have power use *Catch-22* merely to obtain safety and amusement for themselves. They need not risk their lives in planes. "For the sake of commendation, self-

satisfaction, medals and future security in the service, they engage in a rat-race and consider the flying men as nothing more than expendable materials".<sup>1</sup> In this world, fairness and justice are nonexistent, and hostile people can freely enjoy bullying others. The air force in Heller's novel "is less a fighting unit than a bureaucracy perpetuating itself through flagrant but persuasive use of authoritarian logic--*Catch-22*..."<sup>2</sup> Many enlisted men are killed by this unhuman military bureaucracy, and some of them made mad. But Yossarian refuses to become a victim and remains the sanest--or the maddest ("That's just what I mean", Dr. Stubbs answered. "That crazy bastard may be the only sane one left." [109])--all the time. We see that Yossarian has progressed through a five-step process. He analyses and understands, rebels, is tempted away from rebellion, stiffens and rejects the temptation, and in an *epiphany* begins his escape from the crazy world in which he finds himself. Having decided that death in war is a matter of circumstance and having no wishes to be caught by any kind of circumstance, he tries by every means he can think of--malingering, defiance, cowardice, irrational acts--to get out of the war. This resolution comes after the disastrous raid over Avignon, when Snowden (symbolizing pure whiteness) the radio-gunner is shot almost in two, splashing his fresh blood and entrails over Yossarian's uniform and teaching the bombardier the cold and simple fact of man's vulnerability and mortality. This terrible calamity is recollected almost at the end of the novel in a flash-back way when Yossarian is lying at the hospital. "He was cold and thought of Snowden, who had never been his pal but was a vaguely familiar kid who was badly wounded and freezing to death...when Yossarian crawled into the rear section of the plane..." (426) Although Yossarian's stomach turns over and he is completely revolted when his eyes first behold this gruesome scene, he tries to draw a tourniquet around Snowden's thigh and then loosens it to lessen the danger of gangrene. Now he rummages for scissors.

"I'm cold," Snowden said softly. "I'm cold."

"You're going to be all right, kid," Yossarian reassured him with a grin. "You're going to be all right."

"I'm cold," Snowden said again in a frail, childlike voice. "I'm cold."

1. G. G. Urwin, *The American Novel Today* (Faber and Faber Ltd.), p. 175.

2. Eric Mottram and Malcolm, *The Penguin Companion to Literature 3* (Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), pp. 121-122.

"There, there," Yossarian said, because he did not know what else to say. "There, there."

"I'm cold," Snowden whimpered. "I'm cold."

"There, there." (427)

Yossarian begins cutting carefully through Snowden's coveralls high up above the wound, just below the groin. Now the wound he sees "was not nearly as large as a football, but as long and wide as his hand, and too raw and deep to see into clearly. The raw muscles inside twitched like live hamburger meat." (427) This is really the situation which presents a revelation or *epiphany* in which Yossarian experiences disillusion and the need of showing compassion toward his fellow enlisted men at stake. This disillusionment is instrumental to Yossarian's later rebellious behaviors.

After the Avignon mission Yossarian takes off all his clothes, refuses to wear any clothes and goes around without them, his logic being that "There are ten million men in uniform who could replace me. Some people are getting killed and a lot more are making money and having fun. Let somebody else get killed." (102) He remains naked until the day when General Dreedle arrives to award the bombardier a Distinguished Flying Cross and finds that Yossarian wears no uniform on which to pin the medal. General Dreedle's firm jaw swings open at the sight and he strides right down the line to make sure that there is really an enlisted man wearing nothing but moccasins waiting to receive a medal from him. But the funniest and most ironical part in this accident is the following dialogue:

"Why isn't he wearing clothes?" Colonel Cathcart demanded of Colonel Korn with a look of acute pain, tenderly nursing the spot where Colonel Korn had just jabbed him.

"Why isn't he wearing clothes?" Colonel Korn demanded of Captain Pitchard and Captain Wren.

"A man was killed in his plane over Avignon last week and bled all over him," Captain Wren replied. "He swears he's never going to wear a uniform again."

"A man was killed in his plane over Avignon last week and bled all over him," Colonel Korn reported directly to General Dreedle. "His uniform hasn't come back from the laundry yet."

"Where are his other uniforms?"

"They're in the laundry, too."

"What about his underwear?" General Dreedle demanded.

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"All his underwear's in the laundry too," answered Colonel Korn.

.....  
"Don't you worry, sir," Colonel Cathcart promised General Dreedle with a threatening look at Yossarian. "You have my personal word for it that this man will be severely punished."

"What the hell do I care if he's punished or not?" General Dreedle replied with surprise and irritation. "He's just won a medal. If he wants to receive it without any clothes on, what the hell business is it of yours?" (215)

General Dreedle's unexpected comment on Colonel Cathcart's promise that Yossarian will be severely punished shows that General Dreedle is a farcical nut as well as suggests that he concedes to Yossarian's rebellious act. Then, when Snowden's funeral is going on, Yossarian even perches naked on the lowest limb of the tree and balances himself with both hands grasping the bough directly above. Milo finds him and struggles upward clumsily to sit with him. Yossarian is completely nude but for a pair of crepe-soled sandals, but Milo is "dressed in his customary business attire--olive-drab trousers, a fresh olive-drab shirt and tie, with one silver first lieutenant's bar gleaming on the collar, and a regulation dress cap with a stiff leather bill." (255) What a contrast! Furthermore, Yossarian is untouched by the fustian charade of the burial ceremony, while Milo is being worried to the degree of crushing bereavement by the case of "cornering market on Egyptian cotton". The contrast between them is further intensified by Yossarian's prophetic utterance that the tree he perches in is the tree of life and of knowledge of good and evil, too. Can Heller be insinuating that Yossarian is a Jesus crucified on the cross symbolized by the wood of the tree? This may be a controversial topic. However, it will be safe to say that the two episodes of naked Yossarian in the tree and in ranks suggest the searching for innocence and purity on the part of Yossarian in an irrational world. This "insane sanity" reminds us of a Chinese literary man in Chin Dynasty, Liu Lin (劉伶), who is well-known for his taking fancy to "taking off clothes and being naked" (脫衣裸形). In the modern sense, Liu Lin is a member of Beat Generation, which used to include hipsters and beatniks. It is very likely that here Heller intends to have Yossarian assume the air of the hipsters or beatniks who according to Norman Mailer "use vocabulary and are more likely to have a good mind."<sup>3</sup>

3. Donald M. Kartiganer & Malcolm A. Griffith ed., *Theories of American Literature* (Macmillan Co., 1972), p. 393.

The next incident in which Yossarian presents himself as a challenger of *Catch-22* or a "sanctified sinner" is his venture to move the bomb line "on the big, wobbling easel map of Italy". The bomb line is a scarlet band of narrow satin ribbon that shows the forwardmost position of the Allied ground forces in every sector of Italy. The unbearably sinister atmosphere which penetrates the enlisted men before Yossarian takes his action is like this:

The resentments incubating in each man hatched into hatred. First they hated the infantrymen on the mainland because they had failed to capture Bologna. Then they began to hate the bomb line itself... and hated it because it would not move up high enough to encompass the city. When night fell, they congregated in the darkness with flashlights, continuing their macabre vigil at the bomb line in brooding entreaty as though hoping to move the ribbon up by the collective weight of their sullen prayers. (118)

And in the middle of night Yossarian tiptoes out of his tent to move the bomb line up over Bologna. What immediately follows is an ironical and bitter contrast to the background before the bomb line is moved:

Colonel Cathcart was overjoyed, for he was relieved of the embarrassing commitment to bomb Bologna without blemish to the reputation for valor he had earned by volunteering his men to do it. General Dreedle was pleased with the capture of Bologna, too, although he was angry with Colonel Moodus for waking him up to tell him about it. Headquarters was also pleased and decided to award a medal to the officer who had captured the city. There was no officer who had captured the city, so they gave the medal to General Peckem instead, because General Peckem was the only officer with sufficient initiative to ask for it. (119)

Here Heller's satire is at its best. The incompetent, conceited and corrupted high-ranking officers and headquarters are relentlessly and bitterly attacked. Through Yossarian Heller slashes away with great power, leaving no head unturned.

If the moving of the bomb line is one of the active rebellions against *Catch-22*, then Yossarian's going off to the hospital is a silent conspiracy against the ridiculous and evil catch. Yossarian is now in the hospital with a pain in his liver that falls short of being jaundice. If he has jaundice, the doctors will discharge him; if not, they will send him back to duty.

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Actually, the pain in his liver has gone away, but he does not say anything and the doctors never suspect. Yossarian spends some of his time censoring the enlisted men's letters and to break the monotony he invents games. To some letters he signs Washington Irving's name as censors. On others he crosses out the letter but adds loving messages signed by the chaplain's name. The hospital would be a good place to spend the rest of the War if it were not for a talkative Texan and a patient so cased in bandages that Yossarian wonders at times whether there is a real body in it. Anyway, Yossariaan feels much safe inside the hospital than outside it. "He could start screaming inside a hospital and people would at least come running to try to help; outside the hospital they would throw him in prison if he ever started screaming about all the things he felt everyone ought to start screaming about..." (171-172) Cowardice is one of Yossarian's ways to protest against *Catch-22*, and the hospital is the best place to practice cowardice and to protect his sacred life.

Now it is time to make it clear again that Yossarian's rebellion and cowardice as shown in the above mentioned incidents are based on a solid ground: in an impossible world, one finally has to resort to the honoring of his own self; in an absurd situation, the individual has the unique right to seek survival and consider himself supreme. Karl has driven it home when he says, "When Yossarian decides that his life does count, he is making a moral decision about the sanctity of human existence. Life must not be taken lightly, either by others (military men, business manipulators, world leaders) or by oneself."<sup>4</sup> Major Sanderson's reprimand that Yossarian has a morbid aversion to dying and has deep-seated survival anxieties actually justifies Yossarian's rebellion and cowardice. As Sanderson puts it right, Yossarian is "antagonistic to the idea of being robbed, exploited, degraded, humiliated or deceived." (297) And to crown it all, the following famous dialogue between Yossarian and Clevinger shows Yossarian at his best in defending the individual's right to live and the reverence for life which Albert Schweitzer has so desperately advocated:

"We are talking about two different things," Yossarian answered with exaggerated weariness. "You are talking about the relationship of the Air Corps to the infantry, and I am talking about the relation-

4. Frederick R. Karl, "Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*: Only Fools Walk in Darkness" in *Contemporary American Novelists* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 136.

ship of me to Colonel Cathcart. You are talking about winning the war, and I am talking about the war and keeping alive."

"Exactly," Clevinger snapped smugly. "And which do you think is more important?"

"To whom?" Yossarian shot back. "Open your eyes, Clevinger. It doesn't make a damned bit of difference who wins the war to someone who's dead." (122)

"It doesn't make a damned bit of difference who wins the war to someone who's dead" is really an epigram or maxim. It is on this argument that Yossarian's rebellion is based. To himself, Yossarian is as valuable as a general or a president. He has a right to save himself and enjoy himself once he has done his share of the world's dirty and nasty business. It follows that he rejects the mission to Bologna. He threatens Kid Sampson to turn back the plane to the field. After the landing he leaves his things on the sand and walks to the knee-high waves to be completely immersed in them. He submerges himself into the green water several times until he feels clean and wide-awake and then stretches himself out in the sand and sleeps with face down until the planes returning from Bologna wake him up with their great and cumulative rumble coming crashing in through his slumber. Here a sharp contrast is presented between the catastrophic mission to Bologna and the ubiquitous summon of the Mother Earth with its consoling green waters, or between the devastating war in a civilized and industrialized world and the long-felt desire or necessity to return to nature. What is more, Yossarian asks Nurse Duckett to frequent the beach and thus quenches his thirst for life by reaching ravenously to grasp and hold her flesh while lying on the beach:

Frequently they went to the beach at night and did not make love, but just lay shivering between the blankets against each other to ward off the brisk, damp chill. The ink-black nights were turning cold, the stars frosty and fewer. The raft swayed in the ghostly trail of moonlight and seemed to be sailing away. A marked hint of cold weather penetrated the air...It thrilled Nurse Duckett rapturously that Yossarian could not keep his hands off her when they were together...(330)

Here Yossarian bids a farewell to arms and throws himself into the arms of nature and Nurse Duckett. He is just following the call of the wild. And we know that Joseph Heller is again taking pains to accuse Catch-22 or the

damned war by means of antithesis when he immediately brings Yossarian at the beach to recollect the day Mcwatt's plane comes blasting suddenly into the sea:

There was the briefest, softest *zssz!* filtering audibly through the shattering, overwhelming howl of the plane's engines, and then there were just Kid Sampson's two pale, skinny legs, still joined by strings somehow at the bloody truncated hips, standing stock-still on the raft for what seemed a full minute or two before they toppled over backward into water finally with a faint, echoing splash and turned completely upside down so that only the grotesque toes and the plaster-white sole of Kid Sampson's feet remained in view. (331)

Then on the beach, all hell breaks loose, and everyone is screaming and running. This is really the antipodes of the scene in which Yossarian enjoys himself in the arms of nature and Nurse Duckett.

Yossarian likes Nurse Duckett's company, but it seems that Yossarian enjoys her sensuously than spiritually and Nurse Duckett responds to him in the same way. Yossarian enjoys her long white legs and supple, callipygous ass; he often fails to realize that she is slim and fragile from the waist up and hurts her in moments of passion by hugging her too roughly. He finds solace and sedation from her nearness just because he has a craving to touch her always, to remain always in physical communication. "He liked to encircle her ankle loosely with his fingers as he played cards..., to lightly and lovingly caress the downy skin of her fair, smooth thigh with the backs of his nails..." (329) In a word, Yossarian enjoys making love to her in a voluptuous way, just as he enjoys making love to all the vigorous bare amoral girls in Rome (though in a less degree). We also know that he has a recurring dream, that is to have the nude milk-white bodies of the beautiful rich black-haired countess and her beautiful rich black-haired daughter-in-law lying stretched out in bed erotically with him at the same time. Meanwhile, he is in love with Luciana, "the prurient intoxicated girl in the unbuttoned satin blouse." He even wants to marry her, notwithstanding that she refuses, insisting that she is not a virgin. Yossarian runs looking for her in all the French offices but he fails to find her. Then he runs to the enlisted men's apartment for the squat maid with a broad, brutish, congenial face, and makes love to her. So far enough incidents have been presented to demonstrate that Yossarian tries his best to avoid love while seeking sex. But we should

say that Yossarian is justified in seeking full hips, breasts and thighs, because, as Karl points out, in the world of *Catch-22*, "What is left is the only true thing remaining for all men: healthy, robust, joyful sex. Not love--Heller carefully draws the distinction--for love means entanglements and involvements that will eventually lead to phoniness"<sup>5</sup>. It is not so curious that love itself falls victim to a society in which true feeling had better stop at orgasm and that love is martyred amidst people whose every feeling is promiscuous. In a certain sense, Yossarian rebels against the phoniness of love or the society itself as well as the absurdity of *Catch-22* or the war itself. What Yossarian has done is a biting comment on contemporary Americans with their shocking promiscuity and corruption.

Now Yossarian has finally to take action to run away from the frightening world of *Catch-22*. When Milo in a plane cruising toward Rome informs Yossarian that he is ashamed of Yossarian because he refuses to fly more combat missions, thinks of his own safety and deteriorates morale, Yossarian keeps nodding in the co-pilot's seat and tries not to listen as Milo prattles on. Many enlisted men are on his mind, as are all the poor and stupid and diseased people he has seen in Italy, Egypt and North Africa and knows about in other parts of the world. The way in which he reasons foreshadows the ensuing soul-searching conflict between his conscience and self-interest: "Someone had to do something sometime. 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." (396-397) And in this one and the same chapter "The Eternal City", Yossarian also witnesses the culminating nightmarish scene of *Catch-22* when he walks in the street of Rome in lonely torture. He sees a boy in a thin shirt and thin tattered trousers walking out of the darkness on bare feet. His sickly face is pale and sad. This boy makes Yossarian think of "cripples and of cold and hungry men and women, and of all the dumb, passive, devout mothers with catatonic eyes nursing infants outdoors that same night with chilled animal udders bared insensibly to that same raw rain." (403) Then a nursing mother tramps past holding an infant in black rage, and she reminds him of the barefoot boy in the thin shirt and thin, tattered trousers. Yossarian cannot but keep wondering. He wonders how many people are destitute that same night, how many homes are shanties, how many husbands are drunke and wives socked,

5. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

and how many children bullied, abused or abandoned. How many families hunger for food? How many hearts are broken? How many suicides will take place, how many people will go insane? There are still eleven more "how many's" to be followed. Yossarian certainly tries to embrace all the miseries in the world. He really shows mercy to myriads of wretched people. This is the reason why "Yossarian is a Jesus among the money-lenders, without the mean sense of righteousness of a potential Messiah."<sup>6</sup> Now this Messiah has to go on walking in the tomblike street, or rather the purgatory, before he reaches his heaven or paradise. In fact this is a "journey as a motif". It is really a pilgrim's progress, for there are still many nightmarish scenes waiting for Yossarian: an Allied soldier having convulsions; a young lieutenant with a small, pale, boyish face; an unhappy female voice pleading, "Please don't. Please don't."; a despondent young woman in a black raincoat with much black hair on face; a man beating a dog with a stick like the man beating the horse with a whip in Raskolnikov's dream; a man beating a small boy brutally in the midst of an indifferent crowd of adult spectators who make no effort to stop him; human teeth lying on the drenched, shining pavement near splotches of blood; a crying soldier holding a saturated handkerchief to his mouth supported by two other soldiers waiting for the ambulance; and "a young woman materialized with her whole face disfigured by a God-awful pink and piebald burn that started on her neck and stretched in a raw, corrugated mass up both cheeks past her eyes!" (407) This chapter, "The Eternal City", in which these horrible scenes are vividly presented, is really a sensational chapter. In it, we have a clear picture of Rome the eternal city or "the grandeur that was Rome" reduced to a dilapidated shell, as if modern Goths and Vandals have devastated everything in their path. As Karl has summarized for us, "Here we have Heller's immoral world, a scene from Hieronymus Bosch's Hell, in which Aarfy can freely rape and kill while Yossarian is picked up for lacking a pass. Caught in such a dark world, Yossarian can only run toward the light."<sup>7</sup>

With this Hell of Bosch's in mind, we can well imagine how trivial the temptation offered by Colonel Cathcart is and that it is no wonder that Yossarian should turn it down. Yossarian's temptation is in the form of a return to the United States as a military hero, given that he will accept the

6. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

world as it is and agree to say nice things about Cathcart and his fellows who stand for this world. The book ends as he, following the suit of Orr who has ditched his airplane in the sea (he has been practising the maneuver throughout the book) and rowed to Sweden, starts for Rome on his way to neutral Sweden and safety. Thus, in a real sense he is a Hero, a modern Everyman escaping from the maddening chaos which mankind has created for itself. Or as Karl has put it, "Yossarian is a great American--if we must have this point--an American of whom we should all be proud,..."<sup>8</sup> Of course, the action of running is no final solution: just behind him in violent pursuit is Natelly's whore with her flashing knife, intending to revenge herself on Natelly's death. But Yossarian survives after all, and he will get to Sweden, "where the level of intelligence was high and where he could swim nude with beautiful girls with low, demurring voices..." (303)

As a matter of fact, Orr and Yossarian's running to Sweden is no more immoral than Yeats's "Sailing for Byzantium." Both places signify a state of mind other than a real place. We can be sure that when Yossarian arrives in Sweden he will be disappointed and frustrated because not all the tall and blonde women will be condescending enough to be his girl friends and to swim nude with him; the government will even ask him to work. Yet Sweden remains an idea. It may prove a falsified Eden, but man in his distress and desperation may still aspire to Paradise. Many readers may see Yossarian as immoral, cowardly or anti-American. But as Karl assures us, this will indicate "what falsely patriotic hearts beat sturdily beneath seemingly sophisticated exteriors." It will not be disputed that Yossarian has assumed his responsibility to society at large, and has dedicated his energy and sweat. Now it is high time for him to seek a meaningful life, and in Sweden the individual seems to have a chance, a vision which Yeats prophesies in his mythical Byzantium. We have to repeat that Yossarian is a man who acts in great faith (to quote Sartre's phrase), that in a world in which war has turned all men into madmen, nothing is certain except the individual insistent assurance of his own honor, and that the only certain thing in a mess of absurdity is the individual's own identity. "It is better to live on one's feet than die on one's knees," (242) says the old man who argues with Natelly. But could it be that Joseph Heller makes the old man Yossarian's mouthpiece? If what the old man says is not convincing enough, then a statement by

8. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

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Yossarian himself will justify him: "Don't talk to me about fighting to save my country. I've been fighting all along to save my country. Now I'm going to fight a little to save myself. The country's not in danger any more, but I am." (435) At the end of the book, when Major Danby insists that Yossarian can't just turn his back on all his responsibilities and run away from them, and that it is such a negative move and escapist, Yossarian laughs scornfully. He retorts that he is not running away from his responsibilities. Instead, he is running to them. There is nothing negative about running away to save his life and he and Orr are not escapists. To quote Karl again, "Yossarian's decision that life must pre-empt all other considerations is precisely this moral act of responsibility."<sup>9</sup> In choosing life, Yossarian shows himself to be reflective, conscious, and free. All the other enlisted-men are slow-moving creatures living in the swampy depths of self-delusion; they are not necessarily bad men, but they are simply unaware, which makes them unable to be free. It is Yossarian, the hero, who undergoes his solitary ordeal alone, and the ordeal is magnificently worthwhile: to defy death under the name of reason and life.

#### CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

Judging from the superficial, we may conclude that *Catch-22* is an anti-war novel, an exposure of the bloodiness, absurdity and pointlessness of war, and that in theme, fable and mood, it deals with the simple, grim realities of survival in a world with all values reversed by the violence of war. But I would rather assert that *Catch-22* is an attack on 20th century in general and that it is a microcosm as it might look to someone dangerously sane. As we have already known, in the world of *Catch-22*, fairness and justice do not exist; it is a place in which hateful people can take the liberty of inflicting harm on others. And this world can be generalized from the war setting of the novel to the whole of life. This generalization can occur partly because Heller describes Colonel Cathcart as if he were a business executive rather than a military commander, and partly because Milo Minderbinder's business operations make their appearance throughout the book. We cannot but sense that *Catch-22* operates in business, in politics, and even in the academic

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9. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

area. In a world like this, men of good will must either escape or perish, and if this world is sane, then madness alone makes sense. *Catch-22* has good reasons to be "an assault, made in hilarious prose, on the mechanical, institutionalized, homogenized, anesthetized society we live in today."<sup>1</sup>

Written in hilarious prose as it is, *Catch-22* of course should not be mistaken for a comic novel full of puns, slapstick and guffawing satire. It is true that this book has these in abundance, but its purpose is serious. For one thing, the comedy of Yossarian is the comedy of a romantic and natural man forced to do the nasty work of the world. The comedy of *Catch-22* is but a cloak for its bitterness, for Heller intends to ridicule American or international militarism. Robert Brustein says, "his (Heller's) mordant intelligence, closer to that of Nathanael West, penetrates the surface of the merely funny to expose a world of ruthlessness self-advancement. Despite some of the most outrageous sequences since 'A Night at the Opera', *Catch-22* is an intensely serious work."<sup>2</sup> The best explanation of why Heller makes use of farce to allude to a grim purpose is that he tries to make credible the incredible reality of American life in the middle of twentieth century. We do not consider the possibility or impossibility of what happens in the book, because our attention is focused on the significance behind the particular events. For example, Doc Daneeka's "death" is a type for the actual changing of reality by administrative muddle. Things like his "death" do happen with frightening frequency in the military services. Milo's case is another example. At first sight, Milo is unbelievable when he makes a contract with the Germans by which American pilots bomb an American airfield, killing and wounding hundreds of men. Milo's contract is ridiculous, but so are those Japanese Zeroes made of American scrap metal. If treaty of war is justified, why must Milo's contract be absurd? In a similar way, we are busy exploring the significance of Orr's paddling a rubber dinghy from Italy to Sweden without bothering about its impossibility. The point is that Orr knows that flight is the only course. The impossibility of his way of escaping does not count beside the fact of his escape. If those incompetent officers can use absurd *Catch-22* against their subordinates, then Orr is entitled to use the same kind of impossible logic for his own purpose. Bernard Bergonzi's comment is really to the point:

It seems to me that in absurdist or comic-apocalyptic fiction there are two opposed impulses at work. The first of them is, in its own

1. *Masterpieces of World Literature Fourth Series* (copyright 1968 by Frank N. Magill), p. 120.
2. Quoted from the jacket of *Catch-22*.

way, realistic; that is to say, it grapples with the 'incredible reality' and tries to understand it, if not make it wholly credible. The difficulty is, of course, that American reality is constantly transcending itself, moving to heights of absurdity or horror that leave the most extravagantly inventive novelist lagging behind. What work of comic-apocalyptic fiction, for instance, could rival the vast and growing volume of writing, whether speculative or factual, about the events in Dallas in November 1963, full of fantastic suggestions of conspiracy and counter-conspiracy?...<sup>3</sup>

Yes, compared to the absurdity or horror of the assassination of John Kennedy, *Catch-22* is really nothing absurd. If Heller's novel has an underlying purpose, it will be found in the writer's belief that a comic vision of experience and a sense of the shockingly absurd in human affairs provide the only possible stance for rational men in a world in which there is no dividing line between graspable reality and wild fantasy.

In a novel written in a style of so-called "black humor," we should feel its tragic overtones, and we know that Heller's awareness of a passing era is at the center of the tragedy. As Karl tells us, Heller is possessed by the nostalgia of the idealist--such a writer's style is usually jazzed-up, satirical and surrealistic--the idealist who will never take that moral values have become meaningless in human conduct. *Catch-22* is a classic message novel in which we carefully listen to the monody against vanity, egoism, hypocrisy, malice and folly--the stigmata of the twentieth century.

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3. *The Situation of the Novel* (Pelican Books, 1972), p. 102.