

Heading

Running header with author's last name and page number

Smith-Jones 1

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Original title (no punctuation added)

Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*: From Satire to Protest

Signal phrase (introducing quotation)

In his poem "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," W.B. Yeats writes, "Those that I fight I do not hate, / Those that I guard I do not love." This statement, apparently a contradiction, opposes the notion that war is supposed to be the ultimate form of patriotism. Nonetheless, the statement accurately describes the views of the novelist Joseph Heller, best known for his World War II novel *Catch-22*. Written as a satire against the insanity of war, the novel became an ideal expression of the anti-war protests of the 1960s.

Thesis statement

Joseph Heller, born in Brooklyn, New York, grew up in a working-class Jewish neighborhood during the Great Depression. At the age of nineteen, after graduating from high school, Heller joined the Air Force. The year was 1941. Throughout World War II, Heller was stationed on the island of Corsica where, according to *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, he flew sixty combat missions as a wing bombardier (Kutt 231). His experiences during World War II would be used later to write *Catch-22*. The process of writing *Catch-22*, however, took sixteen years and it was not published until 1961.

Signal phrase

Parenthetical citation

During these years Heller took advantage of the G.I. Bill of Rights and enrolled in the University of California. From there Heller transferred to New York University, where he graduated with a major in English. Heller went on to get his master's degree from Columbia and then won a Fulbright Scholarship and studied at Oxford University. On his return the United States, Heller took a teaching job, and from there went into advertising (Kutt 231-2).

During the sixteen years after returning from the war, Heller turned a short story about his experiences into one of the most renowned novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Catch-22* takes place during World War II on an island where a bomber squadron is stationed.

Paraphrased content, including source reference

The story follows Yossarian, a bombardier, as he tries, without success, to escape flying more combat missions. Through the novel, by blatantly satirizing the Air Force and the military in general, Heller was able to change his readers' perspective on war and point out its absurdity. In addition, he succeeded in adding an expression to our vocabulary that is still used today.

Use present tense to summarize plot of literary texts

To understand the novel, one must first know what "Catch-22" is. Yossarian is the first character in the novel to come upon Catch-22. In his attempts to get grounded, and thus fly no more combat missions, Yossarian visits Doc Daneeka. He asks Doc Daneeka if he can ground his friend Orr, who they both agree is crazy. Doc Daneeka replies, "Sure, I can ground Orr. But first he has to ask me to" (Heller 54). This is where the catch comes into play:

Parenthetical citation

Ellipses [...] indicate material deleted from original source

Block-indented quotation

Catch-22 [...] 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. (54-55.)

Signal phrase

The rules of Catch-22 "do not exactly contradict each other," explains critic Jean Kennard, "but are continually inadequate to the occasion and always disregard the individual human life" (77). Heller implies that the Air Force does not care whether a person is insane or not, and Catch-22 shows that the Air Force actually wants insane men flying missions. When Yossarian says to Doc Daneeka, "They're not going to send a crazy man out to be killed, are they?" Doc Daneeka's reply — "who else will go?" (Heller 315) — sums up Heller's feelings about war.

Catch-22 is not just one regulation that keeps insane men from being grounded; it has many manifestations. One such instance occurs when Yossarian goes to an apartment in Rome and finds that Aarfy, another enlisted man, has raped a girl, then killed her by throwing her out the window. Heller gives every indication, as the two men sit in the apartment and listen to the sirens getting closer, that Aarfy will be arrested. Despite this, two military policemen enter the room and "[arrest] Yossarian for being in

Brackets indicate words added to quotation or altered for clarity

Paranthenetical citation. (Omit author's name if same as previous citation.)

Smith-Jones 3

Rome without a pass" (429). These MPs who act "like computers programmed only to enforce army regulations ... have become mechanical men incapable of determining right from wrong in real world terms," claims Carol Pearson in her essay "*Catch-22* and the Debasement of Language" (31).

Paranthenetical citation. (Omit author's name if cited in signal phrase.)

As the novel progresses, the examples of *Catch-22* become more absurd and more encompassing. Near the end of the novel Yossarian visits a woman who runs a brothel in Rome. Here Heller reveals a broader meaning of *Catch-22*. Earlier that day, military policemen came and evacuated everyone from the brothel out into the streets without giving a reason. When Yossarian asks why they did it the old woman replies, "*Catch-22* says they have the right to do anything we can't stop them from doing" (Heller 417). Critic Robert Merrill considers this statement simple yet terrible: "*Catch-22* means whatever 'they' want it to mean. It has no real content — Yossarian doubts that it even exists" (144). The possibility that it does not exist is of no consequence. The bigger problem is that "everyone thought it existed, and that was much worse, for there was no object or text to ridicule or refute" (Heller 419).

By exposing the giant bureaucracy of the Air Force and the military complex in general, as well as the callous way in which individual life becomes meaningless in times of war, Heller changed people's view on war. Heller was able to break the Hollywood stereotype of war and cast doubt on military propaganda. Sales of *Catch-22* took off as the Vietnam protest of the late 1960s approached. The novel struck a chord with young men who faced the possibility of being conscripted. College students could be seen "wearing Army field jackets around campus with Yossarian nametags" (Severo and Mitgang). Heller toured college campuses during the '60s, speaking out against the war in Vietnam. Along the same lines as the jackets, bumper stickers reading "Yossarian Lives" started to pop up around the country. The simple statement "Yossarian Lives" is still being spread today, to anyone who reads *Catch-22*.

Works Cited entries  
alphabetized (by author's last  
name, or by title if anonymous)

Smith-Jones 4

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