

Heller uses his sardonically satiric voice, pointing out groups within American culture that form an utterly corrupt and ridiculous enemy. While the official enemy are the Germans, there are no Germans in Catch-22, and Yossarian fears American bureaucrats more than he fears the Germans attempting to shoot down his plane.

CATCH-22

Joseph Heller

Another expression of this theme is the absurdity of patriotism and honor, which lead most of the airmen to accept the lies and whims of their superiors, often leading to their death. This is pointed up in Robert M. Young's article in The Psychoanalytic Review which states:

"The central moral conflict of the book lies in the relationship between the system and its rules and the humanity which pays the price for the defenses of those in charge and the system they created and maintain at the expense of human decency. This is the point of the book's title. Whenever you try to behave sensibly and look after yourself in a crazy world, there's a catch, a catch which has entered the language as a result of Heller's book. Catch-22 takes many forms, but the central one is that you don't have to fly any more missions if you're crazy, but you have to ask first, and anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't crazy"

In all of Heller's novels the central characters are perplexed and at odds with their surroundings, leading to the conclusion that America is illogical, and cannot be understood. *Catch-22* is very much an anti-war novel, and is "essentially opposed to war, capitalism and traditional religion, and in favor of freedom, peace, agnosticism, sex, and life". Heller's voice is uniquely that of the trickster taunting, feinting and teasing. The very fabric of the novel is not immune to his irony. Joseph Heller said himself about the style of *Catch-22*:

"I consider *Catch-22* to be a novel that employs satire to a considerable degree ... I personally think of *Catch-22* as being a very serious novel, using humorous satire and irony as part of the techniques in making the novel effective. ... it is disrespectful; it is iconoclastic. It is also, I like to think, un-opinionated because there are so many questions raised I can see both sides to and to which I have no answer."

Joseph Heller was born May 1, 1923 in Brooklyn New York. He enlisted in the US Army Air Corps in 1942 at the age of 19, and spent three years of service in the military. During 1944, Heller was stationed on the island of Corsica, where he flew as a wing bombardier in B-25 bombers, flying sixty combat missions in the 12th Air Force. Heller's service in the Air Forces closely paralleled *Catch-22*'s anti-heroic hero, Yossarian. Just as Cathcart raised Yossarian's number of missions, "[Heller's] quota was raised several times during his own tour. [...] During his tour it went from fifty to fifty five and then to sixty".

Early in the war, Heller was excited and optimistic about combat. In a 1975 interview, he said: "I actually hoped I would get into combat ... I was just 19 and ... it all seemed so dramatic and heroic ... I saw it as a war of necessity". But, after a mission flying over Avignon in which his plane was hit by flak, injuring the radio gunner

and inspiring a scene in which Yossarian experiences the same things, Heller had a new outlook on the dangers of combat: "They were trying to kill me, and I wanted to go home. That they were trying to kill all of us each time we went up was no consolation. They were trying to kill me. I was frightened on every mission after that one". Once he completed his required 60 missions, Heller opted to return home by ship, not airplane and had indeed grown terrified of flying, refusing for many years to fly in an airplane.

After the war, Joseph Heller worked in advertising in New York City. It was during this time that he began writing *Catch-22*. When he was writing, Heller would spend two hours each night writing and rewriting the novel after his day at the office. The first chapter of what was to become *Catch-22* was published in the quarterly *New World Writing* #7 in 1955 under the title "*Catch-18*". In 1952, he began working for Time as a copywriter, and in 1956 he was

hired as the advertising manager for *Look*, a general-interest weekly magazine. In 1958 he became the promotion manager for *McCall's*, giving him an inside view of the magazine business. He worked at *McCall's* until *Catch-22* was published in 1961. He did not become involved in the anti-war movement until the Vietnam war in the 1960s.

Heller took 13 years before he published his next novel, the much darker *Something Happened* in 1974, in which he does to corporate life as he does to military life in *Catch-22*. He next published *As Good As Gold*, in which the protagonist Bruce Gold, a middle-aged Jewish professor of English is offered a position as the first ever Jewish Secretary of state, along with the chance for success, fame and fortune in Washington D.C. It satirizes the politicians of the era such as Henry Kissinger and is much more cheerful story than *Something Happened*, it was regarded as Heller's return to the wordplay that made *Catch-22* so popular.

In 1986, Heller developed the rare neurological disease Guillain-Barre syndrome. After his recovery, he wrote *No Laughing Matter* with his friend Speed Vogel. It is a positive, autobiographical account of his experience and recovery from the disease. His last novel, *Closing Time*, published in 1994, is a sequel to *Catch-22*, and follows the characters of John Yossarian, Milo Minderbinder and Chaplain Tappan. His final book, *Now and Then*, published in 1998 is Heller's autobiography, recounting his childhood in Coney Island in the 1920s and 1930s. Heller died of a heart attack at his home on Long Island on December 13, 1999.