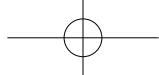


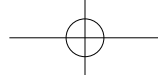
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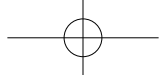
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Unit 1

Joseph Heller

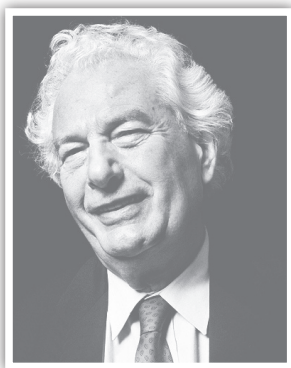
王祖友、陈世丹编注

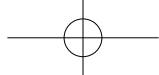
Biographical Sketches

Joseph Heller (1923–1999), one of the most distinctive American novelists, has gained world fame with his satirical, anti-war novel *Catch-22* (1961). The title has added to the English language a term signifying a no-win situation, particularly one created by law, regulation or circumstance.

Joseph Heller was born into a European-Jewish family. He was only four years old when his father died. After graduating from Abraham Lincoln High School in 1941, Heller joined the American Air Forces in Europe. He was stationed in Corsica, where he flew 60 combat missions as a B-25 bombardier. In 1949, Heller received his M.A. degree from Columbia University. He was a Fulbright scholar at Oxford in 1949–1950. Heller worked as a teacher at Pennsylvania State University, a copywriter for the magazines *Time*, *Look*, and a promotion manager for *McCall's*. It took Heller eight years to write his first novel *Catch-18*, the name of which was changed into *Catch-22* at the editor's suggestion.

His second novel, *Something Happened*, a best-seller in 1974, traces the impressions of the hero or antihero Bob Slocum, a faceless organization-man, to probe the personal disorientation in the postmodern American society. In 1979, Heller published *Good as Gold*, a critique of the American government revolving around an English professor's absurd experiences in his ambition for a high position in the government. Other novels are *God Knows* (1984), *No Laughing Matter* (1986), *Picture This* (1988) and *Closing Time* (1994). The last





novel is a sequel to *Catch-22*, showing that Yossarian and company lament the decline of New York City and American culture and look back nostalgically to the golden age of prewar Coney Island. In 1998, Heller published his autobiography, *Now and Then*. Heller's final novel, *Portrait of an Artist as an Old Man*, and the collection of short stories, *Catch as Catch Can*, were published in 2000 and 2003 respectively.

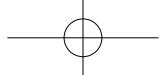
Death is a central theme in Heller's works, as Heller reflects in his memoir, "In *Catch-22* and in all my subsequent novels, and also in my one play [*We Bombed in New Haven*], the resolution at the end of what narrative there is evolves from the death of someone other than the main character." His literary achievement brought him numerous awards, including the University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Medal in 1996. He passed away on December 12, 1999.

Catch-22

Brief Comments

Catch-22 is a brilliant satirical critique of modern American social phenomena. It is generally regarded as an anti-war novel, but Heller's criticisms extend beyond the absurdity of war to capitalism itself and the social relations that arise from it. To be sure, his analysis is at times confusing, and is often directed at surface elements while neglecting more fundamental issues. Nonetheless, *Catch-22* lodges a strong protest against the corruption of modern American society. It is one of the most significant works of protest literature after World War II.

The novel focuses on a bombardier captain Yossarian, a member of U.S. bomber crew stationed on the Mediterranean island of Pianosa during World War II. After flying 60-some bombing missions, he is sick of the war and afraid of death, and desperately wants to go home. There is a set number of missions required before discharge, but every time Yossarian comes close to completing his duty, the number is raised, and he has to fly again. Within this context, Heller creates a number of memorable characters—from the petty and vain officers, whose only aim is to advance through the ranks, to Yossarian's roommate Orr, who crashes every time he goes on a bombing run to practice for his planned escape to Sweden. Milo Minderbender, Heller's prototypical



Unit 1 Joseph Heller

capitalist, is the mess officer for Yossarian's squadron. Milo develops a trading "syndicate," out of which he makes huge profits. Gradually, as the syndicate grows in power, Milo includes in his operations the armies of the rival nations. *Catch-22* exposes the corrupt nature of American social bureaucrats in collusion with capitalists and the suffering and death it brings about to ordinary people.

The selection of "24 Milo" best exemplifies the truth that Milo signs contracts with the Americans to bomb a bridge and with the Germans to defend it results in the death of Mudd, Yassarain's "dead man," before he can sign in. A similar contract with the Germans (to bomb the American base) offsets his losses on Egyptian cotton. Milo claims to be very moral, since the opposing sides would attack anyway and he is just making money from it. This is appalling. People are angry when they see that Milo is not punished for his betrayal, but is promoted to a position of deputy mayor of a town after the war.

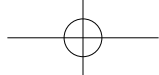
Catch-22 is considered a superb example of the use of black humor. Black humor, also known as black comedy, is a kind of writing that places grotesque elements side by side with humorous ones in an attempt to shock the reader, forcing him to laugh at the horrifying reality of a chaotic maddening world. The black humor novelists like Heller tend to use the comic devices to depict the tragic events in social life. *Catch-22* has a non-linear narrative structure in which events follow the theme rather than the timing to give us a very strange picture full of contradictions.

Catch-22 is more than just an anti-war novel. It is also a novel about the contemporary, regimented commercial society depicted against the background of universal sorrow and inevitable death. Heller claimed his novel and many of the other American novels of the time had more to do with the state of the country after the war: "The antiwar and antigovernment feelings in the book belong to the period following World War II: the Korean War, the Cold War of the 1950s. A general disintegration of belief took place then... Whatever forces were at work shaping a trend in art were affecting not just me, but all of us."

Selected Reading

24 MILO

April had been the best month of all for Milo^[1]. Lilacs bloomed in April and fruit ripened on the vine. Heartbeats quickened and old appetites were renewed. In April a livelier iris gleamed upon the burnished dove. April was



spring, and in the spring Milo Minderbinder's fancy had lightly turned to thoughts of tangerines.

"Tangerines?"

"Yes, sir."

"My men would love tangerines," admitted the colonel in Sardinia who commanded four squadrons of B-26s^[2].

"There'll be all the tangerines they can eat that you're able to pay for with money from your mess fund," Milo assured him.

"Casaba melons?"

"Are going for a song in Damascus?"

"I have a weakness for casaba melons. I've always had a weakness for casaba melons."

"Just lend me one plane from each squadron, just one plane, and you'll have all the casabas you can eat that you've money to pay for."

"We buy from the syndicate?"

"And everybody has a share."

"It's amazing, positively amazing. How can you do it?"

"Mass purchasing power makes the big difference. For example, breaded veal cutlets."

"I'm not so crazy about breaded veal cutlets," grumbled the skeptical B-25^[3] commander in the north of Corsica.

"Breaded veal cutlets are very nutritious," Milo admonished him piously. "They contain egg yolk and bread crumbs. And so are lamb chops."

"Ah, lamb chops," echoed the B-25 commander. "Good lamb chops?"

"The best," said Milo, "that the black market has to offer."

"Baby lamb chops?"

"In the cutest little pink paper panties you ever saw. Are going for a song in Portugal."

"I can't send a plane to Portugal. I haven't the authority."

"I can, once you lend the plane to me. With a pilot to fly it. And don't forget—you'll get General Dreedle^[4]".

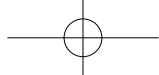
"Will General Dreedle eat in my mess hall again?"

"Like a pig, once you start feeding him my best white fresh eggs fried in my pure creamery butter. There'll be tangerines too, and casaba melons, honeydews, filet of Dover sole, baked Alaska, and cockles and mussels."

"And everybody has a share?"

"That," said Milo, "is the most beautiful part of it."

"I don't like it," growled the unco-operative fighter-plane commander,



Unit 1 Joseph Heller

who didn't like Milo either.

"There's an unco-operative fighter-plane commander up north who's got it in for me," Milo complained to General Dreedle. "It takes just one person to ruin the whole thing, and then you wouldn't have your fresh eggs fried in my pure creamery butter any more."

General Dreedle had the unco-operative fighter-plane commander transferred to the Solomon Islands to dig graves and replaced him with a senile colonel with bursitis and a craving for litchi nuts who introduced Milo to the B-17^[5] general on the mainland with a yearning for Polish sausage.

"Polish sausage is going for peanuts in Cracow," Milo informed him.

"Polish sausage," sighed the general nostalgically. "You know, I'd give just about anything for a good hunk of Polish sausage. Just about anything."

"You don't have to give anything. Just give me one plane for each mess hall and a pilot who will do what he's told. And a small down payment on your initial order as a token of good faith."

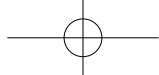
"But Cracow is hundreds of miles behind the enemy lines. How will you get to the sausage?"

"There's an international Polish sausage exchange in Geneva. I'll just fly the peanuts into Switzerland and exchange them for Polish sausage at the open market rate. They'll fly the peanuts back to Cracow and I'll fly the Polish sausage back to you. You buy only as much Polish sausage as you want through the syndicate. There'll be tangerines too, with only a little artificial coloring added. And eggs from Malta and Scotch from Sicily. You'll be paying the money to yourself when you buy from the syndicate, since you'll own a share, so you'll really be getting everything you buy for nothing. Doesn't that make sense?"

"Sheer genius. How in the world did you ever think of it?"

"My name is Milo Minderbinder. I am twenty-seven years old."

Milo Minderbinder's planes flew in from everywhere, the pursuit planes, bombers, and cargo ships streaming into Colonel Cathcart's field with pilots at the controls who would do what they were told. The planes were decorated with flamboyant squadron emblems illustrating such laudable ideals as Courage, Might, Justice, Truth, Liberty, Love, Honor and Patriotism that were painted out at once by Milo's mechanics with a double coat of flat white and replaced in garish purple with the stenciled name M & M ENTERPRISES, FINE FRUITS AND PRODUCE. The 'M & M' in 'M & M ENTERPRISES' stood for Milo & Minderbinder, and the & was inserted, Milo revealed candidly, to nullify any impression that the syndicate was a one-man operation. Planes



arrived for Milo from airfields in Italy, North Africa and England, and from Air Transport Command stations in Liberia, Ascension Island, Cairo, and Karachi. Pursuit planes were traded for additional cargo ships or retained for emergency invoice duty and small-parcel service; trucks and tanks were procured from the ground forces and used for short-distance road hauling. Everybody had a share, and men got fat and moved about tamely with toothpicks in their greasy lips. Milo supervised the whole expanding operation by himself. Deep otter-brown lines of preoccupation etched themselves permanently into his careworn face and gave him a harried look of sobriety and mistrust. Everybody but Yossarian^[6] thought Milo was a jerk, first for volunteering for the job of mess officer and next for taking it so seriously. Yossarian also thought that Milo was a jerk; but he also knew that Milo was a genius.

One day Milo flew away to England to pick up a load of Turkish halvah and came flying back from Madagascar leading four German bombers filled with yams, collards, mustard greens and black-eyed Georgia peas. Milo was dumbfounded when he stepped down to the ground and found a contingent of armed M.P.s^[7] waiting to imprison the German pilots and confiscate their planes. Confiscate! The mere word was anathema to him, and he stormed back and forth in excoriating condemnation, shaking a piercing finger of rebuke in the guilt-ridden faces of Colonel Cathcart^[8], Colonel Korn^[9] and the poor battle-scarred captain with the submachine gun who commanded the M.P.s.

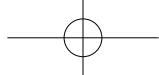
“Is this Russia?” Milo assailed them incredulously at the top of his voice. “Confiscate?” he shrieked, as though he could not believe his own ears. “Since when is it the policy of the American government to confiscate the private property of its citizens? Shame on you! Shame on all of you for even thinking such a horrible thought.”

“But Milo,” Major Danby interrupted timidly, “we’re at war with Germany, and those are German planes.”

“They are no such thing!” Milo retorted furiously. “Those planes belong to the syndicate, and everybody has a share. Confiscate? How can you possibly confiscate your own private property? Confiscate, indeed! I’ve never heard anything so depraved in my whole life.”

And sure enough, Milo was right, for when they looked, his mechanics had painted out the German swastikas on the wings, tails and fuselages with double coats of flat white and stenciled in the words M & M ENTERPRISES, FINE FRUITS AND PRODUCE. Right before their eyes he had transformed his syndicate into an international cartel.

Milo’s argosies of plenty now filled the air. Planes poured in from

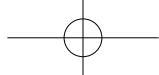


Unit 1 Joseph Heller

Norway, Denmark, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Sweden, Finland, Poland—from everywhere in Europe, in fact, but Russia, with whom Milo refused to do business. When everybody who was going to had signed up with M & M Enterprises, Fine Fruits and Produce, Milo created a wholly owned subsidiary, M & M Fancy Pastry, and obtained more airplanes and more money from the mess funds for scones and crumpets from the British Isles, prune and cheese Danish from Copenhagen, éclairs, cream puffs, Napoleons and petits fours from Paris, Reims and Grenoble, Kugelhopf, pumpernickel and Pfefferkuchen from Berlin, Linzer and Dobos Torten from Vienna, Strudel from Hungary and baklava from Ankara. Each morning Milo sent planes aloft all over Europe and North Africa hauling long red tow signs advertising the day's specials in large square letters: "EYEROUND, 79¢... WHITING, 21¢." He boosted cash income for the syndicate by leasing tow signs to Pet Milk, Gaines Dog Food, and Noxzema. In a spirit of civic enterprise, he regularly allotted a certain amount of free aerial advertising space to General Peckem for the propagation of such messages in the public interest as NEATNESS COUNTS, HASTE MAKES WASTE, and THE FAMILY THAT PRAYS TOGETHER STAYS TOGETHER. Milo purchased spot radio announcements on Axis Sally's and Lord Haw Haw's daily propaganda broadcasts from Berlin to keep things moving. Business boomed on every battlefield.

Milo's planes were a familiar sight. They had freedom of passage everywhere, and one day Milo contracted with the American military authorities to bomb the German-held highway bridge at Orvieto and with the German military authorities to defend the highway bridge at Orvieto with anti-aircraft fire against his own attack. His fee for attacking the bridge for America was the total cost of the operation plus six percent and his fee from Germany for defending the bridge was the same cost-plus-six agreement augmented by a merit bonus of a thousand dollars for every American plane he shot down. The consummation of these deals represented an important victory for private enterprise, he pointed out, since the armies of both countries were socialized institutions. Once the contracts were signed, there seemed to be no point in using the resources of the syndicate to bomb and defend the bridge, inasmuch as both governments had ample men and material right there to do so and were perfectly happy to contribute them, and in the end Milo realized a fantastic profit from both halves of his project for doing nothing more than signing his name twice.

The arrangements were fair to both sides. Since Milo did have freedom of



passage everywhere, his planes were able to steal over in a sneak attack without alerting the German anti-aircraft gunners; and since Milo knew about the attack, he was able to alert the German anti-aircraft gunners in sufficient time for them to begin firing accurately the moment the planes came into range. It was an ideal arrangement for everyone but the dead man in Yossarian's tent, who was killed over the target the day he arrived.

"I didn't kill him!" Milo kept replying passionately to Yossarian's angry protest. "I wasn't even there that day, I tell you. Do you think I was down there on the ground firing an anti-aircraft gun when the planes came over?"

"But you organized the whole thing, didn't you?" Yossarian shouted back at him in the velvet darkness cloaking the path leading past the still vehicles of the motor pool to the open-air movie theater.

"And I didn't organize anything," Milo answered indignantly, drawing great agitated sniffs of air in through his hissing, pale, twitching nose. "The Germans have the bridge, and we were going to bomb it, whether I stepped into the picture or not. I just saw a wonderful opportunity to make some profit out of the mission, and I took it. What's so terrible about that?"

"What's so terrible about it? Milo, a man in my tent was killed on that mission before he could even unpack his bags."

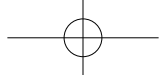
"But I didn't kill him."

"You got a thousand dollars extra for it."

"But I didn't kill him. I wasn't even there, I tell you. I was in Barcelona buying olive oil and skinless and boneless sardines, and I've got the purchase orders to prove it. And I didn't get the thousand dollars. That thousand dollars went to the syndicate, and everybody got a share, even you." Milo was appealing to Yossarian from the bottom of his soul. "Look, I didn't start this war, Yossarian, no matter what that lousy Wintergreen is saying. I'm just trying to put it on a businesslike basis. Is anything wrong with that? You know, a thousand dollars ain't such a bad price for a medium bomber and a crew. If I can persuade the Germans to pay me a thousand dollars for every plane they shoot down, why shouldn't I take it?"

"Because you're dealing with the enemy, that's why. Can't you understand that we're fighting a war? People are dying. Look around you, for Christ's sake!"

Milo shook his head with weary forbearance. "And the Germans are not our enemies," he declared. "Oh I know what you're going to say. Sure, we're at war with them. But the Germans are also members in good standing of the syndicate, and it's my job to protect their rights as shareholders. Maybe they



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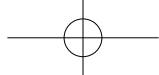
did start the war, and maybe they are killing millions of people, but they pay their bills a lot more promptly than some allies of ours I could name. Don't you understand that I have to respect the sanctity of my contract with Germany? Can't you see it from my point of view?"

"No," Yossarian rebuffed him harshly.

Milo was stung and made no effort to disguise his wounded feelings. It was a muggy, moonlit night filled with gnats, moths, and mosquitoes. Milo lifted his arm suddenly and pointed toward the open-air theater, where the milky, dust-filled beam bursting horizontally from the projector slashed a conelike swath in the blackness and draped in a fluorescent membrane of light the audience tilted on the seats there in hypnotic sags, their faces focused upward toward the aluminized movie screen. Milo's eyes were liquid with integrity, and his artless and uncorrupted face was lustrous with a shining mixture of sweat and insect repellent.

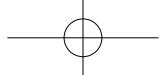
"Look at them," he exclaimed in a voice choked with emotion. "They're my friends, my countrymen, my comrades in arms. A fellow never had a better bunch of buddies. Do you think I'd do a single thing to harm them if I didn't have to? Haven't I got enough on my mind? Can't you see how upset I am already about all that cotton piling up on those piers in Egypt?" Milo's voice splintered into fragments, and he clutched at Yossarian's shirt front as though drowning. His eyes were throbbing visibly like brown caterpillars. "Yossarian, what am I going to do with so much cotton? It's all your fault for letting me buy it."

The cotton was piling up on the piers in Egypt, and nobody wanted any. Milo had never dreamed that the Nile Valley could be so fertile or that there would be no market at all for the crop he had bought. The mess halls in his syndicate would not help; they rose up in uncompromising rebellion against his proposal to tax them on a per capita basis in order to enable each man to own his own share of the Egyptian cotton crop. Even his reliable friends the Germans failed him in this crisis: they preferred ersatz. Milo's mess halls would not even help him store the cotton, and his warehousing costs skyrocketed and contributed to the devastating drain upon his cash reserves. The profits from the Orvieto mission were sucked away. He began writing home for the money he had sent back in better days; soon that was almost gone. And new bales of cotton kept arriving on the wharves at Alexandria every day. Each time he succeeded in dumping some on the world market for a loss it was snapped up by canny Egyptian brokers in the Levant, who sold it back to him at the original price, so that he was really worse off than before.



M & M Enterprises verged on collapse. Milo cursed himself hourly for his monumental greed and stupidity in purchasing the entire Egyptian cotton crop, but a contract was a contract and had to be honored, and one night, after a sumptuous evening meal, all Milo's fighters and bombers took off, joined in formation directly overhead and began dropping bombs on the group. He had landed another contract with the Germans, this time to bomb his own outfit. Milo's planes separated in a well co-ordinated attack and bombed the fuel stocks and the ordnance dump, the repair hangars and the B-25 bombers resting on the lollipop-shaped hardstands at the field. His crews spared the landing strip and the mess halls so that they could land safely when their work was done and enjoy a hot snack before retiring. They bombed with their landing lights on, since no one was shooting back. They bombed all four squadrons, the officers' club and the Group Headquarters building. 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 officers' 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 standing at the bar. They doubled over in agony and dropped. The rest of the officers fled toward the two exits in panic and jammed up the doorways like a dense, howling dam of human flesh as they shrank from going farther.

Colonel Cathcart clawed and elbowed his way through the unruly, bewildered mass until he stood outside by himself. He stared up at the sky in stark astonishment and horror. Milo's planes, ballooning serenely in over the blossoming treetops with their bomb bay doors open and wing flaps down and with their monstrous, bug-eyed, blinding, fiercely flickering, eerie landing lights on, were the most apocalyptic sight he had ever beheld. Colonel Cathcart let go a stricken gasp of dismay and hurled himself headlong into his jeep, almost sobbing. He found the gas pedal and the ignition and sped toward the airfield as fast as the rocking car would carry him, his huge flabby hands clenched and bloodless on the wheel or blaring his horn tormentedly. Once he almost killed himself when he swerved with a banshee screech of tires to avoid plowing into a bunch of men running crazily toward the hills in their underwear with their stunned faces down and their thin arms pressed high around their temples as puny shields. Yellow, orange and red fires were burning on both sides of the road. Tents and trees were in flames, and Milo's planes kept coming around interminably with their blinking white landing lights on and their bomb bay doors open. Colonel Cathcart almost turned the jeep over when he slammed the brakes on at the control tower. He leaped from the car



Unit 1 Joseph Heller

while it was still skidding dangerously and hurtled up the flight of steps inside, where three men were busy at the instruments and the controls. He bowled two of them aside in his lunge for the nickel-plated microphone, his eyes glittering wildly and his beefy face contorted with stress. He squeezed the microphone in a bestial grip and began shouting hysterically at the top of his voice.

“Milo, you son of a bitch! Are you crazy? What the hell are you doing? Come down! Come down!”

“Stop hollering so much, will you?” answered Milo, who was standing there right beside him in the control tower with a microphone of his own. “I’m right here.” Milo looked at him with reproof and turned back to his work. “Very good, men, very good,” he chanted into his microphone. “But I see one supply shed still standing. That will never do, Purvis—I’ve spoken to you about that kind of shoddy work before. Now, you go right back there this minute and try it again. And this time come in slowly... slowly. Haste makes waste, Purvis. Haste makes waste. If I’ve told you that once, I must have told you that a hundred times. Haste makes waste.”

The loudspeaker overhead began squawking. “Milo, this is Alvin Brown. I’ve finished dropping my bombs. What should I do now?”

“Strafe,” said Milo.

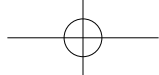
“Strafe?” Alvin Brown was shocked.

“We have no choice,” Milo informed him resignedly. “It’s in the contract.”

“Oh, okay, then,” Alvin Brown acquiesced. “In that case I’ll strafe.”

This time Milo had gone too far. Bombing his own men and planes was more than even the most phlegmatic observer could stomach, and it looked like the end for him. High-ranking government officials poured in 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. Not one voice was raised in his defense. Decent people everywhere were affronted, and Milo was all washed up until he opened his books to the public and disclosed the tremendous profit he had made. He could reimburse the government for all the people and property he had destroyed and still have enough money left over to continue buying Egyptian cotton. Everybody, of course, owned a share. And the sweetest part of the whole deal was that there really was no need to reimburse the government at all.

“In a democracy, the government is the people,” Milo explained. “We’re people, aren’t we? So we might just as well keep the money and eliminate the

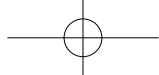


middleman. Frankly, I'd like to see the government get out of war altogether and leave the whole field to private industry. If we pay the government everything we owe it, we'll only be encouraging government control and discouraging other individuals from bombing their own men and planes. We'll be taking away their incentive."

Milo was correct, of course, as everyone soon agreed but a few embittered misfits like Doc Daneeka^[10], who sulked cantankerously and muttered offensive insinuations about the morality of the whole venture until Milo mollified him with a donation, in the name of the syndicate, of a lightweight aluminum collapsible garden chair that Doc Daneeka could fold up conveniently and carry outside his tent each time Chief White Halfoat came inside his tent and carry back inside his tent each time Chief White Halfoat^[11] came out. Doc Daneeka had lost his head during Milo's bombardment; instead of running for cover, he had remained out in the open and performed his duty, slithering along the ground through shrapnel, strafing and incendiary bombs like a furtive, wily lizard from casualty to casualty, administering tourniquets, morphine, splints and sulfanilamide with a dark and doleful visage, never saying one word more than he had to and reading in each man's bluing wound a dreadful portent of his own decay. He worked himself relentlessly into exhaustion before the long night was over and came down with a snife the next day that sent him hurrying querulously into the medical tent to have his temperature taken by Gus and Wes and to obtain a mustard plaster and vaporizer.

Doc Daneeka tended each moaning man that night with the same glum and profound and introverted grief he showed at the airfield the day of the Avignon mission when Yossarian climbed down the few steps of his plane naked, in a state of utter shock, with Snowden smeared abundantly all over his bare heels and toes, knees, arms and fingers, and pointed inside wordlessly toward where the young radio-gunner lay freezing to death on the floor beside the still younger tail-gunner who kept falling back into a dead faint each time he opened his eyes and saw Snowden dying.

Doc Daneeka draped a blanket around Yossarian's shoulders almost tenderly after Snowden had been removed from the plane and carried into an ambulance on a stretcher. He led Yossarian toward his jeep. McWatt^[12] helped, and the three drove in silence to the squadron medical tent, where McWatt and Doc Daneeka guided Yossarian inside to a chair and washed Snowden off him with cold wet balls of absorbent cotton. Doc Daneeka gave him a pill and a shot that put him to sleep for twelve hours. When Yossarian woke up and went to see him, Doc Daneeka gave him another pill and a shot that put him to sleep



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for another twelve hours. When Yossarian woke up again and went to see him, Doc Daneeka made ready to give him another pill and a shot.

“How long are you going to keep giving me those pills and shots?” Yossarian asked him.

“Until you feel better.”

“I feel all right now.”

Doc Daneeka’s frail suntanned forehead furrowed with surprise. “Then why don’t you put some clothes on? Why are you walking around naked?”

“I don’t want to wear a uniform any more.”

Doc Daneeka accepted the explanation and put away his hypodermic syringe. “Are you sure you feel all right?”

“I feel fine. I’m just a little logy from all those pills and shots you’ve been giving me.”

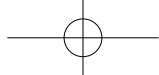
Yossarian went about his business with no clothes on all the rest of that day and was still naked late the next morning when Milo, after hunting everywhere else, finally found him sitting up a tree a small distance in back of the quaint little military cemetery at which Snowden was being buried. Milo was 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.

“I’ve been looking all over for you,” Milo called up to Yossarian from the ground reproachfully.

“You should have looked for me in this tree,” Yossarian answered. “I’ve been up here all morning.”

“Come on down and taste this and tell me if it’s good. It’s very important.”

Yossarian shook his head. He sat nude on the lowest limb of the tree and balanced himself with both hands grasping the bough directly above. He refused to budge, and Milo had no choice but to stretch both arms about the trunk in a distasteful hug and start climbing. He struggled upward clumsily with loud grunts and wheezes, and his clothes were squashed and crooked by the time he pulled himself up high enough to hook a leg over the limb and pause for breath. His dress cap was askew and in danger of falling. Milo caught it just in time when it began slipping. Globules of perspiration glistened like transparent pearls around his mustache and swelled like opaque blisters under his eyes. Yossarian watched him impassively. Cautiously Milo worked himself around in a half circle so that he could face Yossarian. He unwrapped tissue paper from something soft, round and brown and handed it to Yossarian.



“Please taste this and let me know what you think. I’d like to serve it to the men.”

“What is it?” asked Yossarian, and took a big bite.

“Chocolate-covered cotton.”

Yossarian gagged convulsively and sprayed his big mouthful of chocolate-covered cotton right into Milo’s face. “Here, take it back!” he spouted angrily. “Jesus Christ! Have you gone crazy? You didn’t even take the goddam seeds out.”

“Give it a chance, will you?” Milo begged. “It can’t be that bad. Is it really that bad?”

“It’s even worse.”

“But I’ve got to make the mess halls feed it to the men.”

“They’ll never be able to swallow it.”

“They’ve got to swallow it,” Milo ordained with dictatorial grandeur, and almost broke his neck when he let go with one arm to wave a righteous finger in the air.

“Come on out here,” Yossarian invited him. “You’ll be much safer, and you can see everything.”

Gripping the bough above with both hands, Milo began inching his way out on the limb sideways with utmost care and apprehension. His face was rigid with tension, and he sighed with relief when he found himself seated securely beside Yossarian. He stroked the tree affectionately. “This is a pretty good tree,” he observed admiringly with proprietary gratitude.

“It’s the tree of life,” Yossarian answered, wagging his toes, “and of knowledge of good and evil, too.”

Milo squinted closely at the bark and branches. “No it isn’t,” he replied. “It’s a chestnut tree. I ought to know. I sell chestnuts.”

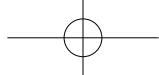
“Have it your way.”

They sat in the tree without talking for several seconds, their legs dangling and their hands almost straight up on the bough above, the one completely nude but for a pair of crepe-soled sandals, the other completely dressed in a coarse olive-drab woolen uniform with his tie knotted tight. Milo studied Yossarian diffidently through the corner of his eye, hesitating tactfully.

“I want to ask you something,” he said at last. “You don’t have any clothes on. I don’t want to butt in or anything, but I just want to know. Why aren’t you wearing your uniform?”

“I don’t want to.”

Milo nodded rapidly like a sparrow pecking. “I see, I see,” he stated



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quickly with a look of vivid confusion. “I understand perfectly. I heard Appleby and Captain Black say you had gone crazy, and I just wanted to find out.” He hesitated politely again, weighing his next question. “Aren’t you ever going to put your uniform on again?”

“I don’t think so.”

Milo nodded with spurious vim to indicate he still understood and then sat silent, ruminating gravely with troubled misgiving. A scarlet-crested bird shot by below, brushing sure dark wings against a quivering bush. Yossarian and Milo were covered in their bower by tissue-thin tiers of sloping green and largely surrounded by other gray chestnut trees and a silver spruce. The sun was high overhead in a vast sapphire-blue sky beaded with low, isolated, puffy clouds of dry and immaculate white. There was no breeze, and the leaves about them hung motionless. The shade was feathery. Everything was at peace but Milo, who straightened suddenly with a muffled cry and began pointing excitedly.

“Look at that!” he exclaimed in alarm. “Look at that! That’s a funeral going on down there. That looks like the cemetery. Isn’t it?”

Yossarian answered him slowly in a level voice. “They’re burying that kid who got killed in my plane over Avignon the other day. Snowden.”

“What happened to him?” Milo asked in a voice deadened with awe.

“He got killed.”

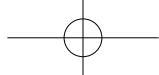
“That’s terrible,” Milo grieved, and his large brown eyes filled with tears. “That poor kid. It really is terrible.” He bit his trembling lip hard, and his voice rose with emotion when he continued. “And it will get even worse if the mess halls don’t agree to buy my cotton. Yossarian, what’s the matter with them? Don’t they realize it’s their syndicate? Don’t they know they’ve all got a share?”

“Did the dead man in my tent have a share?” Yossarian demanded caustically.

“Of course he did,” Milo assured him lavishly. “Everybody in the squadron has a share.”

“He was killed before he even got into the squadron.”

Milo made a deft grimace of tribulation and turned away. “I wish you’d stop picking on me about that dead man in your tent,” he pleaded peevishly. “I told you I didn’t have anything to do with killing him. Is it my fault that I saw this great opportunity to corner the market on Egyptian cotton and got us into all this trouble? Was I supposed to know there was going to be a glut? I didn’t even know what a glut was in those days. An opportunity to corner a market



doesn't come along very often, and I was pretty shrewd to grab the chance when I had it." Milo gulped back a moan as he saw six uniformed pallbearers lift the plain pine coffin from the ambulance and set it gently down on the ground beside the yawning gash of the freshly dug grave. "And now I can't get rid of a single penny's worth," he mourned.

Yossarian was unmoved by the fustian charade of the burial ceremony, and by Milo's crushing bereavement. The chaplain's voice floated up to him through the distance tenuously in an unintelligible, almost inaudible monotone, like a gaseous murmur. Yossarian could make out Major Major by his towering and lanky aloofness and thought he recognized Major Danby mopping his brow with a handkerchief. Major Danby had not stopped shaking since his run-in with General Dreedle. There were strands of enlisted men molded in a curve around the three officers, as inflexible as lumps of wood, and four idle gravediggers in streaked fatigues lounging indifferently on spades near the shocking, incongruous heap of loose coppered earth. As Yossarian stared, the chaplain elevated his gaze toward Yossarian beatifically, pressed his fingers down over his eyeballs in a manner of affliction, peered upward again toward Yossarian searchingly, and bowed his head, concluding what Yossarian took to be a climactic part of the funeral rite. The four men in fatigues lifted the coffin on slings and lowered it into the grave. Milo shuddered violently.

"I can't watch it," he cried, turning away in anguish. "I just can't sit here and watch while those mess halls let my syndicate die." He gnashed his teeth and shook his head with bitter woe and resentment. "If they had any loyalty, they would buy my cotton till it hurts so that they can keep right on buying my cotton till it hurts them some more. They would build fires and burn up their underwear and summer uniforms just to create bigger demand. But they won't do a thing. Yossarian, try eating the rest of this chocolate-covered cotton for me. Maybe it will taste delicious now."

Yossarian pushed his hand away. "Give up, Milo. People can't eat cotton."

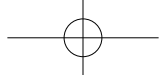
Milo's face narrowed cunningly. "It isn't really cotton," he coaxed. "I was joking. It's really cotton candy, delicious cotton candy. Try it and see."

"Now you're lying."

"I never lie!" Milo rejoindered with proud dignity.

"You're lying now."

"I only lie when it's necessary," Milo explained defensively, averting his eyes for a moment and blinking his lashes winningly. "This stuff is better than cotton candy, really it is. It's made out of real cotton. Yossarian, you've got to



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help me make the men eat it. Egyptian cotton is the finest cotton in the world.”

“But it’s indigestible,” Yossarian emphasized. “It will make them sick, don’t you understand? Why don’t you try living on it yourself if you don’t believe me?”

“I did try,” admitted Milo gloomily. “And it made me sick.”

The graveyard was yellow as hay and green as cooked cabbage. In a little while the chaplain stepped back, and the beige crescent of human forms began to break up sluggishly, like flotsam. The men drifted without haste or sound to the vehicles parked along the side of the bumpy dirt road. With their heads down disconsolately, the chaplain, Major Major and Major Danby moved toward their jeeps in an ostracized group, each holding himself friendlessly several feet away from the other two.

“It’s all over,” observed Yossarian.

“It’s the end,” Milo agreed despondently. “There’s no hope left. And all because I left them free to make their own decisions. That should teach me a lesson about discipline the next time I try something like this.”

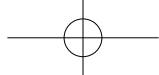
“Why don’t you sell your cotton to the government?” Yossarian suggested casually, as he watched the four men in streaked fatigues shoveling heaping bladefuls of the copper-red earth back down inside the grave.

Milo vetoed the idea brusquely. “It’s a matter of principle,” he explained firmly. “The government has no business in business, and I would be the last person in the world to ever try to involve the government in a business of mine. But the business of government is business,” he remembered alertly, and continued with elation. “Calvin Coolidge said that, and Calvin Coolidge was a President, so it must be true. And the government does have the responsibility of buying all the Egyptian cotton I’ve got that no one else wants so that I can make a profit, doesn’t it?” Milo’s face clouded almost as abruptly, and his spirits descended into a state of sad anxiety. “But how will I get the government to do it?”

“Bribe it,” Yossarian said.

“Bribe it!” Milo was outraged and almost lost his balance and broke his neck again. “Shame on you!” he scolded severely, breathing virtuous fire down and upward into his rusty mustache through his billowing nostrils and prim lips. “Bribery is against the law, and you know it. But it’s not against the law to make a profit, is it? So it can’t be against the law for me to bribe someone in order to make a fair profit, can it? No, of course not!” He fell to brooding again, with a meek, almost pitiable distress. “But how will I know who to bribe?”

“Oh, don’t you worry about that,” Yossarian comforted him with a



toneless snicker as the engines of the jeeps and ambulance fractured the drowsy silence and the vehicles in the rear began driving away backward. “You make the bribe big enough and they’ll find you. Just make sure you do everything right out in the open. Let everyone know exactly what you want and how much you’re willing to pay for it. The first time you act guilty or ashamed, you might get into trouble.”

“I wish you’d come with me,” Milo remarked. “I won’t feel safe among people who take bribes. They’re no better than a bunch of crooks.”

“You’ll be all right,” Yossarian assured him with confidence. “If you run into trouble, just tell everybody that the security of the country requires a strong domestic Egyptian-cotton speculating industry.”

“It does,” Milo informed him solemnly. “A strong Egyptian-cotton speculating industry means a much stronger America.”

“Of course it does. And if that doesn’t work, point out the great number of American families that depend on it for income.”

“A great many American families do depend on it for income.”

“You see?” said Yossarian. “You’re much better at it than I am. You almost make it sound true.”

“It is true,” Milo exclaimed with a strong trace of old hauteur.

“That’s what I mean. You do it with just the right amount of conviction.”

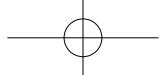
“You’re sure you won’t come with me?”

Yossarian shook his head.

Milo was impatient to get started. He stuffed the remainder of the chocolate-covered cotton ball into his shirt pocket and edged his way back gingerly along the branch to the smooth gray trunk. He threw this arms about the trunk in a generous and awkward embrace and began shinnying down, the sides of his leather-soled shoes slipping constantly so that it seemed many times he would fall and injure himself. Halfway down, he changed his mind and climbed back up. Bits of tree bark stuck to his mustache, and his straining face was flushed with exertion.

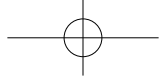
“I wish you’d put your uniform on instead of going around naked that way,” he confided pensively before he climbed back down again and hurried away. “You might start a trend, and then I’ll never get rid of all this goldarned cotton.”

(From Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*,
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961, pp. 164–174.)



Notes

- [1] Milo: As a mess officer at the U.S. Army Air Corps (USAAC) base, he becomes obsessed with expanding mess operations and trading goods for the profits of the syndicate (in which he and everyone else “has a share”). Milo is a satire of contemporary businessmen, and beyond that is the living representation of capitalism, as he has no allegiance to any country, person or principle unless it pays him.
- [2] B-26: B-26 Marauder, which carried the designation “B-26” from 1941 until 1948. It was produced by Glen L. Martin Company.
- [3] B-25: the North American B-25 Mitchell (NA-62), an American twin-engined medium bomber manufactured by North American Aviation. It was used by many Allied air forces in every theater of World War II, as well as many other air forces after the war ended, and saw services across four decades. The B-25 was named in honor of General Billy Mitchell, a pioneer of U.S. military aviation.
- [4] Dreedle: the blunt, irascible commander of a wing in the Mediterranean theater of operations
- [5] B-17: The Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress is an American four-engine heavy bomber developed for the U.S. Army Air Corps. The B-17 began operations in World War II with the Royal Air Force in 1941, American Eighth Air Force and Fifteenth Air Force units in 1942, and was primarily involved in the daylight precision strategic bombing campaign against German industrial targets.
- [6] Yossarian: the hero or antihero of the novel *Catch-22*, and a victim of *Catch-22*
- [7] M.P.: military police
- [8] Cathcart: As a colonel, he wants to be a general in General Dreedle’s outfit. He keeps raising the number of missions and fears “black eyes,” while hoping for “feathers in his cap.”
- [9] Korn: the assistant to Colonel Cathcart. He is more cunning than Cathcart.
- [10] Doc Daneeka: the medical officer who first explains *Catch-22* to Yossarian. He has arranged to be listed on flight schedules, but doesn’t fly. His “theme” is “What about me?”
- [11] Chief White Halfoat: the half-blooded Indian from Oklahoma who obligingly punches Colonel Moodus in the nose for General Dreedle and



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who “knows” he will die of pneumonia

[12] McWatt: a pilot, first Clevinger’s and then Nately’s roommate who heedlessly buzzes the squadron

Questions for Discussion

1. What is “Catch-22”?
2. Is *Catch-22* a formless novel? How is the absurdity as shown in the American Air Force exposed in this novel?
3. In what sense does *Catch-22* signal the beginning of postmodernist American fiction?