

# Critique of American Power Structures in Joseph Heller's Catch-22

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**Kritika struktura moći u Americi u romanu Catch-22 Josepha  
Heller**

Završni rad

Mentorica: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

Osijek, 2023.

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Assistant Professor

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyses the power structures in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. The analysis takes a detailed look at the relationships between the characters that belong to a hierarchical military system, such as the relationships between Colonel Cathcart and Yossarian. The paper explores the distribution of power and the consequences of it being primarily in the hands of the superiors whose orders were treated as laws that could not and should not be questioned. Heller criticizes the system because of its wrong outlook on authoritative forces, such as the military or the government, and their complete power in a society whose members often had no right to a voice of their own and were often unable to uproot their disadvantageous positions. All of these points were expressed through the use of language like irony and paradoxes, fragmentation, and satire designed to show the readers how complicated and easily corrupted the workings of an organization like the army really are and how hard it is to discern the lies from the truth in that kind of environment.

**Keywords:** Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*, power structures, army, hierarchy, language, American society

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## Introduction

Joseph Heller's (1923 – 1999) *Catch-22* criticizes and dissects American beliefs about war by exploring human nature and its ability and desire to conform to the ideas that a major power structure, like the army and the American government, presents to the world. Heller uses World War II and an uncommon hero, John Yossarian, to offer a new perspective on what heroism, individual thinking and bravery is. The author, through his main character Yossarian, makes the reader question how noble a war can really be, how selfish or naive those who hold the power are, and what is behind their decisions in contrast to those who are ready to offer their lives in pursuit of a higher purpose. The core of that relationship, of those in power and their subordinates, is rooted in manipulation present throughout the whole novel and Heller uses the phrase, *Catch-22*, to illustrate that and to offer his own critique. When talking about power structures we will observe the hierarchical relationships in an organization, society or a group of people working together as we see in the army described in *Catch-22*: “The power to make decisions of national and international consequence is now so clearly seated in . . . military, and economic institution . . .” (Mills 32). The following parts of the power-holding structures will be explored through the novel: the possible profit to be made in war, obedience to military orders, and political reasons to attack and fight wars in society. The paper explores how power structures in the novel abuse their power and how that affects the characters. Also, the paper focuses on how that relationship functions outside the novel in American society, mainly how the hierarchical system rests on the desire to advance even when it harms others. Consequently, the first section of the paper will deal with Heller’s critique of society and the meaning and consequence of the term *Catch-22* in real life, like getting trapped in impossible situations similar to the military from which it is hard to be discharged. Secondly, the next section will deal with real examples of hierarchical relationships in the novel, like the relationship between General Peckem and General Dreedle. Finally, the third section will present the language of the novel and its power to control the narrative by being too complicated and incomprehensible to those who have to understand it, mostly the subordinates who have to follow orders.

## 1. Critique of Society in *Catch-22*

To begin with the analysis of *Catch-22* and its influence on American anti-war literature the meaning of the phrase catch-22 is discussed and how the author used it to describe the absurd world in which the individual lives. Heller best describes catch-22 in the fifth chapter of his novel while Yossarian, Heller's main character, is begging Doc Daneeka to relieve him from flying in his plane over enemy territory. He is a doctor who got drafted into the army and takes care of soldiers, he is very important to Yossarian because he has the power to ground him and make him not fly missions over enemy territory anymore:

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

Catch-22 is a special metaphor used to control and trap all of the army officials into staying and honouring their roles in the military. It is a situation that prevents any change to the system it is made to protect, and that is the hierarchical power structure in which the lower-ranking soldiers have to follow orders and are left defenceless against any order that comes their way. Also, the catch is a language absurdity that Heller likes to use in the absurd world of America in World War II which he criticizes, and which is discussed later on in this paper.

Moreover, Heller did not only want his novel to be taken as an anti-war novel but as a "comprehensive indictment of modern society" (Colmer 213). In this section, it is necessary to also mention how American society is greatly influenced by the American power elite and that when talking about this many authors often refer to big corporations who have great influence because of their monetary means and "in many ways the American Government functions primarily to serve their need and promote their interests" (Pauwels 24). Especially in the time of war, something similar to an oligarchic power structure can be seen in the military where the elites and higher-ranking officers take all of the power and hoard it for themselves. They are controlled by profit and control others for the sake of it in the time of war. War will bring profit to those people by forming alliances with the world's power forces, manufacturing weapons, or trading their products with countries destroyed by the war.

The relationship between the power elite and ordinary people who die on a daily basis following their orders can be seen in the novel in the relationship between soldiers and their superiors. We can see how Heller wanted to use his novel to comment on the disappointment he felt towards the society around him which usually saw the war as an economic opportunity to go further in life and not as a tragedy. An example of that is Milo Minderbinder who was intelligent and managed to earn money by buying and selling products in war-affected countries. Heller gives a dual perspective on war in this character. Milo can be seen as productive or smart because he managed to increase his wealth during a turbulent time. On the other hand, Milo can also be seen as a selfish and unscrupulous person who saw the death and destruction the war created around him and saw only an opportunity to make himself richer without much concern for the moral responsibility every individual has to bear. Also, with a character like Milo, the usual image of a soldier as a brave and dignified individual is changed in Heller's novel. Heller continues with his intention to critique and comment on the myth of war the American government tried to build for its people through the following conversation between Nately and the old man in Italy: "Because it's better to die on one's feet than live on one's knees, Nately retorted with triumphant and lofty conviction" (254). Nately is a young, patriotic American who believes that the War would save the American nation and the world from fascism and that death under the commands of those above him is worthy and necessary. Nately identifies freedom with the American military and government which are meant to be considered the pillars of the American Dream by leading the American people to a free life. On the other hand, the old man who is living with prostitutes in a public house and profits from the soldiers who come to the building believes that being neutral, and complacent with any kind of government is better than being dead and forgotten in the name of great ideas, like freedom or patriotism. He welcomed American soldiers like Nately to occupied Italy and made money off them and he would do the same if the Italian or the German soldiers came back to his town.

Furthermore, Heller uses absurd situations to describe a world in which the individual is always an outsider trying to fit into a world that does not value him and only sees him in terms of profit. Yossarian is an example of a character who does not want to fit in but still continues flying the missions he is ordered to fly. He is aware he does not want to serve in the army, and he tries to do everything he can to get out of serving which is why he even gets acquainted with the catch and tries to get around it. In his fight with Major Sanderson Yossarian is faced with the fact that the people around him view him as less than a person because they see him as an unnamed soldier without a consciousness: "You have a morbid aversion to dying. You probably resent the fact that you're at war and might get your head blown off any second" (Heller 311). Yossarian is absolutely

livid because his commander does not acknowledge his desire to live and more importantly Yossarian's unwillingness to die for someone's ideals or any profit the war may bring. Yossarian rejects the world that makes him seem unreasonable or crazy because he wants to protect himself. The absurdity of this situation, being forced to stay alive and at the same time being sent to his death is clear to the reader. On the other hand, the absurdity is not acknowledged by the characters who fight to keep alive "the overstructured and bureaucratic world of Kafka, where one does not exist if he does not have in I.D. card (Lehan and Patch 81). All of these aspects of *Catch-22* describe how critical Heller was of the Second World War and, we can assume, of all the wars that came before and will happen after. Heller combines both reality, the aspect of dehumanization and profit in war, and fiction, all of the absurd situations in his novel, and highlights both as important features of anti-war literature like this.

## 2. Characters of *Catch-22* and their Relationship with Authority

This section of the paper deals with the characters and their positions in the hierarchical military structure. The first character introduced in *Catch-22* is Captain John Yossarian, an anti-hero who refuses to fight the war but, in the end, never stops following the orders given to him, like continuing bombing enemy territory. As the main character he questions the system of the army and the purpose of the war in which he and the soldiers around him were fighting: “. . . Heller is the narrating presence that pits Self against Society, the pure-of-heart against the thoroughly corrupt” (Pinsker 5). Yossarian is the Self who finds himself in the middle of a fixed and inflexible system that is the army. Another example of the righteous Self against the system is Clevinger and his conflict with Lieutenant Scheisskopf when Clevinger got punished for no real reason. Clevinger was punished only because he answered Lieutenant Scheisskopf’s question about who was guilty of losing the military parades that Lieutenant Scheisskopf liked to participate in. Clevinger tried to be honest and helpful by answering but the system, namely his commander Scheisskopf, punished him because all the officers he commanded had no right to question his decisions. Even trying to help can be seen as a danger to the preexisting structure because it means that subordinates possess opinions and beliefs. Additionally, Yossarian questions how this absurd world of the army and war can be considered honourable and wanted in American society, and how the people who have important governmental roles shape the thoughts of those who fight:

Allied military groups and the opposing German units are equally insane. The existence of war-aims, the validity of motives such as patriotism or a moral conviction that one’s own side is righteous and the enemy wicked, are discounted: the bureaucracies, whatever they say, do not exist to further these pseudo-reasonable objectives; they exist because they exist and in order to perpetuate their existence. (Way 10)

Yossarian is aware that there are beliefs built around him that make their enemies, Nazis, feel like mythical creatures without attaching real feelings to those whom the Air Force, he, and other soldiers, are meant to destroy. The important factor in Yossarian’s story is the fact that soldiers drop bombs from high up in the sky without real contact with those they kill. The bureaucracies that think of and plan those bombings as said in the quote before do not work to further establish these “evil” or “good” sides but to stay in power and strengthen their positions. The power the generals, colonels, or officers hold is the only thing they are fighting for. The complicated net of connections and orders they give out to their soldiers, just like the catch, offer no exit out of the absurd world. That kind of a system asks for conformity and as a reward for that gives them further

promotions or better ranks, like to Lieutenant Scheisskopf, Colonel Cathcart, or Major Major, characters who are further discussed in the following paragraphs.

Yossarian also experiences the inability to control his own actions because he has to continue to go into planes and fight according to the orders he gets. Moreover, he loses control of his own body because, as it is said, nothing he owns is really his: "That leg belongs to the U. S. government. It's no different than a gear or a bedpan. The Army has invested a lot of money to make you an airplane pilot. . ." (Heller 299). This is an example of how an individual is dehumanized in the army. There is nothing Yossarian is in possession of, even his death serves a purpose. His death is only used as an honour to the American army. It serves to emphasize the size and power the army has to send thousands of people into war happy to die in order to maintain the colossal force that it is.

The next individual whose destiny is determined by his relationship with the army is Major Major. Major Major got his own chapter, and he is one of the many absurd stories the author uses to describe the complicated and confusing world he builds in the novel. Major Major is the real name of this character, as confusing as that sounds, his name, and the fact his father named him that in secrecy made him an unstable individual, ashamed of his name, perfect for work in the army, without any questions or arguments from his superiors: "He was told to honor his father and his mother, and he honored his father and his mother. He was told that he should not kill, and he did not kill until he got into the Army. Then he was told to kill, and he killed" (Heller 89). He was an insecure conformist who accepted every order that came his way because he, like many others who joined the military, felt the most secure when others decided for him and took away any responsibilities that complicated his life. He got his promotion because of the personal interest of a different character, Colonel Cathcart: "A superfluous major on his rolls meant an untidy table of organization and gave ammunition to the men at Twenty-seventh Air Force Headquarters who Colonel Cathcart was positive were his enemies and rivals" (Heller 92). His promotion is useless and without any real purpose and happens only because Cathcart thought of him as either a competition or a problem he needed to solve. The ability to change lives and turn individuals into numbers is shown to be in the hands of those who have power and higher ranks, emphasizing the importance of the hierarchical structure. Later on, Major Major does not use his new power to help other soldiers. For example, Yossarian asks him to help him in his intention to stop flying over enemy territory. Major Major, on the other hand, stays passive and decides to pretend as though he has no personal responsibility to help those who need it.

Furthermore, Milo Minderbinder is a character who uses the corruption of the system to change his life by forming his own business: "Milo has formed a syndicate designed to corner the world

market on all available foodstuffs, which he then sells to army messhalls at huge profits” (Brustein 6). Milo is an example of a capitalist point of view, it is another structure built in the real world but present also in the setting of the novel, mainly the army. Milo does not concern himself with things like honour or love for his country because he seems to have put his own individual self in front of those values that he is told he should die for. Milo is, similarly to Yossarian, an individual who rejects authority and its possession of the lives of officers. While Yossarian fights for his life and tries to help others to realize how pointless it is to give away one’s life, Milo lives following other principles: “It reveals that behind the compulsive acquisitiveness of capitalism lies a completely amoral destructive force, blind in its operation and totally unconcerned with human consequences” (Colmer 211). Milo buys produce and sells it for a high profit which is not fair because in a time of war, people cannot influence the quality of their lives but have to sell their belongings to anyone who wants to buy them. But Milo never thinks about that because his business cannot suffer because of his feelings or morality. Capitalism and its system values profit over anything. The loss of humanity and the importance of material gain is best exemplified when Milo signed a contract with the Germans to bomb his own squadron and its men. Milo’s greed and crimes saw no limits, but he was still able to use the power of profit for his own benefit and that is not being properly punished by his superiors: “And they know that what’s good for the syndicate is good for the country, because that’s what makes Sammy run” (Heller 240). Milo appeals to the country by giving shares in the syndicate to everyone in the squadron. He solves his problems with money and donations, by appealing to those who lead the country. In the end, Milo is Heller’s way of explaining how the American power elite and its structures are tightly intertwined with capitalism and are willing to sacrifice anything for it, even its own soldiers and military bases. All of these characters, Yossarian, Major Major, and Milo, offer a perspective on how power is distributed in the military. Yossarian and his relationship with authority is highlighted in the novel and it is clear he is a powerful individual who wants to take control of his own life without hurting others if he is not forced to do so. Secondly, Major Major is dehumanized and awarded for being submissive. His power is given to him by his superiors because of his submissive nature and because of the personal benefit his superiors enjoy by having a weak and submissive higher-ranking officer who can be easily controlled. Finally, Milo is neither a submissive nor an honourable person, he is only led by personal interest and profit. He uses the power structure that is established in the army, he does not serve the system like Major Major and does not have a personal conflict with the military principles like Yossarian because he does not attribute them any value.

## 2.1. General Peckem and General Dreedle

The relationship and conflict between General Peckem and General Dreedle is significant because it offers a clear example of the hierarchical military power structure which includes fights for rank, authority, and control. The conflict between these two characters rests on their need to replace one another as the higher-ranking officer: “General Peckem, head of Special Services, whose strategic objective is to replace General Dreedle, the wing commander, capturing every bomber group in the US Air Force” (Brustein 5). The characters lack any real human emotions or desires besides the need to annihilate one another and erase any trace of power the other one might have had. However, their need to destroy one another is not necessarily a trait of them being evil but rather accustomed to a society in which they have to strive towards excellence:

Even the former (Cathcart, Dreedle, Milo, et al.), however, are not really evil in any sinister way: rather, they simply react to the given chance, the proffered opportunity. They could be professors, or even ministers. They are men on the make, and such is the quality of modern life—all men are waiting for their chance. (Karl 23)

The author highlights how those characters do not make their decisions in order to intentionally bring harm to others around them but have rather lost empathy for those they do not have to listen to but who have to obey them. Moreover, they did not do that because they are inherently evil but in order to achieve better things in life, in this case getting a better rank than those they are competing with. They had to learn how to take all of the chances offered to them because in the fast-paced settings of the military opportunities disappear as quickly as they appear.

General Peckem fits in this mold Karl talks about and that can be seen when someone announces that Bologna was captured and nobody knew who had done it or how it was done: “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” (Heller 125). Peckem managed to get a medal without any real initiative or action on his part except for being brave enough to ask for it. This could be the author’s desire to comment on how the ranks and military awards are often not given to those who deserve them but to those ready to take advantage of every situation, more so because Bologna was never captured. In fact, it was Yossarian who moved the battleline without anyone noticing him doing it. This shows how the well-established structures inside the military are able to function even when it relies on rumours, like the capture of Bologna, or when parts of it are not working properly: “I’ve already put in a requisition for two majors, four captains and sixteen lieutenants to give you a hand. While none of the work we do is very important, it is important that we do a great deal of it” (Heller 330). General Peckem says this to



Colonel Scheisskopf about his department proving how the military structure relies on people respecting the hierarchy established a long time ago and how most of the work is done by lower-ranking soldiers who often must bear the responsibilities of the decisions made by those above them.

General Dreedle is an example of how power dynamics in military structures can be changed in some cases. Dreedle, described as opposite of General Peckem, holds a more traditional military role which can be seen when he insists on opening a skeet-shooting range for his men because he cares about his soldiers' ability to shoot. In addition, he wants to show their masculine side and physical power rather than showing off his own personal results. He seems to be struggling to keep his position because of his old way of thinking about the military: "General Dreedle had wasted too much of his time in the Army doing his job well, and now it was too late. New power alignments had coalesced without him and he was at a loss to cope with them" (Heller 222). This shows how the power dynamics in the military are very much changing and complex and often influenced by one's superiors or outside forces. General Dreedle is not as calculating and if we believe in this quote maybe he does not possess the possibility to always put himself in the lead which stopped him from pursuing the opportunities offered to him that stopped him from advancing and is now stopping him from keeping his position safe from others, like General Peckem. This incompetence to work in those conditions and to adapt to them makes him lose some of his authority although that is not clearly described in the novel: "The chief officers become even more self-seeking and incompetent. Lt. Scheisskopf . . . takes over Special Services from General Dreedle at the moment when Special Services takes over the control of combat" (Solomon 60). The power structure becomes even worse in the absurd world that Heller builds because the importance of following the rules and being obedient in that structure is more important than being competent and good at doing their jobs which indicates one of the main problems in the novel. Both Peckem and Dreedle represent the need for blind advancement without any real reason but personal goals.

## 2.2. Lieutenant Scheisskopf and Yossarian

To begin this section that will discuss the relationship between Lieutenant Scheisskopf and Yossarian it is important to highlight how the Lieutenant maintains the typical hierarchical power structure and tries to establish the almost oligarchic power structure, which Yossarian tries to disrupt and reject throughout the novel with his lack of respect. To begin illustrating their relationship and the power structure it symbolizes, it is essential to address rank and hierarchy

between them. Lieutenant Scheisskopf outranks Yossarian and by that, he should hold all authority over him. While that is true in the formal sense, Yossarian does and must follow all the orders given to him. There are a lot of conflicts because Yossarian decides to try to fight against the strict military rules by refusing to fly anymore missions. Scheisskopf is first described in chapter eight of the novel where Heller does not hide that Scheisskopf can be considered a very problematic character:

Lieutenant Scheisskopf was an R.O.T.C. graduate who was rather glad that war had broken out, since it gave him an opportunity to wear an officer's uniform every day and say 'Men' in a clipped, military voice to the bunches of kids who fell into his clutches every eight weeks on their way to the butcher's block. (Heller 72)

He is a character who holds a completely different take on war and fighting than Yossarian, which will be a source of conflict between them. He does not see victims or thinking individuals in his subordinates but people he knows he could control and who are forced to listen to him because of his rank and the military system they belong to. The author criticizes him for using the words kids for the soldiers he will have to take care of. His use of the word kids presents the soldiers as immature and juvenile people who are not aware of the consequences of war they decided to join. Therefore, Yossarian's thoughts on Scheisskopf's position in that system can be questioned even from his first mention. Furthermore, the readers find out that Scheisskopf has problems with his eyesight and sinuses which prevents him from going overseas to fight. This is also important because the author uses that to crush any sense of authority he has among the military men because which subordinate could follow a Lieutenant they could never follow into battle in which he should be able to lead them. To further crush his authority Yossarian decides to sleep with Scheisskopf's wife, Luciana, while saying how he is not the first soldier to do so. Yossarian falls in love with her while being annoyed with her too. Their relationship presents an interesting power dynamic between Scheisskopf, Yossarian, and Luciana. Luciana holds a sense of romantic power over Yossarian, who is in love with her, but his position in the army is also threatened if she ever decides to reveal their affair to her husband. Lieutenant Scheisskopf seems to hold a great emotional distance between himself and his wife and focuses more on his military career than anything else. The author establishes a clear hierarchical relationship between the spouses in which the wife holds a clear submissive role towards her husband. On the other hand, while Yossarian seems to be unassertive in his relationship with Luciana he secretly feels proud because he believes he has reversed the flow of power between Scheisskopf and himself at least on the personal level. Moreover, Yossarian notices how power hungry Scheisskopf is and how he treats those without power: This is evident in Scheisskopf's thoughts about Clevinger: "Clevinger had a mind, and

Lieutenant Scheisskopf had noticed that people with minds tended to get pretty smart at times” (Heller 73). The author presented him as someone who sees people as objects who can only come between him and his goal, and that is to hold a high military rank. That relationship is clear between Scheisskopf and his wife as well as between him and his subordinates.

This is another commentary on the military structure in which obedience given through instilled fear is the only thing that is desired and wanted from the young men serving in the army. The hierarchy needs to be preserved and continued and never questioned by people like Yossarian because that would mean its crash. Scheisskopf’s progress in that hierarchy and becoming Colonel and later on a General is never fully explained but we as the readers can suspect that it happened because of his love and meticulous nature when it came to organizing military parades. Military parades are described as very important to the Lieutenant and one of his only motives to join and stay in the military. Organizing them offered no real sense of danger but it served to show Scheisskopf to be very organized and capable of disciplining his soldiers. Of course, Yossarian is aware of how incompetent Scheisskopf is and how Yossarian’s mission to keep himself alive is now in great danger because of the incompetent Lieutenant.

This seems to be a major topic the author discusses throughout the novel; the subordinates are aware that their superiors are not fit to lead them and that oftentimes they present a greater danger than their enemies. All of that is true with regard to Lieutenant Scheisskopf but his progress to power is never stopped in that absurd world. His willingness to listen and move forward without almost any sort of moral responsibility makes him a perfect soldier but not a perfect person. Lieutenant Scheisskopf is an excellent example of a soldier in a hierarchical military power structure who benefits from that system because he is willing to trample on his personal beliefs in order to get a position. He enjoys the power he has and enjoys ordering all those who are under him. The main conflict is between him and Yossarian, mainly because Yossarian represents a rebel and an obstacle to Scheisskopf’s success in the military.

### 2.3. Colonel Cathcart and Yossarian

The next relationship that will be analysed is the one between the main character Yossarian and Colonel Cathcart which as in the previous relationship is characterized by the hierarchical power structure between two individuals. Colonel Cathcart is described as a person who abuses his power but never puts his own life on the line like many of those in power: “Colonel Cathcart had courage and never hesitated to volunteer his men for any target available. No target was too dangerous for his group to attack. . .” (Heller 56). Yossarian describes Cathcart as another weak individual who

moves up in rank on account of the sacrifices of other people who have no choice but to listen to him and follow his orders. In a conversation between Major Danby and Yossarian readers find out about the importance of obedience in the military: “Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn are my superiors, and obeying their orders is the only contribution I can make to the war effort. I work along with them because it’s my duty” (Heller 460). We find out that Danby might not have the best opinion about those who give him orders but it is his duty as a soldier to respect the rules of all of those who have a higher rank than him within the military power structure. Cathcart is obsessed with rank which he can achieve only based on his men’s actions and soldiers, soldiers like Danby who are willing to help him only out of a sense of duty. This obsession with advancement is also clear when the Colonel promotes Major Major to the new rank of squadron commander, only because he is calculating how he can control someone who he believes is a Major and who could potentially endanger his position and authority among his men.

The relationship is very similar to the one Yossarian has with Scheisskopf because Yossarian struggles with his superior and his superior’s authority over him and his life. Colonel Cathcart is the commanding officer of Yossarian’s unit who decides the number of missions soldiers on the island of Pianosa have to fly. Those missions are the ones Yossarian tries to evade throughout the whole novel because he is aware those missions are going to be the thing that will be the cause of his death. Similarly to Scheisskopf, Cathcart is also chasing a higher rank for no other reason than to give orders and to have as many people under his command as possible. While Colonel Cathcart’s relationship with Yossarian is heavily marked by their positions in the military that is not the only relationship of his that relies heavily on rank. Colonel Cathcart held power over and governed with fear over all of the members of his unit: “. . . if he ever displeased Colonel Cathcart by grounding Yossarian, he might suddenly find himself transferred” (Heller 32). The strict system of giving and listening to orders is very clear and as we can see with this example of Doc Daneeka it cannot be evaded or disrespected. That is why Doc Daneeka is not even tempted to help Yossarian in his intention to stop flying missions and survive the war.

A major part of the plot that involves Colonel Cathcart and Yossarian is the missions he makes the pilots fly. This is also a product of his need to go up in rank and the only way to do that in the military is to impress those who run the country and hold the highest positions. They are the ones characters like Scheisskopf and Cathcart look up to, once again confirming the importance of the hierarchical system of power. They represent power and most importantly they can distribute parts of it to those under them. The number of missions the soldiers had to fly over enemy territory was at first twenty-five missions but as soon as some of the soldiers managed to catch up to that number the Colonel would raise the number up by five more making the number reach eighty by the time

Yossarian decides he has had enough. Thus, the number eighty can be considered unreachable to almost all of the men in the unit. By raising the number of missions to eighty the superiors reaffirm their power over the life and death of those soldiers. Also, this is an absurd number of missions that serve to remind the reader how erratic and unpredictable orders could become but still had to be followed. Using this example with Colonel Cathcart the author once again emphasizes that while this power dynamic is very successful, as can be seen in militaries around the world, it is also very dangerous. The American Army was advancing, and they were taking more and more of the enemy territory but the individuals who had to fly the missions were exhausted and lost all individual freedom and identity by becoming only things that were meant to die for their country. Yossarian decides to rebel against that system by refusing to fly at one point in the novel: “‘I wish we could disappear him!’ Colonel Cathcart blurted out from the corner peevishly” (Heller 405). However, while Yossarian’s decision is a very brave one it ultimately ends up with terrible consequences for him. First, he is demoted to Lieutenant even though he was a Captain at the beginning of the novel. Secondly, Colonel Cathcart threatens him with a court-martial, a trial that could lead to prison or in extreme cases, execution. This example shows how an individual is forced to become a dehumanized object whose only purpose is to listen and follow given orders. Moreover, Heller points out how advancing in the military structure does not have to be connected to abilities but is often motivated by nothing more than personal greed and interest “‘What else have we got to do? Everyone teaches us to aspire to higher things” (439). This is one of the clearest examples the author gives of how power-centred the military, and American society really are in their teaching that power and advancement are to be cherished above all else.

### 3. The Language of *Catch-22*

Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is a novel that criticizes the American society and its obsession with power and profit and the influence of those two things on people's actions and lives. *Catch-22* is an anti-war novel that focuses on the anti-hero, John Yossarian, who tries to rebel against the strict military system that relies on submissive and senseless individuals who surrender control over their own lives to those who are not better than them in any other way than the rank that was given to them. The absurdity of that situation is emphasized and made worse because usually, the higher-ranking officers are not better, more educated, or more capable than the people whose lives they can control with their orders. They are people who only had better opportunities and showed less moral responsibility because they trampled over anyone who could stop them from advancement in the workplace.

Heller presents the hierarchical power structure in the army the most because it is the basic way the army operates. There is a clear distinction between the subordinates and their superiors. Lines are very clear even in the absurd world that Heller built because no matter how crazy or half-witted the orders are they must be followed no matter what. Even characters like Yossarian do everything they are told to do and are punished for not obeying their superiors. Nobody is safe if they do not hold a certain amount of power and if they do get it, they become selfish and further concerned with advancing like Lieutenant Scheisskop or Colonel Cathcart. Heller criticizes the human instinct to chase power above all else but also the human nature which decides to accept that power and authority over their lives without much thought about their personal beliefs and ideals. Furthermore, there is something similar to an oligarchic power structure inside the military where while the power is distributed hierarchically it is still mostly in the hands of a select number of individuals who control the whole hierarchy by giving out orders that usually benefit only them. When it comes to the characters in the novel those individuals can be General Dreedle or General Peckem who try to organize their units so that they will be the ones with the most amount of power and almost untouchable by everybody else. But, given the dynamic nature of power, they do not manage to hoard a great amount of power because most of it is in the hands of the government or big corporations that have a lot of money. The last power structure is the informal one, mostly visible through the personal relationships of the characters. These relationships mainly depend on the amount of influence or even personality of the person who puts themselves in front of others by their abilities, like Milo Minderbinder with his intelligence and perseverance to succeed.

Lastly, language shapes the world Joseph Heller built because it holds much more power than the reader would assume. The language maintains the structures built inside the army but also in the

American Society. For example, the military sends a report to Doc Daneeka's wife that he is dead even though the readers know that is not true but a bureaucratic mistake. Using language, a higher-ranking officer like Scheisskopf, is able to punish Clevinger, not because he is guilty but because he poses a threat to his position. Language is behind the promotion of Major Major because it is awarded only as a result of his name and not his qualifications. Through language Mudd is reduced to becoming known as the "dead man" and not a once living and breathing individual. The reversal of power happens in the end when Yossarian finally frees himself of the guilt and shackles that the military put on him by escaping to live his life freely.

## Conclusion

Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is a novel that criticizes American society and its obsession with power and profit and the influence of those two things on people's actions and lives. *Catch-22* is an anti-war novel that focuses on the anti-hero, John Yossarian, who tries to rebel against the strict military system that relies on submissive and senseless individuals who surrender control over their own lives to those who are not better than them in any other way than the rank that was given to them. The absurdity of that situation is emphasized and made worse because usually, the higher-ranking officers are not better, more educated, or more capable than the people whose lives they can control with their orders. They are only people who had better opportunities and showed less moral responsibility because they trampled over anyone who could stop them from advancement in the workplace.

Heller devotes most of the novel to presenting the hierarchical power structure in the army because it is the basic way the army operates. There is a clear distinction between the subordinates and their superiors. Lines are very clear even in the absurd world that Heller has built because no matter how crazy or half-witted the orders are they must be followed no matter what. Even characters like Yossarian do everything they are told to do and are punished for not obeying their superiors. Nobody is safe if they do not hold a certain amount of power and if they do get it, they become selfish and further concerned with advancing like Lieutenant Scheisskop or Colonel Cathcart. Heller criticizes the human instinct to chase power above all else but also the human nature which decides to accept that power and authority over their lives without much thought about their personal beliefs and ideals. Furthermore, there is something similar to an oligarchic power structure inside the military where while the power is distributed hierarchically it is still mostly in the hands of a select number of individuals that control the whole hierarchy. When it comes to the characters in the novel those individuals are represented by General Dreedle and General Peckem, who try to organize their units so that they will be the ones with the greatest power and almost untouchable by everybody else. But, given the dynamic nature of power, that cannot be true because most of the power is, as mentioned in the paper, in the hands of the government or big corporations that have a lot of money. The last power structure is the informal one, mostly visible through the personal relationships of the characters. This informal power structure runs parallel to the formal power structure and is based on the amount of influence or even the personality of the person who puts themselves ahead of others using their abilities, like Milo Minderbinder with his intelligence and perseverance to succeed.



Lastly, language shapes the world Joseph Heller built because it holds much more power than the reader would assume. The language maintains the structures built inside the army but also in the American Society. The language and words said by those in power, like the report to Doc Daneeka's wife that he is dead even though the readers know that it is a bureaucratic mistake. Language, through the higher-ranking officer like Scheisskopf, punishes Clevinger even though he is not guilty but only poses a threat to Scheisskopf's position because of his capabilities. Language promotes Major Major only because of his name and no further qualifications. It names Mudd as the "dead man" and leaves him as nothing more than an adjective and not a once living and breathing individual. Finally, the reversal of power happens in the end when Yossarian frees himself of the guilt and shackles of the rules of the military by escaping to live his life freely on his own terms.

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