

# A Lawyer Looks at *Catch-22*: The Best Catch There Is Is Not Much of a Catch

Kenneth Bresler\*

When Joseph Heller, author of *Catch-22*, was asked about translating the phrase “Catch-22” into Finnish, the question was treated as absurd:

I am translating your novel *Catch-22* into Finnish. Would you please explain me one thing: What means Catch-22? I didn't find it in any vocabulary. Even the assistant air attaché of the U.S.A. here in Helsinki could not explain exactly.<sup>1</sup>

*Newsweek*, which reported the request, continued: “Joe Heller, who knows there is a catch to everything, comments dryly: ‘I think in Finland the book will lose a lot in translation.’”<sup>2</sup>

The responses of Heller and *Newsweek* were as if “Catch-22” is not only untranslatable, it is *obviously* untranslatable, along the lines of: “If you have to ask, you won't get it.” The *Newsweek* interviewer didn't turn around and ask Heller, “So, what *does* ‘Catch-22’ mean?”

In another interview, Heller said, “One of the qualities of *Catch-22* is that it almost eludes exact definition.”<sup>3</sup> The interviewer responded, “I wouldn't even think of ever asking you to define it.”<sup>4</sup> Later, the interviewer told Heller about “a few real-life items” that “say more about what *Catch-22* is than any definition possibly could.”<sup>5</sup> I have been unable to locate an interview

---

\* B.A., Tufts University, 1979; J.D., Harvard Law School, 1984. Member of the Massachusetts Bar.

© Kenneth Bresler 2008. The author thanks Maria Plati for her translation on page 21 and 22; Joel J. Brattin, Harvey N. Bock, and Joel R. Leeman for their insights and useful comments; Phally Eth and the research librarians at the Sawyer Library, Suffolk University, Boston, Mass., and Elinor Hernon and the research librarians at the Newton (Mass.) Free Library.

<sup>1</sup> “The Heller Cult,” *Newsweek* (Oct. 1, 1962), Adam J. Sorkin, ed., *Conversations with Joseph Heller 5* (University Press of Mississippi 1993).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* Heller repeated the Finnish translator's question word-for-word in an interview with *Playboy* (or *Playboy* lifted it from *Newsweek*). Heller's comment on the question was: “I suspect the book lost a great deal in its Finnish translation.” “*Playboy* Interview: Joseph Heller by Sam Merrill” (June 1975), Sorkin at 173. Heller called the letter “unsettling.” *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Paul Krassner, “An Impolite Interview with Joseph Heller,” *The Realist* 23-24 (Nov. 1962).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 23. This exchange was published in the November 1962 issue of *The Realist*. It is not exactly the same version of *The Realist* interview that appears in Sorkin at 6.

<sup>5</sup> Sorkin at 27. I refer enough to this interview excerpt that I quote it here.

Q. I have a few real-life items in mind, which, I think, say more about what *Catch-22* is than any definition possibly could, and I'd like to get whatever reactions they evoke in you. Item: The Department of Welfare has finally revised a long-standing rule so that now, when a public assistance case is closed because of the death of the person who had been receiving the public assistance, it's no longer necessary that the deceased person be notified by mail that he won't get any further public assistance.

A. It does not surprise me at all. That's like that educational session in the beginning of the book, with the rule Colonel Korn employs to cut off these embarrassing questions: the only ones who would be allowed to ask questions were those who never did.

But it does not surprise me. There is a law of life: People in need of help have the least chance of getting it. Here again, we can almost establish a mathematical

in which Heller defined or was asked to define the term.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, Heller's lack of a definition didn't matter. Once the term entered the language, it was no longer his alone to define. He did explain it, which is not the same as defining it. He died in 1999.

"Catch-22" may lose something in Finnish (although I doubt it) and have been hard for Heller to define (although not for others later), but that does not mean that the question "What means 'Catch-22'?" is not worth exploring. The novel states variously that Catch-22 is a law,<sup>7</sup> regulation,<sup>8</sup> rule,<sup>9</sup> and deal,<sup>10</sup> and that it has clauses.<sup>11</sup> That makes a legal analysis of Catch-22 appropriate. The first step toward understanding Catch-22, as with understanding legal concepts, is to examine the text and sources. *Catch-22* presents seven explicit applications or scenarios illustrating Catch-22, and six implicit applications or scenarios. The sequel to *Catch-22*, *Closing Time*,<sup>12</sup> presents four Catch-22s, two of them new. I have named these applications or scenarios of Catch-22 to make them easier to discuss.

relationship. The chance of a person getting help is in inverse proportion to the extent of his need.

And this is true of mental cases, this is true in social work; it's certainly true in business; it's true of people who want credit; it's true of friendship.

Now, that happens with Major Major, too. I hate to keep referring to my book – I *love* to keep referring to my book – there's a line about Major Major: Because he needed a friend so desperately, he never found one.

That's certainly true of mental cases. A person who's in out-and-out need, who's on the verge of suicide, who *is* paranoiac on the strength of it, is going to get no help from anybody; a mild neurotic will be encouraged to see a psychiatrist, his friends will want to help him and indulge him, but when the need becomes critical, then – if I might quote an old philosopher – goodbye, Charlie.

*Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Sorkin (31 interviews with Heller, or articles based on interviews); *A Catch-22 Casebook* 294, 301, eds. Frederick Kiley and Walter McDonald (Thomas Y. Crowell 1973)(two additional interviews); Barbara A. Bannon, "PW Interviews: Joseph Heller," *Publishers Weekly* 6 (Sept. 30, 1974); Murry Frymer, "He Adds Another Catch to List," *Newsday* 40A (Oct. 14, 1968); Caroline Moorehead, "Writing novels slowly but with hardly a catch," *The Times* 10 (Oct. 17, 1976); Charlie Reilly, "An Interview with Joseph Heller," *Contemporary Literature* 507 (vol. 4, 1998); C.E. Reilly and Carol Villei, "An Interview with Joseph Heller," *Delaware Literary Review* 19 (Spring 1975); Robert Robinson, "Thirteen years after 'Catch-22' – an interview with Joseph Heller," *The Listener* 550 (Oct. 24, 1974); Charles Ruas, *Conversations with American Writers* 143 (Alfred A. Knopf 1985); James Shapiro, "Work in Progress/Joseph Heller," *Intellectual Digest* 6 (vol. 6, Dec. 1971); Israel Shenker, "Joseph Heller Draws Dead Bead on the Politics of Gloom," *The New York Times* 49 (Sept. 10, 1968); Peter Strafford, "Mr Heller catches the spirit of a generation," *The Times* 12 (Oct. 19, 1974); Larry Swindell, "What Happened to Heller After 'Catch-22'? Something," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 1-D (Sept. 12, 1974); Kathi A. Vosevich, "Conversations with Joseph Heller," *War, Literature & the Arts* 91 (vol. 11, no. 2, Fall/Winter 1999); Alden Whitman, "Something Always Happens On The Way To The Office: An Interview With Joseph Heller," *Pages: The World of Books, Letters, and Writing* 74, eds. Matthew J. Bruccoli, C.E. Frazer Clark, Jr. (Gale Research Co. 1976); "Catch-22 and After," *Gentlemen's Quarterly* 95 (March 1963); "So They Say: Guest Editors interview six creative people," *Mademoiselle* 234 (Aug. 1963).

<sup>7</sup> *Catch-22* chap. XXXIX, 398.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at chap. V, 45.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at chap. IV, 35, chap. V, 45.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 412, 414.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at chap. V, 46.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Heller, *Closing Time* (Simon & Schuster 1994).

## The seven explicit applications or scenarios of Catch-22

*Catch-22* takes place during World War Two, primarily on the fictitious Italian island of Pianosa.

1. **The censor's Catch-22.** The novel begins with Yossarian, the protagonist, in the hospital. To escape bombing missions, he is concealing that his liver pain had gone away. He, as an officer, is assigned to censor enlisted men's outgoing mail.

Catch-22 required that each censored letter bear the censoring officer's name. Most letters he didn't read at all. On those he didn't read at all he wrote his own name. On those he did read he wrote, "Washington Irving." When that grew monotonous, he wrote, "Irving Washington."<sup>13</sup>

In this application, Catch-22 is not the absurdist construction that the term has come to mean. The reason might be that it was the first one that Heller wrote. He said, "Initially Catch-22 required that every censoring officer put his name on every letter he censored. Then as I went on, I deliberately looked for self-contradictory situations, and artistic contrivance came in."<sup>14</sup>

Yossarian misses at least one loophole in this Catch-22. If he doesn't read the letters and therefore doesn't censor them, he doesn't have to put his name on them; he could write "Washington Irving," "Irving Washington," any other name, or nothing on the letters. Another possible loophole depends on what a "censored letter" meant: a letter that a censor redacts, or a letter that a censor reviews, with or without redacting it. It is possible that a censoring officer who does not redact anything in a letter does not have to put his name on it.

2. **The airmen's Catch-22 (original).** The second application of Catch-22 to appear in the novel is the best known, so well known that most people think of it as *the* Catch-22. Even if people have read the book, and know and remember that other applications of Catch-22 exist, this Catch-22 is the most memorable.

I will quote the excerpt that presents the airmen's Catch-22, but first, my summary: World War Two airmen are assigned to fly bombing missions (an ever-increasing number), which are dangerous. Sane airmen must fly bombing missions. Insane airmen cannot fly bombing missions. Anyone who doesn't want to fly a bombing mission is sane, and is required to do so. Anyone who wants to fly bombing missions is insane and cannot do so. To be excused from missions, an insane airman must ask. But an airman who wants to fly missions won't ask to be excused from flying. The result? Every airman flies bombing missions.

...Yossarian came to him [Doc Daneeka] one [bombing] mission later and pleaded again,<sup>15</sup> without any real expectation of success, to be grounded. Doc Daneeka snickered

---

<sup>13</sup> *Catch-22* chap. I, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Heller, "Reeling in *Catch-22*," *Catch as Catch Can: The Collected Stories and Other Writings* / *Joseph Heller* 313-14 (Simon & Schuster 2003).

<sup>15</sup> The previous plea may have been in *Catch-22* chap. II, 21.

once and was soon immersed in problems of his own, which included...Yossarian who decided right then and there to go crazy.

“You’re wasting your time,” Doc Daneeka was forced to tell him.

“Can’t you ground someone who’s crazy?”

“Oh, sure. I have to. There’s a rule saying I have to ground anyone who’s crazy.”

“Then why don’t you ground me? I’m crazy....”

Yossarian continues:

“[A]sk any of the others. They’ll tell you how crazy I am.”

“They’re crazy.”

“Then why don’t you ground them?”

“Why don’t they ask me to ground them?”

“Because they’re crazy, that’s why.”

“Of course they’re crazy,” Doc Daneeka replied. “I just told you they’re crazy, didn’t I? And you can’t let crazy people decide whether you’re crazy or not, can you?”

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

“He sure is,” Doc Daneeka said.

“Can you ground him?”

“I sure can. But first he has to ask me to. That’s part of the rule.”

“Then why doesn’t he ask you to?”

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

“That’s all he has to do to be grounded?”

“That’s all. Let him ask me.”

“And then you can ground him?” Yossarian asked.

“No. Then I can’t ground him.”

“You mean there’s a catch?”

“Sure there’s a catch,” Doc Daneeka replied. “Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn’t really crazy.”

There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one’s 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<sup>16</sup>; 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.

“That’s some catch, that Catch-22,” he observed.

“It’s the best there is,” Doc Daneeka agreed.

Yossarian saw it clearly in all its spinning reasonableness. There was an elliptical precision about its perfect pairs of parts that was graceful and shocking, like good modern art, and at times Yossarian wasn’t quite sure that he saw it at all, just the way he was never quite sure about good modern art....<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The phrase “didn’t have to” isn’t quite accurate. If Orr were crazy, then he *couldn’t* or *shouldn’t* fly missions. Earlier in this passage, Daneeka says, “I *have to* ground anyone who’s crazy” (emphasis added), meaning that Daneeka, not Orr, decides whether to ground Orr.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at chap. V, 45-46.

I call this the original version of “the airmen’s Catch-22,” because the novel later reveals a secret simpler one.

The best catch there is is not much of a catch. For one thing, it relies on two artistic contrivances, as Heller would call them.<sup>18</sup> The first is defining sanity and insanity narrowly. *Defining sanity*: Not wanting to fly does not prove that an airman is sane. It is possible that an airman does not want to fly and is still insane. *Defining insanity*: Wanting to fly *might* prove that an airman is insane, but it is not the only way to prove it.

The second artistic contrivance is requiring that insane airmen *ask* to be grounded. A similarly artificial requirement – requiring a person who needs help to ask for it – occurs elsewhere in the book:

Yossarian knew he could help the troubled old woman if she would *only* cry out, knew he could spring forward and capture the sturdy first woman and hold her for the mob of policemen nearby if the second woman would *only give him license* with a shriek of distress.<sup>19</sup>

If either contrivance were removed – if an airman’s insanity can be proved by factors other than his desire to fly combat missions, or if a doctor can ground an insane airman without the airman asking to be grounded – then this most famous application of Catch-22 would crumble.

Although this application of Catch-22 labels airmen who want to fly missions as crazy, the novel doesn’t seem to believe it. Nately wants to fly more missions to avoid being sent home until he could take his whore, whom he wants to marry, back with him.<sup>20</sup> Havermeyer decides to keep flying missions to avoid disgracing his wife and kid and to remain in the reserves when the war ends.<sup>21</sup> ““You get five hundred dollars a year if you stay in the reserves,”” he says.<sup>22</sup> Danby flies missions to help his country and because it is his duty.<sup>23</sup> These reasons could be crazy, and Nately, Havermeyer, and Danby could be crazy, too. But they and their reasons sound rational and sincere.

When Milo Minderbender asks to fly more combat missions, he is not assumed to be crazy.<sup>24</sup> ““You want to fly more combat missions?” Colonel Cathcart gasped. ‘What in the world for?’” Milo invokes duty to defend his country, pulling his weight – although those reasons sound insincere – and countering grumbling among fellow airmen. If Cathcart assumes that Milo is insane, the only possible indication is Cathcart’s comment: ““I don’t know what’s come over you.””<sup>25</sup> Cathcart finally gives in, temporarily.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> “Reeling in *Catch-22*,” *Catch as Catch Can* 314.

<sup>19</sup> *Catch-22* chap. XXXIX, 407 (emphasis added).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXV, 361, 367.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXVIII, 393.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at chap. XLII, 434-35.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXIX, 362.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXIX, 363, 364, 366.

What's more, in a glaring exception to Catch-22, Yossarian asks a military psychiatrist, Major Sanderson, to ground him and send him home.<sup>27</sup> Sanderson finds Yossarian crazy and orders him sent home.<sup>28</sup> However, when Sanderson tells Yossarian that he is crazy, the psychiatrist thinks that he is delivering his diagnosis to Second Lieutenant Anthony A. Fortiori.<sup>29</sup> (In a name that lawyers would appreciate, he is called "A. Fortiori."<sup>30</sup> As in "A[ir] Force-iori"?). A. Fortiori is sent home instead.<sup>31</sup> The absurdity, injustice, and letdown of Fortiori being sent home overshadow the importance of the incident: An airman *is* found insane and sent home, in an exception to or even a violation of Catch-22.

There may be wardfuls of exceptions. Yossarian cautions the chaplain about visiting other hospital wards: "That's where they keep the mental cases. They're filled with lunatics."<sup>32</sup>

In addition, this Catch-22's narrow focus on mental health leaves a loophole large enough to fly a B-25 through: Airmen are grounded for physical and neurological ailments – or for feigning them. Yossarian pretends that he still has liver pain<sup>33</sup> and that he sees everything twice.<sup>34</sup> Lieutenant Dunbar fakes dizzy spells and falls on his face.<sup>35</sup> Dunbar once "woke up on the [hospital] floor with a bleeding nose and exactly the same distressful head symptoms he had been feigning all along."<sup>36</sup> Hungry Joe has "trumped-up symptoms of appendicitis."<sup>37</sup>

Although Milo says to Yossarian, "You can't keep running into the hospital every time something happens you don't like,"<sup>38</sup>

Yossarian ran right into the hospital, determined to remain there forever rather than fly one mission more.... Ten days after he changed his mind and came out, the colonel raised the missions to forty-five and Yossarian ran right back in, determined to remain in the hospital forever rather than fly one mission more....<sup>39</sup>

On the novel's second page, Yossarian decides "to spend the rest of the war in the hospital."<sup>40</sup> Colonel Korn possibly closes this loophole – airmen being grounded for physical and neurological ailments, real or feigned – by closing the medical tent,<sup>41</sup> which acts as the in-take point for the hospital.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXVII, 293.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXVII, 298.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXII, 297-98.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXI, 285; chap. XXII, 298.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXII, 298.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at chap. I, 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at chap. I, 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at chap. XVIII, 179-80.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at chap. I, 7-8, 15.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXVII, 288.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXIV, 355

<sup>38</sup> *Id.* at chap. VII, 64.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* at chap. XVII, 164.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at chap. I, 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* at chap. X, 107.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.* at chap. IV, 32; chap. X, 95.

Thus, it is inaccurate to say that “[t]here is no way out of the tautological absurdity” of Catch-22.<sup>43</sup> There are many ways out: loopholes, exceptions, times when Catch-22 is not applied, and people to whom it is not applied.

### 3. The obey-your-orders Catch-22.

...[Colonel Cathcart] believed in his men. As he told them frequently in the briefing room, he believed that they were at least ten missions better than any other outfit and felt that any who did not share this confidence he had placed in them could get the hell out. The only way they could get the hell out, though, as Yossarian learned when he flew to visit ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen, was by flying the extra ten missions.

“I still don’t get it,” Yossarian protested. “Is Doc Daneeka right or isn’t he?”

“How many did he say?”

“Forty.”

“Daneeka was telling the truth,” ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen admitted. “Forty missions is all you have to fly as far as the Twenty-seventh Air Force Headquarters is concerned.”

Yossarian was jubilant. “Then I can go home, right? I’ve got forty-eight.”

“No, you can’t go home,” ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen corrected him. “Are you crazy or something?”

“Why not?”

“Catch-22.”

“Catch-22?” Yossarian was stunned. “What the hell has Catch-22 got to do with it?”

“Catch-22,” Doc Daneeka answered patiently, when...Yossarian [had flown] back to Pianosa, “says you’ve always got to do what your commanding officer tells you to do.”<sup>44</sup>

“But Twenty-seventh Air Force says I can go home with forty missions.”

“But they don’t say you have to go home. And regulations do say you have to obey every order. That’s the catch. Even if the colonel were disobeying a Twenty-seventh Air Force order by making you fly more missions, you’d still have to fly them, or you’d be guilty of disobeying an order of his...”

Yossarian slumped with disappointment. “Then I really do have to fly the fifty missions, don’t I?” he grieved.

“The fifty-five,” Doc Daneeka corrected him.

“What fifty-five?”

“The fifty-five missions the colonel now wants all of you to fly.”<sup>45</sup>

This Catch-22, too, is not much of a catch. Regulations don’t need to state that one must obey orders; the nature of orders is that one must obey them. Yossarian doesn’t “let out a respectful whistle” at this catch, as he does when he heard the airmen’s Catch-22 (original). If this were the only Catch-22 in the novel, then “Catch-22” would not have been a phrase to, well,

<sup>43</sup> Marcus K. Billson III, “The Un-Minderbinding of Yossarian: Genesis Inverted in Catch-22,” *Joseph Heller’s Catch-22* 121, 123, ed. Harold Bloom (Chelsea House Publishers 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Daneeka answers the question that Yossarian poses to Wintergreen, meaning that the novel does not include the end of Yossarian’s conversation with Wintergreen or the start of Yossarian’s conversation with Daneeka.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.* at chap. VI, 57-58.

catch on, enter the language, and be used by the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>46</sup> This passage presents the explicit obey-your-orders Catch-22 and Colonel Cathcart's implicit Catch-22, discussed later.

4. **Wintergreen's Catch-22.** Ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen is a former private first class, because he is regularly absent without leave.<sup>47</sup> Each time he goes AWOL, he is caught and sentenced to dig and fill up holes six feet deep, wide, and long for a specified length of time. Each time he finishes his sentence, he goes AWOL again.<sup>48</sup>

Wintergreen does so, because "digging holes in Colorado was not such a bad assignment in wartime."<sup>49</sup> Wintergreen "was busted down to buck private each time he was court-martialed. He regretted this loss of rank keenly."<sup>50</sup>

"It was kind of nice being a P.F.C.," he reminisced yearningly. "I had status – you know what I mean?<sup>51</sup> – and I used to travel in the best circles." His face darkened with resignation. "But that's all behind me now," he guessed. "The next time I go over the hill it will be as a buck private, and I just know it won't be the same." There was no future in digging holes. "The job isn't even steady. I lose it each time I finish serving my sentence. Then I have to go over the hill again if I want it back. And I can't even keep doing that. There's a catch, Catch-22. The next time I go over the hill, it will mean the stockade. I don't know what's going to become of me. I might even wind up overseas if I'm not careful." He did not want to keep digging holes for the rest of his life, although he had no objection to doing it as long as there was a war going on and it was part of the war effort.<sup>52</sup>

Now it's our turn to ask Yossarian's question to Wintergreen in the obey-your-orders Catch-22, "What the hell has Catch-22 got to do with it?"<sup>53</sup> The Catch-22 is that he prefers digging holes to other tasks, even though it is a punishment. However, if he keeps going AWOL, his punishment will escalate beyond digging holes. Wintergreen does end up overseas for reasons unknown.<sup>54</sup>

5. **The airmen's Catch-22 (secret simpler version).** In this Catch-22, Yossarian approaches Doc Daneeka about getting grounded for being insane, and learns additional information about the process.

He was afraid...that Doc Daneeka would still refuse to help him when he went to him again after jumping out of Major Major's office, and he was right.

---

<sup>46</sup> *E.g.*, *Bowen v. Kendrick*, 487 U.S. 589, 615 (1988).

<sup>47</sup> He eventually becomes ex-Corporal Wintergreen, *Catch-22* chap. XII, 120, ex-Sergeant Wintergreen, *id.* at chap. XXIX, 319; chap. XXXVII, 383, and at the end, an ex-P.F.C. again. *Id.* at XLII, 438.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at chap. X, 103.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at chap. X, 104.

<sup>51</sup> No.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.* It is unclear to whom Wintergreen is talking. He might be reminiscing and musing in general.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at chap. VI, 58.

<sup>54</sup> *E.g.*, *id.* at chap. XII, 120 (he visits Yossarian on Pianosa).



“...Do you think I enjoy sitting here day after day refusing to help you? I wouldn't mind it so much if I could refuse to help you back in the States or some place like Rome. But saying no to you here isn't easy for me either.”

“Then stop saying no. Ground me.”

“I can't ground you,” Daneeka mumbled. “How many times do you have to be told?”

“Yes, you can. Major Major told me you're the only one in the squadron who *can* ground me.”

Doc Daneeka was stunned. “Major Major told you that? When?”

“When I tackled him in the ditch.”

“Major Major told you that? In a ditch?”

“He told me in his office after we left the ditch and jumped inside. He told me not to tell anyone he told me, so don't start shooting your mouth off.”

“Why that dirty, scheming liar!” Doc Daneeka cried. “He wasn't supposed to tell anyone. Did he tell you how I could ground you?”

“Just by filling out a little slip of paper saying I'm on the verge of a nervous collapse and sending it to Group. Dr. Stubbs grounds men in his squadron all the time, so why can't you?”

“And what happens to the men after Stubbs does ground them?” Doc Daneeka retorted with a sneer. “They go right back on combat status, don't they? And he finds himself right up the creek. Sure, I can ground you by filling out a slip saying you're unfit to fly. But there's a catch.”

“Catch-22?”

“Sure. If it takes you off combat duty, Group has to approve my action, and Group isn't going to. They'll put you right back on combat status, and then where will I be? On my way to the Pacific Ocean, probably. No, thank you. I'm not going to take any chances for you.”<sup>55</sup>

This is a simpler version of the airmen's Catch-22. Yossarian learns what Daneeka considers a secret: Air Force doctors, such as Doc Daneeka and Dr. Stubbs, *are* authorized to ground airmen. But learning about the secret procedure isn't useful to Yossarian or any airman, because the groundings don't stick. Group Headquarters will not approve the airmen being grounded, and might punish doctors for signing the slips, such as by sending them to the Pacific Ocean, a more dangerous theater of war.

The airmen's Catch-22 (secret simpler version) can be summarized as: Sane airmen must fly bombing missions. Insane airmen cannot fly bombing missions. Physicians can submit paperwork to ground insane airmen. But Group never approves any airman being grounded for insanity. The result? Every airman flies bombing missions.

Although Yossarian says that Major Major had told him the information, it doesn't appear in the fairly extensive two-part conversation after Yossarian tackles Major Major in the ditch.<sup>56</sup> In fact, Major Major ends up telling Yossarian, “I'm sorry....But there's nothing I can do.”<sup>57</sup> Sergeant Towser confirms it: “Major Major told him there was nothing he could do.”<sup>58</sup> There, the chapter ends. If Major Major tells Yossarian about Daneeka being able to ground him,

<sup>55</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXVII, 172-73.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at chap. IX, 100-02.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* at chap. IX, 102.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXV, 271.

and does so in this conversation, then the conversation continues beyond the end of Chapter IX, but is not recorded in the novel's text. Doc Daneeka's reaction – "He wasn't supposed to tell anyone" – indicates that Major Major has told Yossarian the truth. Thus, it is unclear why Doc Daneeka calls Major Major a liar. This secret simpler version of the airmen's Catch-22 still generally entails all airmen going on bombing mission. Thus, it also unclear why Daneeka is upset that Major Major has revealed it to Yossarian, calling Major Major "dirty" and "scheming."

**6. The right-to-do-anything-that-can't-be-stopped Catch-22.** Parts of *Catch-22* are set in Rome, where the airmen go for rest and relaxation, including or especially sex. U.S. military police and Italian carabinieri close down a brothel in Rome, and chase away the prostitutes, leaving an old woman. (She is almost certainly a madam. She "trudged out to get a girl for Hungry Joe,"<sup>59</sup> yet for some reason "disapproved of everything immoral that occurred there and tried her best to tidy up."<sup>60</sup>) Yossarian learns about the closing from the old woman when he visits the site. He asks why the brothel has been closed.

"There must have been a reason," Yossarian persisted, pounding his fist into his hand. "They couldn't just barge in here and chase everyone out."

"No reason," wailed the old woman. "No reason."<sup>61</sup>

"What right did they have?"

"Catch-22."

"*What?*" Yossarian froze in his tracks with fear and alarm and felt his whole body begin to tingle. "*What did you say?*"

"Catch-22," the old woman repeated, rocking her head up and down. "Catch-22. Catch-22 says they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Yossarian shouted at her in bewildered, furious protest. "How did you know it was Catch-22? Who the hell told you it was Catch-22?"

"The soldiers with the hard white hats and clubs. The girls were crying. 'Did we do anything wrong?' they said. The men said no and pushed them away out the door with the ends of their clubs. 'Then why are you chasing us out?' the girls said. 'Catch-22,' the men said. 'What right do you have?' the girls said. 'Catch-22' the men said. All they kept saying was 'Catch-22, Catch-22.' What does that mean, Catch-22? What is Catch-22?"

"Didn't they show it to you?" Yossarian demanded, stamping about in anger and distress. "Didn't you even make them read it?"

"They don't have to show us Catch-22," the old woman answered. "The law says they don't have to."

"What law says they don't have to?"

"Catch-22."

"Oh, God damn!" Yossarian exclaimed bitterly. "I bet it wasn't even really there."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXIII, 237.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXIII, 236.

<sup>61</sup> That wasn't true; there was a reason: Catch-22. Was she saying that "Catch-22" equals "no reason," that is, a lack of reason?

<sup>62</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXIX, 398-99.

Yossarian assumes that Catch-22 can be displayed and read – in other words, that it exists and is written – something he very soon comes to doubt. Instead of answering the old woman’s crucial questions, questions that no one apparently asked Heller – What is Catch-22 and what does it mean? – he asks two questions of his own. The second question rebukes her, unfairly: “Didn’t you even make them read it?” How is this old woman who “trudged,” supposed to make M.P.s and carabinieri do anything? Yossarian is being especially unfair in this context, where Catch-22 means “might means right.” The old woman has no might or right to make the police read Catch-22.

Yossarian’s comment that Catch-22 probably “wasn’t even really there” is enigmatic. Did Catch-22 come in a form resembling a search warrant, which had to be read or presented?

Yossarian....strode out of the apartment, cursing Catch-22 vehemently as he descended the stairs, even though he knew there was no such thing. Catch-22 did not exist, he was positive of that, but it made no difference. What did matter was that everyone thought it existed, and that was much worse, for there was no object or text to ridicule or refute, to accuse, criticize, attack, amend, hate, revile, spit at, rip to shreds, trample upon or burn up.<sup>63</sup>

I have several observations here. It took Yossarian a short time to arrive at the certainty that there is no such thing as Catch-22; back in the apartment, he is sure that it exists and demands that the old woman tell him whether they had shown or read Catch-22 to her. Yossarian reverses himself again later and accepts the existence of Catch-22 – by accepting the deal of the just-like-us Catch-22 (which this article discusses next).

Further, when Yossarian is positive on the stairs that Catch-22 does not exist, he is wrong, for two reasons. We know that Catch-22 exists because the omniscient narrator told us so: “Catch-22 required that each censored letter bear the censoring officer’s name.”<sup>64</sup> “Catch-22...specified that a concern for one’s safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind.”<sup>65</sup> And if everyone believes that Catch-22 exists and many people act accordingly, then at a certain point it exists. As Heller said, “Yossarian is convinced that there is no such thing as Catch-22, but it doesn’t matter as long as people believe there is.”<sup>66</sup>

Yossarian is wrong for a second reason. Just because there is “no object or text...to spit at, rip to shreds, trample upon or burn up” doesn’t mean that people can’t “ridicule or refute...accuse, criticize, attack, amend, hate, [or] revile” it.

**7. The just-like-us Catch-22.** Yossarian decides not to fly any more missions and went to Rome, AWOL. Military police arrest him in Rome, bring him back to Pianosa, and take him to

---

<sup>63</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXIX, 400.

<sup>64</sup> *Id.* at chap. I, 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Id.* at chap. V, 46.

<sup>66</sup> See “Reeling in *Catch-22*” 314.

see Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn.<sup>67</sup> In the last sentence of the chapter, Korn announces, “We’re sending you home.”<sup>68</sup>

“There was, of course, a catch,” begins the next chapter.<sup>69</sup> That line is not dialogue; it paraphrases at least one line, and probably more, of missing dialogue.

The dialogue continues:

“Catch-22?” inquired Yossarian.

“Of course,” Colonel Korn answered pleasantly....“After all, we can’t simply send you home for refusing to fly more missions and keep the rest of the men there, can we? That would hardly be fair to them.”<sup>70</sup>

....

“We’re going to send him home, I’m afraid.” Colonel Korn was chuckling triumphantly.... “Yossarian....[w]e’re going to send you home....We’ve worked out this little deal to – ”

“What kind of deal?” Yossarian demanded with defiant mistrust.

Colonel Korn tossed his head back and laughed. “Oh, a thoroughly despicable deal, make no mistake about that. It’s absolutely revolting. But you’ll accept it quickly enough.”

“Don’t be too sure.”

“I haven’t the slightest doubt you will, even though it stinks to high heaven....”<sup>71</sup>

The scene continues for pages, with Korn and Yossarian sparring, and with Korn and Cathcart bickering. The dialogue returns to the deal or plan only occasionally. Korn says to Yossarian, “[W]e finally worked out this horrible little plan for sending you home....”<sup>72</sup>

“What kind of plan? I’m not sure I’m going to like it.”

“I know you’re not going to like it.” Colonel Korn laughed, locking his hands contentedly on top of his head again. “You’re going to loathe it. It really is odious and certainly will offend your conscience.”<sup>73</sup>

Two pages later, Korn says:

“– and we have to send you home. Just do a few things for us, and – ”

“What sort of things?” Yossarian interrupted with belligerent misgiving.

“Oh, tiny, insignificant things. Really, this is a very generous deal we’re making with you. We will issue orders returning you to the States – really, we will – and all you have to do in return...”

“What? What must I do?”

Colonel Korn laughed curtly. “Like us.”

Yossarian blinked. “Like you?”

“Like us.”

---

<sup>67</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXIX, 409-10.

<sup>68</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXIX, 410.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 411.

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 412.

<sup>72</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 414.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 416-17.

“Like you?”

“That’s right,” said Colonel Korn....“Like us. Join us. Be our pal. Say nice things about us here and back in the States. Become one of the boys. Now, that isn’t asking too much, is it?”

“You just want me to like you? Is that all?”

“That’s all.”

“That’s all?”

“Just find it in your heart to like us.”

....”That isn’t going to be too easy,” he sneered.

“Oh, it will be a lot easier than you think,” Colonel Korn taunted in return, undismayed by Yossarian’s barb. “You’ll be surprised at how easy you’ll find it to like us once you begin....A whole new world of luxury awaits you once you become our pal....”<sup>74</sup>

The desire to be liked and to have friends is a theme in the novel: “Kraft was a skinny, harmless kid from Pennsylvania who wanted only to be liked, and was destined to be disappointed in even so humble and degrading an ambition.”<sup>75</sup> Only three pages after discussing Kraft, the novel discusses Major Major’s desire to have friends.<sup>76</sup>

But something else is going on here. Why does Yossarian object? Why would it be hard for Yossarian to find it in his heart to like Colonel Korn, Colonel Cathcart, and other superior officers? (Yossarian is a captain.) Because Korn is asking Yossarian not simply to “like us,” but also to “[be] like us.”

When Korn says, “Just find it in your heart to like us,” he is also saying, “Just...[be] like us” and “[Be] just like us.” The “just-like-us Catch-22” means, not only “Regard us with affection,” but also “Act as we do.” In the phrase “just-like-us,” the accent can be on the last syllable, instead of the middle one.

After Korn says, “Like us,” he continues, “Join us....Become one of the boys. Now, that isn’t asking too much, is it?”<sup>77</sup> Well, yes, it is asking too much of Yossarian if he has, not simply to like superior officers, but to be like them, join them, and become one of them. *Being* like superior officers, not liking them, is what is “thoroughly despicable,”<sup>78</sup> “absolutely revolting,”<sup>79</sup> and “odious,”<sup>80</sup> as Korn describes the deal. If all Korn means is for Yossarian to *like* the high officers, Korn would not say about the deal that “it stinks to high heaven,”<sup>81</sup> “You’re going to

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> *Id.* at chap. VI, 54.

<sup>76</sup> *Id.* at chap. VI, 57 (referring to “men who had almost become his friends” and soldiers “who had let him come as close to making friends with them as anyone had ever let him come before”). *See also id.* at chap. IX, 84 (“What playmates he had withdrew from him....Because he needed a friend so desperately, he never found one.”), 87 (referring to “officers and enlisted men who were almost his friends”). This theme, this social law of a person needing a friend so desperately that he can’t find one, is important because it was bound up with Heller’s notion of Catch-22 as a social law. When an interviewer analogized a news item to Catch-22, Heller soon quoted his book: “Because he needed a friend so desperately, he never found one.” *Realist* interview at 27. See note 5 for the text of the interview.

<sup>77</sup> *Catch-22* chap. XL, 416 (emphasis added).

<sup>78</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 412.

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*

<sup>80</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 414.

<sup>81</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 412.

loathe it,”<sup>82</sup> and it “will offend your conscience.”<sup>83</sup> Yossarian knows what is being asked of him, which is why he calls it “a scummy trick”<sup>84</sup> and accepts Korn’s characterization of the deal as odious.<sup>85</sup>

Almost a page after Korn asks Yossarian to “[l]ike us,” Yossarian asks, “Suppose I denounce you when I get back to the States?”<sup>86</sup>

Colonel Korn responds,

“...No one would believe you, the Army wouldn’t let you,<sup>87</sup> and why in the world should you want to? You’re going to be one of the boys, remember? You’ll enjoy a rich, rewarding, luxurious, privileged existence. You’d have to be a fool to throw it all away just for a moral principle,<sup>88</sup> and you’re not a fool. Is it a deal?”<sup>89</sup>

A half page later, Yossarian answers, “‘It’s a deal!’”<sup>90</sup> Within a quarter-page, Colonel Korn, now on a first-name basis, says to Yossarian, “‘Call me, Blackie, John. We’re pals now.’”<sup>91</sup> (“Blackie” as in “blackguard”?<sup>92</sup> “Blackie” as in black-marketeer?)

This Catch-22 is a deal, contract, or provision of Catch-22. Yossarian would return to the States, stay in the Army, fly no more missions, and enjoy a privileged existence. In return, he must like his superior officers, be like them, or both.

Yossarian’s commitment to the deal does not last long. “‘Don’t worry,’” Yossarian reassures the chaplain in the next chapter. “‘I’m not going to do it.’”<sup>93</sup> In the next chapter after that, the final one, this conversation happens:

“Colonel Korn says,” said Major Danby to Yossarian...“that the deal is still on. Everything is working out fine.”

“No it isn’t.”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” Major Danby insisted....“...Now the deal can go through perfectly.”

“I’m not making any deals with Colonel Korn.”

---

<sup>82</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 414.

<sup>83</sup> *Id.*

<sup>84</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 418.

<sup>85</sup> *Id.* at chap. XLII, 431.

<sup>86</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 417.

<sup>87</sup> When Korn discusses sending Yossarian “home,” *id.* at chap. XXXIX, 410; chap. XL, 411, and “back to the States,” *id.* at chap. XL, 417, Korn does not mean sending Yossarian back to civilian life. The phrase “the Army wouldn’t let you” indicates that Yossarian will still be in the Army (of which the Air Force was then a part). *See also id.* at chap. XL, 416-17 (Korn: “We’re going to promote you to major and even give you another medal... You’ll... make speeches to raise money for war bonds.”).

<sup>88</sup> What moral principle? The moral principle against being like them.

<sup>89</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 417.

<sup>90</sup> *Id.* at chap. XL, 418. A short time after the deal, Yossarian said, “Between me and every ideal I always find...Korns and Cathcarts. And that sort of changes the ideal.” *Id.* chap. XLII, 435. When Heller wrote “ideal,” did he mean “deal” or mean to allude to it? The Korns and the Cathcarts get between every deal and every ideal?

<sup>91</sup> *Id.*

<sup>92</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXIX, 403.

<sup>93</sup> *Id.* at chap. XLI, 424.

....“But you do have a deal with him, don’t you?...Don’t you have an agreement?”

“I’m breaking the agreement.”

“But you shook hands on it, didn’t you? You gave him your word as a gentleman.”

“I’m breaking my word.”

....

“I did it in a moment of weakness,” Yossarian wisecracked with glum irony. “I was trying to save my life.”<sup>94</sup>

Even though Yossarian broke his word in *Catch-22*, the sequel *Closing Time* reveals that the deal went through.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> *Id.* at chap. XLII, 431. Yossarian recognizes the validity of an oral contract. He did *not* say, “We had no deal, because it was not in writing” or “I didn’t see or sign any contract.” He recognizes that he was “breaking the agreement” and “breaking my word.” That clarifies that in the previous *Catch-22*, the right-to-do-anything-that-can’t-be-stopped *Catch-22*, Yossarian doubts the existence of *Catch-22* – but not for the reason that “there was no object or text to...spit at, rip to shreds, trample upon or burn up.” *Id.* at chap. XXXIX, 400.

In light of how lightly Yossarian breaks the agreement in *Catch-22*, Yossarian is naïve, or has grown naïve by *Closing Time*. A character named Gaffney tells Yossarian information that Yossarian doesn’t believe. The reason Yossarian doesn’t believe it, he says, is that ““They gave me their word.”” Gaffney responds, ““They break their word.”” Yossarian continues:

“They made me a promise.”

“They break their promises.”

“I have a guarantee.”

“It’s no good.”

“I have it in writing.”

“Stick it in your Freedom of Information file.”

*Closing Time* 438. See the unnumbered *Catch-22* of the Freedom of Information Act, text accompanying note 140, to see how little regard Heller had for FOIA.

<sup>95</sup> *Catch-22* ends with Yossarian running to escape to Sweden. *Catch-22* chap. XLII, 440-43. He doesn’t expect to make it. *Id.* at 441 (Danby tells Yossarian, ““You’ll never make it. It’s impossible.”” Yossarian answers, ““Hell, Danby, I know that.””). *Closing Time* reveals what happens to Yossarian after he deserts: He “had defied his immediate superiors and compelled them at the last to send him home.” *Closing Time* 80.

In a conversation with Sam Singer, a character who does not appear in *Catch-22* and who had been an airman on Yossarian’s bomber, Yossarian said:

“They sent me home....They threatened to kill me, to put me in prison, they said they would ruin me. They promoted me to major and sent me home. They wanted no fuss.”

*Id.* at 355.

In another part of the novel, Yossarian said,

“They gave me a temporary boost near the end, because they didn’t know what else to do with me. Then they shipped me home, brought me back to my permanent grade, and gave me my honorable discharge. I had the medals, I had the points, I even had my Purple Heart.”

Heller confirmed in at least two interviews that the just-like-us Catch-22 is about Yossarian becoming just like the colonels. Here is Heller in one interview:

His choices are: Accept the corruption and benefit by it, join us, become one of the boys, and we'll give you a promotion, we'll send you home a hero; or else, go to prison for refusing to fly more missions; or fly more missions until you're eventually killed. The only way he can assert himself without accepting any of these obnoxious alternatives is through saying no.<sup>96</sup>

Here is an excerpt from the second interview:

One of the things in the book is the development, the birth of Yossarian's consciousness of himself as a moral being. Through most of *Catch-22* Yossarian feels all that he wants to do is survive the war. The colonels say, "You can go home." And he accepts it at first.

He has deluded himself into thinking that all he wants to do is survive. He has the opportunity and accepts it in despair. In the hospital [where he is recovering from being stabbed] he finds that he can't accept it because there's a moral life inside him. As scared as he is of dying, he doesn't want to live if it has to be in terms of calling those colonels by their first names. Being on a first-name basis with the Establishment. He would rather be a fugitive. It is an awesome decision.<sup>97</sup>

### **Implicit scenarios or applications of Catch-22:**

1. **Colonel Cathcart's implicit Catch-22.** This article previously quoted this implicit Catch-22:

...[Colonel Cathcart] believed in his men. As he told them frequently in the briefing room, he believed that they were at least ten missions better than any other outfit and felt that any who did not share this confidence he had placed in them could get the hell out. The only way they could get the hell out, though...was by flying the extra ten missions.<sup>98</sup>

---

*Id.* at 92. It is unclear what the Purple Heart was for. It was possibly for being stabbed. In effect, Heller used *Closing Time* to rewrite the end of *Catch-22*, the novel, and "Catch-22" (1970), the movie, which ended with Yossarian paddling in a yellow inflatable raft.

In a conversation Yossarian had with "the imperturbable old soldier Schweik and the young one named Krautheimer who had changed his name to Joseph Kaye," *id.* at 346, one of them (it is not clear who) asks Yossarian, "... You ran away once to Sweden, didn't you?"

"I didn't get far. I couldn't even get to Rome."

"You didn't escape there? In a little yellow raft?"

"That happens only in the movies."

*Id.*

<sup>96</sup> "Joseph Heller, Novelist," *Bill Moyers: A World of Ideas*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (Doubleday 1989) 28-37; Sorkin at 287.

<sup>97</sup> Richard B. Sale, "An Interview in New York with Joseph Heller," 1970, *Studies in the Novel* 4 (Spring 1972) 63-74; Sorkin at 89.

<sup>98</sup> *Catch-22* chap. VI, 57-58.



As with the airmen's Catch-22 (original), the ultimate result of this implicit Catch-22 is that airmen must fly their quota of missions. In the airmen's Catch-22 (original), it ultimately does not matter if airmen are sane or insane. In Colonel Cathcart's implicit Catch-22, it does not matter if airmen have confidence or no confidence in the outfit.<sup>99</sup>

## 2. The right-to-do-anything-not-forbidden-by-law implicit Catch-22.

"Won't I be able to conduct [military] parades every Sunday afternoon?" Colonel Scheisskopf demanded....

[General Peckem answered:] "No. Of course not. What ever gave you that idea?"

....

"The officers who sent me overseas. They told me I'd be able to march the men around in parades all I wanted to."

"They lied to you."

"That wasn't fair, sir."

"I'm sorry, Scheisskopf...."

"What about my wife?" Scheisskopf demanded.... "I'll still be able to send for her, won't I?"

....

"That's out of the question also."

"But they said I could send for her!"

"They lied to you again."

"They had no right to lie to me!" Colonel Scheisskopf protested....

"Of course they had a right," General Peckem snapped.... "Don't be such an ass, Scheisskopf. People have a right to do anything that's not forbidden by law, and there's no law against lying to you. Now, don't ever waste my time with such sentimental platitudes again...."<sup>100</sup>

We probably wouldn't recognize this as an implicit Catch-22 if it didn't resemble the sixth explicit one, "Catch-22 says they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing."<sup>101</sup>

3. **The implicit Catch-22 of Colonel Korn's rule.** Colonel Korn's implicit Catch-22 emerges from the educational sessions that Clevinger conducts twice a week. Yossarian and other soldiers ask absurd questions to disrupt the sessions.

Group Headquarters was alarmed, for there was no telling what people might find out once they felt free to ask whatever questions they wanted to. Colonel Cathcart sent Colonel Korn to stop it, and Colonel Korn succeeded with a rule governing the asking of questions. Colonel Korn's rule was a stroke of genius.... Under Colonel Korn's rule, the only people permitted to ask questions were those who never did. Soon the only people attending were those who never asked questions, and the sessions were

<sup>99</sup> Significantly or not, Cathcart's name contains the letters that spell "catch." I won't take this further; I have no indication that Heller liked or used anagrams.

<sup>100</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXIX, 314-315.

<sup>101</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXIX, 398.

discontinued altogether, since Clevinger, the corporal<sup>102</sup> and Colonel Korn agreed that it was neither possible nor necessary to educate people who never questioned anything.<sup>103</sup>

Even though this Catch-22 is not labeled as one, we know it is a Catch-22, and not only because it is absurd. Joseph Heller labeled it as such in an interview. The interviewer said, “I have a few real-life items in mind which, I think, say more about what Catch-22 is than any definition possibly could, and I’d like to get whatever reactions they evoke in you.”<sup>104</sup> The interviewer proceeded to read a newspaper item.

Heller responded, “That’s like that educational session in the beginning of the book, with the rule that Colonel Korn employs: to cut off these embarrassing questions, the only ones who would be allowed to ask questions were those who never did.”<sup>105</sup>

#### 4. The implicit Catch-22 of Major Major’s office hours.

“From now on,” he [Major Major] said, “I don’t want anyone to come in to see me while I’m here....”

....

[Sergeant Towser asked,] “What shall I say to the people who do come to see you while you’re here?”

“Tell them I’m in and ask them to wait.”

“Yes, sir. For how long?”

“Until I’ve left.”

....

“May I send them in to see you after you’re left?”

“Yes.”

“But you won’t be here then, will you?”

“No.”

....

“From now on,” Major Major said to the middle-aged enlisted man who took care of his trailer, “I don’t want you to come here while I’m here to ask me if there’s anything you can do for me. Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir,” said the orderly. “When should I come here to find out if there’s anything you want me to do for you?”

“When I’m not here.”

“Yes, sir. And what should I do?”

“Whatever I tell you to.”

“But you won’t be here to tell me. Will you?”

“No.”<sup>106</sup>

Appleby asks Sergeant Towser to see Major Major, and Towser explains why Appleby could not do so:

<sup>102</sup> This was “the corporal in sunglasses who everybody knew was probably a subversive.” *Id.* at chap. IV, 34.

<sup>103</sup> *Id.* at chap. IV, 35.

<sup>104</sup> *Realist* interview, Sorkin at 6. See note 5 for an excerpt from the interview.

<sup>105</sup> *Id.*

<sup>106</sup> *Catch-22* chap. IX, 97-98.

“Those are my orders. You can ask Major Major when you see him.”  
 “That’s just what I intend to do, Sergeant. When can I see him?”  
 “Never.”<sup>107</sup>

On another occasion, the sergeant requests the chaplain “to remain outside because Major Major was inside and told him he would not be allowed inside until Major Major went out.”<sup>108</sup> On still another occasion, Yossarian forces an exception to this implicit Catch-22 by tackling Major Major in a ditch and then meeting with him in his office.<sup>109</sup>

**5. The implicit Catch-22 of the countess and her daughter-in-law.** Airmen have apartments in Rome, which a major rents for them, to carouse in. In one apartment,

[o]n the landing above lived the beautiful rich black-haired countess and her beautiful rich black-haired daughter-in-law, both of whom would put out only for Nately, who was too shy to want them, and for Aarfy, who was too stuffy to take them and tried to persuade them from ever putting out for anyone but their husbands....<sup>110</sup>

The result, of course, is that the countess and her daughter-in-law do not have sex with men other than their husbands, or at least do not have sex with the airmen below. Aarfy prevails.

## 6. Luciana’s implicit Catch-22.

He [Yossarian] wondered if she [Luciana] would marry him.  
 “*Tu sei pazzo,*” she told him with a pleasant laugh.<sup>111</sup>  
 “Why am I crazy?” he asked.  
 “*Perchè non posso sposare.*”<sup>112</sup>  
 “Why can’t you get married?”  
 “Because I’m not a virgin,” she answered.<sup>113</sup>  
 “What has that got to do with it?”  
 “Who will marry me? No one wants a girl who is not a virgin.”  
 “I will. I’ll marry you.”  
 “*Ma non posso sposarti.*”<sup>114</sup>  
 “Why can’t you marry me?”  
 “*Perchè sei pazzo.*”<sup>115</sup>  
 “Why am I crazy?”

<sup>107</sup> *Id.* at chap. X, 106. Heller used this exchange in *Closing Time* 226. He used the surrounding scene, *Catch-22* chap. X, 105-06, almost verbatim in *Closing Time* 225-26.

<sup>108</sup> *Catch-22* chap. XXV, 271.

<sup>109</sup> *Id.* at chap. IX, 100.

<sup>110</sup> *Id.* at chap. XIII, 131.

<sup>111</sup> Readers who don’t understand Italian can still follow this dialogue, because Yossarian incorporates Luciana’s statements into his questions. Nonetheless, I provide translation from the Italian in the notes. The translation of this line is: “You are crazy.”

<sup>112</sup> “Because I can’t get married.”

<sup>113</sup> Of course, Yossarian knew this; he and Luciana had just made love.

<sup>114</sup> “But I can’t marry you.”

<sup>115</sup> “Because you are crazy.”

“*Perchè vuoi sposarmi.*”<sup>116</sup>

Yossarian wrinkled his forehead with quizzical amusement. “You won’t marry me because I’m crazy, and you say I’m crazy because I want to marry you? Is that right?”

“*Si.*”<sup>117</sup>

“*Tu sei pazzo!*” he told her loudly.<sup>118</sup>

“*Perchè?*”<sup>119</sup> she shouted back at him indignantly...as she sat up in bed indignantly. “Why am I crazy?”

“Because you won’t marry me.”

“*Stupido!*”<sup>120</sup> she shouted back at him, and smacked him loudly and flamboyantly on the chest with the back of her hand. “*Non posso sposarti! Non capisci? Non posso sposarti.*”<sup>121</sup>

“Oh, sure I understand. And why can’t you marry me?”

“*Perchè sei pazzo!*”<sup>122</sup>

“And why am I crazy?”

“*Perchè vuoi sposarmi.*”<sup>123</sup>

“Because I want to marry you. *Carina, ti amo,*” he explained, and drew her gently back down to the pillow. “*Ti amo molto.*”<sup>124</sup>

“*Tu sei pazzo,*” she murmured in reply, flattered.<sup>125</sup>

“*Perchè?*”<sup>126</sup>

“Because you say you love me. How can you love a girl who is not a virgin?”

“Because I can’t marry you.”

She bolted right up again in a threatening rage. “Why can’t you marry me?” she demanded, ready to clout him again if he gave an uncomplimentary reply. “Just because I am not a virgin?”

“No, no, darling. Because you’re crazy.”<sup>127</sup>

### The Catch-22s in *Closing Time*

*Closing Time* creates two new Catch-22s, although the novel labels one of them a “catch” without enumerating it “22.” Both new Catch-22s are weak. *Closing Time* also cites two Catch-22s from *Catch-22*. *Closing Time* applies one of these Catch-22s to a new scenario and simply quotes the other from *Catch-22*.

1. **The vice president’s Catch-22.** *Closing Time*, Heller’s sequel to *Catch-22*, reprises some characters from *Catch-22*, including Yossarian, Wintergreen, and Chaplain Albert Tappman. In *Closing Time*, the U.S. President resigns, as do various Supreme Court justices,

<sup>116</sup> “Because you want to marry me.”

<sup>117</sup> “Yes.”

<sup>118</sup> “You’re crazy.”

<sup>119</sup> “Why?”

<sup>120</sup> “Stupid!”

<sup>121</sup> “I can’t marry you. Don’t you understand? I can’t marry you.”

<sup>122</sup> “Because you’re crazy.”

<sup>123</sup> “Because you want to marry me.”

<sup>124</sup> “Dear, I love you. I love you very much.”

<sup>125</sup> “You’re crazy.”

<sup>126</sup> “Why?”

<sup>127</sup> *Id.* at chap. XVI, 158-59.

including the Chief Justice. The Vice President, who resembles Dan Quayle, wants the Chief Justice, or at least *a* Chief Justice, to swear him in as president. In this exchange with a political operative, the Vice President begins.

“...Who appoints the new chief justice of the Supreme Court?”

“You do,” said Noodles....

“Right,” said the Vice President, who, with the resignation of his predecessor, was technically already the President. “But I can’t appoint him until I’ve been sworn in?”

“That’s right too,” said Noodles Cook....

“Who swears me in?”

“Whoever you want to.”

“I want the chief justice.”

“We have no chief justice,” said Noodles....

“And we will have no chief justice until I appoint one? And I can’t appoint one until – ”

“You’ve got it now, I think.”<sup>128</sup>

....

“Then it’s just like Catch-22, isn’t it?” the Vice President blurted out...“I can’t appoint a chief justice until I’m the President, and he can’t swear me in until I appoint him. Isn’t that a Catch-22?”<sup>129</sup>

This Catch-22 is an artistic contrivance, as is the most famous Catch-22, the airmen’s Catch-22 (original). If the Vice President did not insist that the Chief Justice swear him in – and there’s no apparent reason why the Vice President insists – then this Catch-22 crumbles. There is also no apparent reason the Vice President, who is “technically already the President,” at least according to the novel, couldn’t appoint a Chief Justice and then get her to swear him in.

## 2. The unnumbered Catch-22 of the Freedom of Information Act.

The Freedom of Information Act, the chaplain explained, was a federal regulation obliging government agencies to release all information they had to anyone who made application for it, except information they had that they did not want to release.<sup>130</sup>

It is of course hyperbole that government agencies can withhold information for the reason that they don’t want to release it. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) specifies nine categories of information that agencies can withhold.<sup>131</sup>

And because of this one catch in the Freedom of Information Act, Yossarian had subsequently found out, they were technically not compelled to release any information at all. Hundreds of thousands of thousands of pages each week went out regularly to applicants with everything blacked out on them but punctuation marks, prepositions, and conjunctions. It was a good catch, Yossarian judged expertly, because the government

---

<sup>128</sup> *Closing Time* 166.

<sup>129</sup> *Id.* at 168.

<sup>130</sup> *Id.* at 61. Intentionally or not, Heller uses legalese here: “made application” instead of “applied.”

<sup>131</sup> 5 U.S.C. §552(b).

did not have to release any information about the information they chose not to release....”<sup>132</sup>

This last statement about FOIA is hyperbole, too. FOIA requires that if agencies delete information, “in each case the justification for the deletion shall be explained fully in writing.”<sup>133</sup> From the standpoint of this lawyer, who worked with FOIA for years, its inaccurate and contrived description make this implicit and unnumbered catch weak and unconvincing.

Yossarian is able to judge expertly because of his role as a wartime censor. The redactions under the FOIA resembles the work of Yossarian the censor:

Death to all modifiers, he declared one day, and out of every letter that passed through his hands went every adverb and every adjective. The next day he made war on articles. He reached a much higher plane of creativity the following day when he blacked out everything in the letters but *a*, *an* and *the*....<sup>134</sup> Soon he was proscribing parts of salutations and signatures and leaving the text untouched.

This Catch-22 resembles the airmen’s Catch-22 (secret simpler version) in that paperwork that threatens the bureaucracy is never approved.

**3. The implicit Catch-22 of Major Major’s office hours; the second time around.** Sergeant Towser explains to Appleby why Appleby could not meet with Major Major:

“Those are my orders. You can ask Major Major when you see him.”  
 “That’s just what I intend to do, Sergeant. When *can* I see him?”  
 “Never.”<sup>135</sup>

*Closing Time* reprises this Catch-22 from *Catch-22*<sup>136</sup> by quoting some of it. If Heller reprised this Catch-22 and the next one because they are significant, the significance is not apparent.

**4. The right-to-do-anything-that-can’t-be-stopped Catch-22; the second time around.**

“You’ve no right to do this to me,” the chaplain protested to General Groves....  
 “You’re mistaken, I’m afraid,” answered the general. “I think you’ll find that we have a right to do to you anything you can’t stop us from doing....”<sup>137</sup>

Later, the chaplain repeats the Catch-22, ““You said just a while ago that people have a right to do whatever we can’t stop them from doing.””<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> *Closing Time* 61.

<sup>133</sup> 5 U.S.C. §552(a)(2).

<sup>134</sup> *Catch-22* chap. I, 8.

<sup>135</sup> *Closing Time* 225-26. See text accompanying note 106.

<sup>136</sup> *Catch-22* chap. X, 106. See text accompanying note 106. The only change in the three lines of dialogue is that *Catch-22* does not italicize the word “can”; *Closing Time* does.

<sup>137</sup> *Closing Time* 268-69.

<sup>138</sup> *Id.* at 271.

Still later, Yossarian explains to Mrs. Tappman, the chaplain's wife, "[P]eople with force have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing. That's the catch Albert and I found out about in the army."<sup>139</sup>

Yossarian may have been referring to the occasion when an unnamed colonel, whom the chaplain had never seen before, interrogates him about the letters that Yossarian censored.<sup>140</sup> The chaplain, using the "you've no right" language that he also uses in *Closing Time*, says, "'You've no right to keep me here, and I'm not just going to stand for it.'"<sup>141</sup>

"Without saying a word, the colonel pushed the chaplain's chest hard and knocked him back down into the chair...."<sup>142</sup>

Although Yossarian refers to "*the* catch Albert and I found out about in the army,"<sup>143</sup> both Tappman and Yossarian also encounter the implicit Catch-22 of Major Major's office hours.<sup>144</sup>

### Key questions and some answers

Of three key questions about Catch-22, the old woman in the brothel poses the first and last, and implicitly raises the second one. What is Catch-22?<sup>145</sup> What does Catch-22 say?<sup>146</sup> What does Catch-22 mean?<sup>147</sup>

#### *What is Catch-22?*

Heller answered this question fairly revealingly.

Initially Catch-22 required that every censoring officer put his name on every letter he censored. Then as I went on, I deliberately looked for self-contradictory situations, and artistic contrivance came in. I began to expand each application of Catch-22 to encompass more and more of the social system. Catch-22 became a law: "they" can do anything to us we can't stop "them" from doing.<sup>148</sup>

However, when Heller said that Catch-22 came to "encompass more and more of the social system[;] Catch-22 became a law," he was not distinguishing between a social system and a law. He was calling Catch-22 a social system and a *social* law, as distinguished from a legal one.

---

<sup>139</sup> *Id.* at 306.

<sup>140</sup> *Catch-22* chap. XXXVI, 371, 375.

<sup>141</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXVI, 375.

<sup>142</sup> *Id.*

<sup>143</sup> *Closing Time* 105 (emphasis added).

<sup>144</sup> *Catch-22* chap. XXV, 271.

<sup>145</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXIX, 398 ("What is Catch-22?").

<sup>146</sup> *Id.* ("Catch-22 says they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing.").

<sup>147</sup> *Id.* ("What does it mean, Catch-22?").

<sup>148</sup> "Reeling in *Catch-22*," *Catch as Catch Can* 313-14.

In one interview, while discussing real-life Catch-22s, he used the phrase “a law of life.”<sup>149</sup> Thus, Catch-22 is a law as in Murphy’s Law, not Megan’s Law.

***What does Catch-22 say?***

<i>What does Catch-22 say?</i>	<i>Which Catch-22 is this?</i>	<i>As reported by...</i>
1. “Catch-22 required that each censored letter bear the censoring officer’s name.”	The censor’s Catch-22.	the narrative.
2. “Catch-22...specified that a concern for one’s safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind.”	The airmen’s Catch-22 (original).	the narrative.
3. “There’s a rule saying I have to ground anyone who’s crazy....But first he has to ask me to. That’s part of the rule.”	The airmen’s Catch-22 (original).	Doc Daneeka.
4. ““Catch-22...says you’ve always got to do what your commanding officer tells you to do.””	The obey-your-orders Catch-22.	Doc Daneeka.
5. “[R]egulations do say you have to obey every order. That’s the catch.”	The obey-your-orders Catch-22.	Doc Daneeka.
6. ““Catch-22 says they have a right to do anything we can’t stop them from doing.””	The right-to-do-anything-that-can’t-be-stopped Catch-22.	the old woman in brothel.
7. ““They don’t have to show us Catch-22,” the old woman answered. ‘The law says they don’t have to.’ ““What law says they don’t have to?” ““Catch-22.””	The right-to-do-anything-that-can’t-be-stopped Catch-22.	the old woman in brothel.

This is all we know about what Catch-22 says, and only the first two statements above may be accurate, because the narrative reports them. The old woman never saw the text of Catch-22. She reports what the M.P.s and carabinieri *state* that Catch-22 says, but her knowledge is second-hand at best. The M.P.s probably did not see Catch-22 and might not have been in a position to know what it says. The carabinieri almost certainly did not read it – presumably, it is in English – or know what it says.

Doc Daneeka confidently states what Catch-22 says, but it is unknown whether he ever read Catch-22 or is otherwise in a position to know what it says. Assuming that Doc Daneeka

---

<sup>149</sup> Sorkin at 27 (“There is a law of life: People in need of help have the least chance of getting it.”). See note 5 for the text of the interview.



accurately reports what Catch-22 says, then the leading authority on the text or paraphrasing of Catch-22 is Doc Daneeka, a physician, not an airman, combat officer, or lawyer.<sup>150</sup>

### *What does Catch-22 mean?*

This question is not the same as “What does Catch-22 say?” just as “What does the First Amendment mean?” is not the same as “What does the First Amendment say?” The old woman knows what Catch-22 says, or thinks that she knows, yet still asks what it means.

To say that Catch-22 in the novel – not the term “Catch-22” as it has come to mean in the language – means insanity and inanity,<sup>151</sup> or how Heller himself put it, being “self-contradictory,”<sup>152</sup> is not accurate. Of the novel’s seven explicit Catch-22s, only one is insane, inane, absurd, and self-contradictory, or seems to be: the airmen’s Catch-22 (original) – the embodiment of Catch-22. Even the airmen’s Catch-22 (secret simpler version) is not self-contradictory; it’s about military policy: Physicians submit paperwork to ground insane airmen, but Group Headquarters doesn’t approve it.

(The six implicit Catch-22s generally are and generally must be self-contradictory. Otherwise, we wouldn’t recognize them as Catch-22s. The two new Catch-22s in *Closing Time* are not about the military, but the federal bureaucracy.)

The novel *Catch-22* is absurd, but its explicit Catch-22s are not. When viewed together, the explicit Catch-22s mean, “This is how we do things around here.” Or, “This is S.O.P., Standard Operating Procedure.”

And the way that things are done in the army, the S.O.P., is not always nonsensical; some practices are downright common-sense: You must obey their orders. Officers must censor letters in wartime. If you go AWOL, you will be punished.

The just-like-us Catch-22 is not absurd. Military officers and other supervisors want personnel to like them and to be like them.

---

<sup>150</sup> Korn is the only lawyer in the book, or at least the only character identified as one.

Colonel Cathcart often wondered if what they were doing with the plum tomatoes was legal, but Colonel Korn said it was....He had no way of knowing whether or not the house in the hills was legal, either....Colonel Korn was the lawyer, and if Colonel Korn assured him that fraud, extortion, currency manipulation, embezzlement, income tax invasion and black market speculations were legal, Colonel Cathcart was in no position to disagree with him.

*Catch-22* at chap. XXI, 207-08. The only identified lawyer in the novel is ““an intelligent person with no moral character at all.”” That’s Korn’s own description of himself. *Id.* at chap. XL, 413.

<sup>151</sup> To state that the Glorious Loyalty Oath Campaign is “just like Catch-22,” as Captain Black did, *Catch-22* chap. XI, 113, is to call Catch-22 inane. In that campaign:

All the enlisted men and officers on combat duty had to sign a loyalty oath to get their map cases from the intelligence tent, a second loyalty oath to receive their flak suits and parachutes from the parachute tent, a third loyalty oath...to be allowed to ride from the squadron to the airfield in one of the trucks. Every time they turned around there was another loyalty oath to be signed. They signed a loyalty oath to get their pay from the finance officer, to obtain their PX supplies, to have their hair cut....

*Id.* at chap. XII, 111-12. Eventually, everyone who went to the intelligence tent had to sign four loyalty oaths, recite the pledge of allegiance, and sing four choruses of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” *Id.* at chap. XII, 112.

<sup>152</sup> “Reeling in *Catch-22*,” *Catch as Catch Can* 314.

The right-to-do-anything-that-can't-be-stopped Catch-22 begins to make sense. (I'm not defending the catch *per se*, but recognizing that it is defensible.) That's what armies generally do: anything that they can't be stopped from doing. This Catch-22 is not about absurdity, but power, and possibly utilitarianism in winning the to-the-death struggle against nazism and fascism.

As applied, the right-to-do-anything-that-can't-be-stopped Catch-22 is defensible and not inane: A brothel is closed down. As applied, the similar implicit Catch-22 *prevents* inanity: The right-to-do-anything-not-forbidden-by-law implicit Catch-22 blocks the inane and demoralizing practice of military parading during a war. The implicit Catch-22s of Colonel Korn's rule and Major Major's office hours are defensible as eliminating time-wasting meetings. (They might eliminate necessary meetings, too, but the overall effect might be to make the war effort more efficient.) The implicit Catch-22 of Colonel Korn's rule prevents inanity in that it ends Yossarian's and other airmen's absurd and disruptive questions.

Even the quintessential Catch-22, the airmen's Catch-22 (original) ultimately makes sense: You have to fight, no matter your mental state. After all, there's a war going on, you know.<sup>153</sup> Another person cannot fill in for you; that person is needed, too.<sup>154</sup> Get in there and fight.<sup>155</sup> (Colonel Cathcart's implicit Catch-22 makes sense for the same reason.)

The pragmatist General Peckem has a ready lecture for Yossarian, the old woman, Dr. Stubbs, and all of us who view Catch-22 as unjust, the lecture he gives to Colonel Scheisskopf

---

<sup>153</sup> *Catch-22* chap. XL, 411. "Doesn't he know there's a war going on?" Colonel Cathcart...demanded... without looking at Yossarian.

"I'm quite sure he does," Colonel Korn answered, "That's probably why he refuses to fly."

*Id.*

"Doesn't he know there's a war on?" Colonel Cathcart yelled out....

"I'm quite sure he does," Colonel Korn replied, acidly, "since you brought that identical point to his attention just a moment ago."

*Id.* at chap. XL, 412-13. *See also id.* at chap. IV, 32 (Doc Daneeka says, "I know there's a war on."), *id.* at XIX, 194 ("Tell them there's a war going on," Colonel Cathcart advises the chaplain).

<sup>154</sup> Doc Daneeka asks, "Who else will go [on missions]?" *Id.* at chap. XXVII, 299. Yossarian disagrees with this reasoning. *Id.* at chap. IX, 101 (he says that Colonel Cathcart "could ask for replacements and send us home"), *id.* at chap. IX, 102 ("There are ten million men in uniform who could replace me."). Doc Daneeka's thinking, despite his question "Who else will go?" is similar to Yossarian's. He says, "I know a lot of people are going to have to suffer for us to win....But why must I be one of them?" *Id.* at chap. IV, 32. *See id.* at chap. XIX, 194 (the chaplain asks Cathcart if he could "requisition some of the replacement crews that are waiting in Africa to take their places and then let them go home"), chap. XXVII, 294 (Hungry Joe reports, as Dobbs relates, that hundreds of airmen are being sent home from Naples and that replacement crews from the States are pouring in). In a few interviews, Heller would have disagreed with the notion that every man, including Yossarian, was needed for the war. *E.g.*, *Realist* interview. He said, "I tried to make it very evident that the war was just about over....I mean if this book had been set two or three years earlier, before the beachhead, then it would be a completely different book." *Id.* Because replacements were available, it would not have greatly harmed the war effort had Yossarian deserted. *Id.* It would have been different if it had been "right after Pearl Harbor, and we *don't* have enough planes, and we *don't* have enough men, and Hitler *is* in a dominant and threatening position...." *Id.* However, and this is my point, not Heller's, bureaucracies react slowly. If every man were needed in 1941 and 1942, the Army still thought so in 1944 and 1945.

<sup>155</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXXV, 364 (Milo Minderbender said, "...I want to get in there and fight ....").

about being lied to: “Don’t be such an ass...[D]on’t ever waste my time with such sentimental platitudes again.”<sup>156</sup>

The various explicit Catch-22s can be unified into the social law of Catch-22, the standard operating procedure necessary to win the war. And that just might be the definition of Catch-22, the best summary, the best integration of seven explicit applications or scenarios of Catch-22: the S.O.P. necessary to win the war.

Catch-22 is – dare I say it? – a reasonable social law, contrary to the old woman’s possible suggestion that it lacks reason.<sup>157</sup> Yossarian might agree. He sees Catch-22, or at least a clause of it, in all its “spinning reasonableness.”<sup>158</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> *Id.* at chap. XXIX, 314-315. See text accompanying note 100.

<sup>157</sup> See text accompanying note 61.

<sup>158</sup> See text accompanying note 17.