

Humor to Horrer to Hope

By : Please

About the book Catch-22

Published on
Booksie

booksie.com/Please

Copyright © Please, 2014

Publish your writing on Booksie.com.

Humor to Horror to Hope

Humor to Horror to Hope

Kira Statson/English IV

(847)

Catch-22

Joseph Heller

In light of Catch-22 topping the charts of the "Best Novel on Earth" list, I believe that it is an appropriate time to explore the book's merit and revisit the story that caused so much controversy in its original publishing. Eight years in the making, Catch-22 was Joseph Heller's first novel, with seven others (along with many plays and short stories) to follow. Though all through his writing career Heller kept his same tone of satire, and even carried over some of the more memorable characters of Catch-22, the book itself is rightfully called his greatest literary accomplishment.

The plot of Catch-22 is not necessarily easy to pinpoint. Yes, it is the story of Yossarian, a 28 year old bombardier fighting in WWII, and his rebellion against the forces he believes are trying to kill him. Yes, it is the story of Yossarian losing his friends and fellow soldiers to an unjust bureaucratic war. Yes, it is the story of his anger towards the unjustifiable increase in missions the members of his squadron are required to fly. However, when you describe the book like this you miss the entire point of the book.

The book is not just angry, or sad, or non-compliant. It is one of the funniest books I have ever read. The phrase "Catch-22" was coined after the book was published. The first so called Catch-22 the reader is introduced to is when Yossarian tries to get out of flying combat missions by telling the doctor that he is crazy. The doctor then explains:

"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 [another bombardier] 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 then he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to."

We follow Yossarian and the other characters of the book through battles, trips to Rome, conferences, and personnel visits. The book is written from different character's perspectives and often one event will be explained through the eyes of multiple characters. The multidimensional story gives each character a life of their own, and breathes a certain reality into the ridiculous situations the characters find themselves in.

Heller moves the story forward in a zig-zagging motion, but as the humorous story begins to draw to a close darker tones set in. The irony of the absurd bureaucratic officials turns from something uproarious to something bitter. Instead of laughing I found myself shaking my head. The way Heller revealed the absurdity of the officers was still funny, but the overtones became darker and darker.

Humor to Horror to Hope

Finally, in the forth-from-last chapter a new definition of Catch-22 is given. â Catch-22 says they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doingâ. I believe the whole book can be summed up in that statement.

The stories ending sees two of the Colonels giving Yossarian the way out he has been asking for. Of course ,though, there is a catch... a Catch-22. He will have to ally himself with the very men who gave him and the other soldiers the missions that drove him to the brink of insanity to begin with. The effects of the loss of Yossarian's friends are seen in his ability to ignore his conscience. Yossarian agrees.

However, another turn of events leaves the ending more satisfying then expected. The darker beat of the story is not lost but a glimmer of hope is seen. We are shown that Yossarian has allies he didn't expect. The reader then sees that perhaps the world will always have the Catch-22, but maybe as an individual or with help we can break free of the vicious cycle.

The book at its original publishing caused much controversy, mostly because there had never been anything like it written. The story does not follow a conventional story line, and the events are not always written chronologically. The book's humor can seem in bad taste if the reader is not aware of the sarcasm Heller was looking for. These things, though, I believe are all essential to give the book its tone texture and realness.

In the simplest terms possible, Catch-22 is the story of humanity and bureaucracy that are left unchecked. It is the tale of what happens when those who have the power ignore the subordinates, and how the world can appear to someone who is â dangerously saneâ in a dangerously insane situation. The ending paves the way for a sequel and I for one cannot wait to see what becomes of Yossarian.

Created from Booksie.com

Generated: 2014-07-30 14:51:52