

The first generation russian-jewish immigrants

[Art & Culture](#), [Comedy](#)



May 1, 1919 in Brooklyn, New York to first generation Russian-Jewish immigrants. When he was five, his father died due to an unsuccessful surgery, and his mother and siblings struggled to survive in the carnival-like atmosphere in Coney Island; some scholars hypothesize that this environment was a major source of Heeler's wry humor and irony that eventually made him famous. Though it is largely unconfirmed if Heeler was an aspiring author during his childhood, many people credit *The Iliad* as a notable book that was influential to him in his youth.

A year after Heeler graduated from high school, he enlisted in the Army AirCorp... And by 1944 Heeler flew 60 combat missions for the Allied forces in World War II.

He was awarded an Air Medal and a Presidential Unit Citation. After the war, Heeler married Shirley Held in 1945 and they had children. Heeler also took advantage of the G.

L. Bill which allowed him to study English at the University of South Carolina and New York University. By 1949, Heeler had received an M. A. From Columbia University as well. He spent some time as an instructor at Penn State University and also at Yale university before working as a copywriter, most notably for Time Magazine. Heeler's most celebrated book is *Catch-22*. Published in 1961, it is a novel about a World War II pilot who tries desperately to get out of combat flying, but continually finds himself doing just that.

Initially, the novel was slow to be recognized in the United States, but eventually it was critically acclaimed and eventually sold over ten million

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copies. It is often noted for its satire and dark comedy. The book became so popular that even the title was coined into an everyday term to describe an impossible solution to a dilemma. The idea for *Catch-22* came from Healer's personal experiences from World War II. The feelings that Historian and the other bomber pilots felt were taken directly from his own personal feeling and problems he suffered while on duty. Heeler was able to make it out of the war, but the experience tortured him and it took until 1953 before he could start writing about it. The war experience turned Heeler into a "tortured, funny, deeply peculiar human being".

After publication in 1961, *Catch-22* became very popular among teenagers at the time. *Catch-22* seemed to embody the feelings that young people had toward the Vietnam War. It was joked around that every student who went off to college at the time took along a copy of *Catch-22*. The popularity of the book created a cult following, which led to over eight million copies being sold in the United States. In addition to *Catch-22*, Heeler wrote about another half-dozen novels, along with a number of plays, screen writings and short stories. Most notable was his second novel, *Something Happened*, published in 1974, as it went on to be listed on *New York's Best-selling novels*.

Though it is not as popular as *Catch-22*, some scholars suggest that *Something Happened* was the more sophisticated and better written piece of literature. *Catch-22* The Story follows Captain Historian of the Army Air Corps, a B-25 bombardier who is stationed on the island of Pianos off the coast of Italy during World War II. Historian and his bomb squadron friends endure a farcical, absurd existence in where bureaucracy and moronic

superior officers prevent them from ever leaving the dangers of war. Historian wishes to be evaluated as insane by the squad flight surgeon, rendering him unfit to fly. However, to be evaluated, he must request the evaluation, an act that is considered sufficient proof for being declared sane (Heeler 55). This was the first of many lose-lose tuitions, or Catch-ass's shown in this story. Throughout the novel, Historian's main concern is that people are trying to kill him. Clinger, a highly educated fellow airman who's optimism causes Historian to hate him, and accuse each other of being crazy.

In a conversation with Clinger, asks " Who, specifically, do you think is trying to murder you? " " Every one of them," Historian told him. " Every one of whom? " " Every one of whom do you think? " " I haven't any idea. " " Then how do you know they aren't? " (24) Historian and the other airmen are particularly distraught by the rising number of missions required to have fulfilled their military duties and be sent home. Despite Historian's desperate measures to avoid more combat flights, he always ends up back in the plane. As the novel progresses through its loosely connected series of recurring stories and anecdotes, Historian is continually haunted by his memory of Snowmen, a soldier who died in his arms on a mission when Historian lost all desire to participate in the war.

After a darker tone is established for the last four chapters, including the deaths and disappearances of many of his friends, Historian rebelliously refuses to fly more missions. Colonel Cataract offers Historian a deal: Historian will be sent home if he promises to praise his commanding officers.

If he refuses, he will be court martially. Realizing that such a bargain would betray his fellow soldiers, Historian refuses to sell-out. The story ends on a slightly optimistic note; Historian tries to escape this conflicting choice by fleeing to neutral Sweden, where he would be live in danger Of being court martially for desertion. Key plot points are scattered intermittently throughout the book in a non- chronological manner.

These are told from differing points of views, and lowly the reader learns more of each event from each iteration, with the newly revealed information telling something deeper about the situation - its cause, its consequences, when it happened, or the punching for a joke set up in prior references to that situation. Heeler tends to repeat things a lot - words, catchphrases, references to events, and important scenes. These repeated events serve as touchstones through which readers can become oriented again in a story that is often wildly absurd, circular, and difficult to follow. For example, the death of Snowmen is rendered in all of these ways, iris as the subject of casual comments (where it is not even clear that Snowmen has died), then as the occasion for brief, inconclusive scenes, finally as the novel's most powerfully traumatized episode (337-340). The early references are naturally confusing because they allude to a scene not yet fully rendered. Mr.

.. Heeler died a long time ago, so it is impossible to know for sure, but I sincerely doubt that the relative lack of structure of Catch-22 is an accident. It's a parallel to the chaos, muddle, and ineptitude of bureaucracy. Parts that stood out to me AKA Ideas Catch-ass's In Catch-22 The most infamous example of this paradoxical situation was summed up earlier. However,

there are many other catch-ass's that can be inferred from the behaviors and interactions of these cartoonist characters.

When Historian is courting the prostitute Lucian, he thinks he falls in love with her. He express his desire to marry her, but she replies that she will not marry him. He asks why not, and she replies that he is crazy. When he asks why she thinks he is crazy, she responds that he must be crazy if he wants to marry her.

Just as he cannot avoid flying dangerous combat missions, he cannot convince Lucian to marry him. The military police chase the whore's away from Historian's favorite place in Rome. When asked what right they have to do this, they reply, " Catch-22. " Catch-22 says they have a right to do anything that you can't stop them from doing (407).

" And if you ask to see Catch-22, the law says they don't have to show it to you. " " What law says they don't have to? " " Catch-22" (p. 398). Major Major is a commander who doesn't command. He hates dealing with people, and is somewhat frightened Of them. He therefore instructs his receptionist/orderly that, whenever he is in his office, any visitors should be old he is out.

When he leaves his office (sneaking out the back window), the receptionist can send visitors in to see him. In short, the only time you can see Major Major in his office is when he's out. If Hess in, you can't see him. That's some catch, that Catch-22," he observed. " It's the best there is," Doc Danker agreed (55). " Snowman's Secret While building up to the book's powerful

emotional climax , Historian's vague recollections of Snowmen and Snowman's secret are stated.

Historian is motivated not by a selfish instinct for survival but by his final understanding of Snowman's secret. One must say final because a first version of this secret is offered in an earlier rendering of Snowman's death: "That was the secret Snowmen had spilled to him on the mission to Avignon - they were out to get him. (172). Much later, Snowman's secret is significantly redefined. It is revealed that Snowmen was hit with flak, and literally spilled his guts on Historian. He felt goose pimples clacking all over him as he gazed down despondently at the grim secret Snowmen had spilled all over the messy floor. It was easy to read the message in his entrails. Man was matter, that was Snowman's secret.

Drop him out a window and he'll fall. Set fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowman's secret. Ripeness was all (440).

It is the spirit which counts, not matter. To capitulate to Cataract would be to kill the spirit, to deny the distinction between man and other forms of garbage. Historian cannot do this even though it would insure the physical safety he has pursued so zealously, for he has finally learned the secret embedded in the entrails of all the Snowmen: men and women must protest against the forces that would render them garbage or they are indeed thing more than trappable, burnable, bury-able matter. This event, not revealed until the penultimate chapter, and the revelations that spilled out of it explain Historians supreme fear of dying. " He had decided to live forever or

die in the attempt, and his only mission each time he went up was to come down alive.

" (29). It is the same priority of self-preservation that creates conflict within Historian. He is determined to save his life at all costs, but genuinely cares deeply for his friends in the squadron and is traumatized by their deaths. His nightmarish flashbacks to the horror Of Snowman's death Came from the legalization that his own body was just like Snowman's - as destructible and fragile as his. In the end, when Historian is offered safety for either himself or his entire squadron, he is unable to choose himself above others. So he is stuck in one final catch-22: life is not worth living without moral concern for the well-being of others, but a moral concern for the well-being of others can put your own well-being at risk.

On a semi-related note, it was much more difficult to Google Snowmen because of the recent news on the NSA and how they [comment removed]. Absurdity Absurdity in the form of a character's actions is a common theme in Catch-22. Historian's strategies for surviving the war, mess officer and syndicate-running Mill, Cataract's blind ambition, and the background of Washington Irving all reflect unreasonable behaviors. In the order of most understandable to least understandable actions, Historian constantly tries to avoid combat flight with an " by any means possible" approach. He frequently checks into the hospital for " a pain in his liver that fell just short of being jaundice," the fictitious Garnett-Fleischer syndrome, and exploiting his unnaturally high running temperature of 101 degrees (7). He orders his pilot to perform extreme evasive action at the earliest signs Of flak, peaking

when he threatens to kill pilot and close friend Muscat during some risky aerial maneuvers. After he made up his mind to spend the rest of the war in the hospital, Historian wrote letters to everyone he knew saying that he was in the hospital but never mentioning why. One day he had a better idea.

To everyone he knew he wrote that he was going on a very dangerous mission. " They asked for volunteers. It's very dangerous, but someone has to do it. I'll write you the instant I get back. " And he had not written anyone since (8). He postponed a dangerous mission during the Great Big Siege of Bologna by singsong the whole squadron. Historian also snuck into his squadron's operations tent and moved the bomb line on the map forward, leading to his superiors believing that their air raid was no longer necessary. Even though Historian is the protagonist and one of the sanest characters introduced, he is still prone to behave in absurd fashion.

Mill had used his business acumen to take advantage of markets in the entire theater of war, and had consolidated his influence and wealth into the M & M Enterprises. In a short while, he controlled the international black market, played a role in the global economy, and used air force planes from all over the world (Axis and Allied) to deliver his shipments. And everybody had a share. Mill contracts with the Americans to bomb the Germans, and with the Germans to shoot down the incoming bombers. One evening after dinner, Mill's planes begin to bomb Pianos; he had landed another contract with the Germans. Many men were killed or injured in the attack. Everyone demands that M & M Enterprises be disbanded forever, but Mill shows them how much money they have all made, and the survivors quickly forgive him.

An example of absurd leadership is seen in Colonel Cataract's ambition to become a general.

Seen as nothing more than inhuman resources, Cataract volunteers his bomber group for every mission, even the most dangerous. On these bombing runs, it was deemed more important to get good aerial photography of explosions rather than to actually hit the target. While other bomber groups only required 50 missions to go home, Cataract keeps raising the amount of required missions to 60, 65, 70, 80 missions. Cataract hates Historian almost as much as Historian hates him.

When Historian publicly refuses to fly any more missions, Cataract jumps at the opportunity to have him court martially, but his right hand man, Colonel Corn, talks him out of it, advising him that a dismissal from the military is exactly what he wants; Cataract instead decorates him to ensure that he will stay in the service. First signed as a forgery by Historian in the hospital, the name Washington Irving (or Irving Washington) is soon adopted by Major Major, who signs the name because the paperwork with Erving's name on it never comes back to him. Washington Irving is a figment of the imagination who is, in a sense, the perfect person to deal with bureaucracy: because he does not exist, he is ideally suited to the meaningless shuffle of paperwork. Critique Robert Young insists that " It is ultimately a book about ideals, about the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions and about how hard it is for people to behave well, especially in groups and institutions under duress. " (Young) I would agree with this statement, as the moral dilemma given to Historian by Colonel Cataract would reflect this. Without his ideals, which in

this case would be his compassion for his friends and squad mates, he would be like Snowmen, hit by flak, live hamburger meat spilling out of his guts (438).

Catch-22 is definitively a book about war, an "institution under duress. The chaos of the story's time line, morbid rapid turn of events, and bureaucratic ineffectiveness Of the military are all parallels to the horrors Of war. Sticking with the war theme, critic Robert Bernstein adds that "Heeler often manages to heighten the macabre obscenity of total war much more effectively through its gruesome comic aspects than if he had written realistic descriptions. And thus, the most delicate pressure is enough to send us over the line from farce into phantasmagoria." (Bernstein). Like an unblocked fresh recruit, the reader is introduced to a totally unknown world. They both also observe the social structure of the situation from afar, and the new soldier tries to adapt and prove himself to the veterans around him.

But just as in the final five chapters of the book, sit goes down. In the climactic chapter, in fact, the book leaves comedy altogether and becomes an eerie nightmare Of terror. Here, Historian, walking through the streets of Rome as though through the apocalypse, observes soldiers molesting drunken women, fathers beating ragged children, policemen clubbing innocent bystanders until the whole world seems swallowed up in the maw of evil: The night was filled with errors, and he thought he knew how Christ must have felt as he walked through the world, like a psychiatrist through a ward of nuts, like a victim through a prison of thieves....

Mobs...

Mobs of policemen.... Mobs with clubs were in control every'here (416). Our hypothetical soldier would face the same terror in the form of gunfire, mortar fire, and the deaths of his squad around him. Bernstein finishes this thought with " as the book leaves the war behind, it is finally apparent that Healer's comedy is his artistic response to his vision of transcendent evil, as if the escape route of laughter were the only course from a malignant world.

John Aldrich, English professor at the University of Michigan, wrote in 1986 a reflection on *Catch-22* that still holds a striking resemblance to modern society: As is the case with many original works of art, " *Catch-22* ' is a novel that reminds us once again of all that we have taken for granted in our world and should not, the madness we try not to bother to notice, the deceptions and falsehoods we lack the will to try to distinguish from truth. Twenty-five years later, we can see that the situation Mr... Heeler describes has, during those years, if anything grown more complicated, deranging and perilous than it was in 1944 or 1961 The comic fable that ends in horror has become more and more clearly a reflection of the altogether uncommon and horrifying realities of the world in which we live and hope to survive. (Aldrich) There are many political topics addressed in *Catch-22* that are still relevant today.

Washington Irving filtering out any information for post cards to the families of soldiers is a direct form of censorship. Mill's shenanigans or profiting from bombing his own air force base reeks of the supreme mortgages sold off by the big banks. The Houses of Congress are constantly in deadlock, with legislation passing at a snail's pace. This book is also a potent critic of any

governing body, and specifically the moral, legal, and social issues that governing body will face.

Significance At a time when, as Philip Roth famously complained to *Commentary Magazine*, “ the American writer in the middle of the 20th Century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make credible much of the American reality - the actuality is continually outdoing our talents”, Heeler was one of the first to find a way to deal with the apparent deadness of the modern world. As Historian struggles against the self-serving bureaucracy at the heart of the military machine, Heeler argues that the individual will always struggle against the vested interests (such as Mill’s predatory capitalism) that control the world. And, perhaps, that madness is an entirely relevant reaction to this. As the Use’s involvement in Vietnam grew, Healer’s exploration of the insanities of both war and the “ military-industrial complex” gradually caught the public imagination, and the book became a word of mouth success. Stickers declaring “ Historian Lives” started to appear among other anti-war slogans.