

Regeneration and catch 22 essay sample



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Many of the young officers who enlisted in both armies saw the war as a noble task, a journey filled with honour and glory. ‘ There was only one catch’, many of the men would suffer mental and physical effects from what they had seen and been part of. These effects ranged from nightmares to mutism and shaking. Many of those who did not partake in the action did not understand that the horrors the soldiers were witnessing would alter their lives forever.

Regeneration by Pat Barker deals with the psychological impact of trench warfare in British soldiers in the First World War, whereas Catch 22 by Joseph Heller depicts the absurd and futile life in the American army in the Second World War. Not only were lives lost during both wars, but also soldiers suffered loss of their mental health and loss of their individuality. Within both novels there are two big contrasts in the way that Barker and Heller present us with the impact of war.

Heller wrote Catch 22 from his own memories and understood how ridiculous the U. S government was and so in his novel he uses humour to show this and also Heller uses fictional characters in his plot, whereas Barker has used historical facts and the characters in her novel did exist and did fight in the war. For Barker to use humour in her novel to portray the impact of war would be seen as insulting by many people. Many of the soldiers fighting in the war knew that one of the only ways to get through the war was with your comrades whether it would be drinking or companionship and understanding in a world without meaning. At the end of Catch 22, Yossarian is able to plan his escape with the help of the chaplain.

Catch 22 follows many unknown soldiers: a dead man in Yossarian's tent, an anonymous soldier in white and another who sees everything twice and another who touches Yossarian personally by ding in his arms. The recurrence of the unknown soldiers is one of Catch 22 themes, the loss of individuality, which as the novel progresses becomes more obvious. The soldier in white, in Catch 22, is a bandage-wrapped, faceless, nameless body that lies in the hospital in the first chapter of the novel, represents the way the army treats men as transferable objects.

When, months after his death, he is replaced by another, identical soldier in white, everyone assumes it is the same person. To one character in Catch 22, Lieutenant Scheisskopf, winning parades is all that mattered. He wanted his men to move with precision, which meant that they had to be the same. This was done by 'nailing the twelve men to a long beam'. Lieutenant Scheisskopf saw his men as puppets instead of human beings. None of his men were allowed to be different or themselves, as that would cost him his victory.

Similarly in Regeneration the soldiers at Craiglockhart are given blue bands to wear which shows that they are ill and receiving help for it. Many of the patients were admitted to Craiglockhart against their will and consequently do not want to be there. This is shown by Prior, who removes his blue band to enter the town nearby. Both novels show how when soldiers enter the army they become soldiers and lose all sense of individuality on and off the battlefields.

There are many other examples of officers in Catch 22 who have no respect for the uniqueness of soldiers, like Colonel Cathcart who keeps increasing the number of missions his squadron must fly. He does this not out of military necessity but solely to enhance his own prestige. Many of the officers in the armies wanted to impress their superiors and the government and they did this by claiming that the soldiers were government property. One clear example of this is in Catch 22: It's my leg It certainly is not your leg! That leg belongs to the U. S government.

This quotation shows Heller's use of humour to show how men's body parts are no more than 'gear and bedpans'. Heller makes the point that the men are no more than simple pieces of equipment, consequently not allowing the soldiers any form of identity. A similar situation is presented through Colonel Cathcart, in Catch 22, in the way he treats his squadron. He does not value them and shows his by placing them in high-risk situations for his own personal gain without thinking about the consequences of losing the soldiers lives. Colonel Cathcart views his soldiers as being like the stairways towards his victory in the army.

Colonel Cathcart wants to be promoted to general; to do so; he constantly raises the number of missions that the men are required to fly before they can be discharged. The number of mission's increases as time goes on, providing us with one of the few ways we have of keeping track of the chronology of Catch- 22. The number of missions is also the primary trap from which the men in the squadron are unable to escape: each time Hungry Joe completes his missions or Yossarian comes near completing them, the number is raised yet again.

The utter futility of trying to get out of the system the honest way, by flying the required number of missions, is what prompts Orr and Yossarian to seek alternative methods of escape. Alternatively in Regeneration Dr Rivers is sympathetic towards the soldiers that he treats and cures them thoroughly before they go back to the front, even if this meant taking time and spending time with the patients, whereas a close colleague of his Dr Yealland uses electric shocks to get the soldiers fighting fit again quicker.

Dr Yealland has no consideration for the pain the soldiers are already in by increasing their pain from the use of the electric shocks so that the soldiers get the ‘stamp of approval’ from the medical board. In using the term stamp it suggests that the patients are no more than documents waiting for approval from the government before they can be told they are well again. It also suggests that they are pieces of paper that can be discarded at any time, which was true of many of the soldiers who ended up at Craiglockhart.

After their stay many of the men did not see the action on the front because it could cause a relapse in their condition. Many of the men feel trapped by their commitments to the war. Although in Regeneration Sassoon puts up a protest to the continuation of the war he feels bound by the love and dedication for the men who serve in his division to get back to the front to fight with them. Alternatively in Catch 22 soldiers, like Yossarian, are bound by Catch 22.

Doc Daneeka points out that the men are trapped because those who are mad will fly the missions and if they deny madness, they will be forced to fly them because they are capable of doing so. This shows that whatever

circumstances the soldiers are in they are trapped by the war and must continue fighting for the government. Both those who fought in the war and those who did not feel like outcasts towards each other. The soldiers feel that they are not able to confront those who have not seen what they have and do not understand how it is affecting them.

They feel that they do not understand that ‘ you’re inches away from death’ every day. On the other hand those who did not fight in the war do not know how to approach those who have as they feel awkward. During the early years of the war enlisting in the army was voluntary. Many of the women at this time were patriarchal and so to the men who did not volunteer for the army they gave white feathers which became a sign of cowardice. Officer Prior, in *Regeneration*, is inevitably an outcast in society because he is dubbed insane.

When patients leave the institute they are advised to wear blue bands around their arm so that society knows that they are mentally ill. Wearing the band on their sleeve stops them from having any chance of being accepted in society because they are automatically disliked and pronounced insane. When Prior went to the bar, he didn’t wear the band because of fear of rejection. He knew that the public would not accept him. He didn’t want to deal with that rejection just because he is misunderstood. Prior knew that ‘ deep down inside he’s a regular guy’. One of the unknown soldiers in *Catch 22* dies in hospital, just before his family reach him.

They have come along way so the hospital decides that ‘ one dying soldier is as good as another’, in this instance it is Yossarian. This shows that even

family do not even feel they know their son anymore and even how to talk to them. To those who did not partake in the war saw those who did as heroes, but with the title of heroism came cowardice. Many of the soldiers did not like the fact that they were living in mud with rats and disease. Those fighting on the front would have to face 'going over the top' which meant they would most likely be shot dead in seconds by machine gun fire.

In *Regeneration* Sassoon is rewarded for heroic action in the war, but this forces him to put up a protest as he feels the war is being prolonged for unjust reasons. In form, *Catch 22* is a social satire. It's a novel using absurd humour to ridicule aspects of our society. The humour in the novel is accompanied with descriptive styles such as: 'Doc Daneeka roosted dolorously like a shivering turkey buzzard' These descriptive styles help depart from the reality by attributing unusual qualities to objects. These help to create new and altered perceptions of the world.

One example of the absurd humour that helps escape reality is the deaths of some of the men: Clevinger whose plane disappeared in the clouds, Dunbar who simply disappeared from the hospital and Sampson who is killed by a propeller of one of the bombers. A structural style that adds to the purpose of the novel is that the novel is not organized chronologically, time is disjointed. This is used for effects such as disjointed time which helps to present the psychological impact of war. Both novels show some aspect of being anti-war.

Catch 22 shows the absurdity of war and how it got out of hand in some circumstances, whereas in *Regeneration* shows how serious the war was and

the long term affects of the war. Also in Regeneration Sassoon puts up a protest to the war and is consequently sent to Craiglockhart. Many of the soldiers began to doubt their religion. This is shown in Catch 22 when even the chaplain begins to doubt his faith in God by the end of Catch-22. Part of the reason for his disillusionment is the manner in which Colonel Cathcart constantly tries to use religion to further his own ambition.

Heller's treatment of the subject of God is most focused in the thanksgiving discussion between Yossarian and Scheisskopf's wife. Yossarian points out that no truly good, God would have created something as terrible as human suffering and pain. Yossarian has experienced so many terrible things that he cannot believe in a God who would create such a wide array of options when it comes to pain and death. Both World War One and Two obviously had awful side affects whether it was mentally or physically. Men's lives were altered as they fought to save the king.

Both novels present different interpretations of the psychological impact of war. Heller uses humour to show the downfall of the government during the war, and Regeneration tells the stories of different officers in the British army and how the war has affected them. To conclude I think that both novels show the horrors of the war, as Heller was a soldier in the war he is able to use humour affectively, whereas Barker is writing Regeneration from facts that she has read and researched. Both novels at some point show an anti war attitude.