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“There was no end in sight”:

Time and chronology in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*

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Abstract

Joseph Heller's 1961 novel *Catch-22* is a frequently studied modern literary classic and is characterized by, among other things, its distinctive internal logic. This logic is partly created by the use of a confusing chronological structure and a peculiar approach to the idea of time, as time appears to behave in a way that is unlike its behaviour in the non-literary world. This essay explores the significance of the ideas of time and chronology in *Catch-22*, focusing on the precision of the non-chronological timeline, the apparent behaviour of time in the novel and the relationship between that time and certain characters. The discussion is based on various philosophical sentiments regarding the nature of time. I show how time in the novel is highly relative, consists of no distinct past, present or future, and does not flow in a strictly linear motion. I also show that the chronology which is employed in the text is logical, though not entirely faultless, that certain characters are to some degree able to manipulate time, and that time in the world of *Catch-22* flows in a cyclical and repetitious manner.

Table of contents

1. Introduction

Because of its status as a modern literary classic, and its prominent place in American literature, Joseph Heller's 1961 war-novel *Catch-22* has been subject to numerous literary studies. Topics of these studies range from the administrative insanity of bureaucracy to the use of dark humour to portray the horrors of war and, frequently, the eponymous catch. This catch, which applies to many situations in the novel, is essentially an inescapable paradox of bureaucratic rules. A soldier has to ask to be released from the army, but they can only be released if they are insane. However, they cannot be insane if they ask to be released, because that is a rational action, and they are, therefore, not allowed to leave. The soldier, then, is trapped in the army indefinitely. *Catch-22* tells the story of one such soldier, Captain John Yossarian of the fictional 256th U.S. Army Air Squadron, who is stationed on the Italian island of Pianosa during World War II. The story is mainly set in 1944 and follows Yossarian and his fellow officers as they attempt to remain sane, and alive, while futilely waiting for orders to return home.

One of the most characteristic aspects of Heller's novel is the absurd, confusing, and seemingly nonsensical internal logic that dictates much of the characters' lives. This effect is in part created by the use of a distorted narrative chronology, as well as by a peculiar approach to the concept of time. Events are often retold numerous times, from various points in time; frequently, events that occur prior to the current narrative present are described as happening in the present moment, embedded in a long and complicated sequence of digressions and flashbacks. Other instances of this wry approach to the flow of time include Yossarian's friend and fellow officer Dunbar, who firmly believes that his longevity depends entirely on his being utterly bored, and Mudd, Yossarian's deceased roommate who is still registered as being alive.

The absurd temporal structure of *Catch-22* has been duly noted by many scholars and its coherence has been subject to much debate. In 1967, Jan Solomon created one of the first comprehensive chronological timelines of events in the novel. He establishes in his analysis that there are in fact two separate chronologies in the text, which exist alongside each other (63). A few years later, Doug Gaukroger strongly criticised Solomon's analysis and offered an alternative interpretation. He concludes that the text has only one timeline and that Heller employed a disjointed chronology to complement the absurdity of the rest of the novel (79). Clinton S. Burhans arrives at a similar conclusion, stating that some chronological inconsistencies could possibly have been intended by Heller. He also establishes a tonal structure, which concerns the narrative progression rather than the chronological one (248).

This theme is further elaborated on by Robert Merrill, who concludes that the continuous use of repetitions creates "the curiously 'timeless' world of *Catch-22*", and that repetitions are used to progress the narrative (141).

While many critics have provided more or less extensive assessments of the chronology in *Catch-22*, little scholarly attention has been paid to the significance of time and chronology beyond their function as structural elements. The question of the actual nature and behaviour of time in the text has not yet been satisfactorily answered. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to attempt to determine the significance of the ideas of time and chronology in *Catch-22*, as well as to discuss the ways in which they are employed as narrative tools in the text. I argue that the disjointed and confusing chronology in *Catch-22*, along with an apparent lack of forward motion in time and the seemingly manipulable nature of time, are used to create the sense that time does not behave normally in the world of the novel. I also argue that the flow of time in the novel does not directly correspond to the flow of time in the real, non-literary world.

In order to contextualize the discussion of time in *Catch-22*, the essay will begin with a discussion about the use of time and chronology in literature beyond the subject of this study and in the field of narratology. In this section, there will also be included a survey of various theoretical approaches to the subject, including views held by the philosopher Immanuel Kant and the physicist Carlo Rovelli. Using their theories, I will establish a number of principles or rules, which describe the behaviour of time in the world of *Catch-22*. I will then use these principles to examine the novel's chronology and the different ways in which the text allows the reader to navigate the timeline. I will also provide a chronological timeline of the most significant events in the novel. Next, I will examine the ways in which certain characters, including Dunbar and fellow officer Hungry Joe, view and treat the concept of time. The discussion will mainly revolve around the idea of boredom as a way of prolonging one's life and the idea of stopping time altogether. Lastly, I will discuss the motion of time, or rather lack thereof, in the novel. I will examine the theme of repetition and cyclical motion which is repeated throughout the text, and the ways in which this reflects the motion of time in the world of the text. I will also discuss whether or not this circular nature of time is ever broken, and in that case what significance it carries.

2. Time in literature and philosophy

In the field of literary criticism, the subjects of time and chronology have long been fundamental parts of the discussion regarding fictional narratives and narrative structure. Many forms of literature, particularly the novel and other narrative stories, incorporate the element of time in the narrative construction of the work in question. Mark Currie emphasises the relevance of the fictional narrative as a foundation in discussions about literary time, referring to "the freedom that fiction possesses to roam in time, and therefore to produce temporal structures of a complicated kind" (150). In the discourse regarding narrative time, much attention has been given to literature that puts a marked emphasis on time as a thematic element, meaning literature that directly or explicitly uses the idea of time as a narrative theme or motif. According to Currie, such works concern time "in the sense that they explore the theme of time, perhaps even nature of time, through the temporal logic of storytelling" (1-2). Although it is not one of the more explicit themes in Heller's novel, the nature and logic of time is certainly a subject that is dealt with throughout the text.

While time has been established as a central element of narrative theory, and as an integral component of many narrative structures, the nature of time in narrative is not absolute. J. Hillis Miller remarks that "each literary work has a different time sense – even those by the same author" (87), entailing that there is no universal time or temporality in narrative literature. Rather, time is a feature which is unique to each individual narrative. There are, however, certain similarities and shared characteristics between different works and their narratives. One such connection is the structure of narratives, which can be divided into two facets; one of which concerns the chronological progression of events in the story, and the other of which concerns the narration of those events. Although these facets have been given different labels by different critics, the principle of a narrative division is a central element of narrative theory (Martin). Gérard Genette discusses these facets in his work on narrative discourse and narrative constituents, naming them *story time* and *narrative time*, with the additional facet of *narrating*, which concerns the action of producing a narrative (27). Genette's method of analysis does not only describe the nature of the relations between time and narrative, but also exhibits the centrality of time in narrative construction.

The discourse around time in literature also concerns the topic of chronology and the order in which a story is presented. Many, if not most, works of fiction rely on a chronological model of organization, presenting the plot in a sequential order which reflects the temporal order of

the non-literary world. This order can be disrupted by the use of, among other things, narrative flashbacks, a common occurrence in *Catch-22*. The narrative then shifts between various points in the story time, while remaining rooted in the narrative present and keeping the sequential order of events intact. As Catherine Emmott points out, flashbacks place characters, objects, and locations in different contexts, both past and present (175). This forces the reader to keep track of what context belongs to the narrative past and what belongs to the narrative present. In this essay, the term 'narrative present' refers to the point in the story time where the narrative begins and the events which follow sequentially from that point. In the case of *Catch-22*, the narrative present begins with Yossarian in hospital in the first chapter (although chronologically, this occurs more than halfway through the story). Everything that happens before this moment in the chronology is part of the narrative past and is recounted through a series of complex flashbacks, which are made to appear like part of the narrative present. This helps create the confusion established by the chronological structure of the novel.

The organized depiction of time as flowing in a linear and sequential manner is not necessarily true for all fictional narratives. In his study of what he refers to as the "illusion of sequence", Paul Ricoeur argues that "literary criticism of fictional narratives takes for granted that every narrative takes place within an uncriticized temporal framework" (169-170). The presence of time in narratives, although a key element of narrative theory, is not necessarily as unequivocal as it may seem. In the case of *Catch-22*, this novel exists in a temporal framework which is highly criticised, as time in the story does not appear to behave in the typically linear manner.

Much of the discussion about time in literature and narrative draws upon theories regarding temporality expressed by various philosophers and philosophical schools. The most popular and most generally accepted theory from the 18th century onwards is that which is known as relational time. This theory essentially states that time is dependent on the perception or experience of it by something material (Dowden). The theory of relational time was first articulated in ancient Greece, by Aristotle, who argued that time is a measure of change and that time is only perceived when change is perceived (Falcon 53). It has since been developed and refined by a number of subsequent philosophers.

One of the most prominent of these was Immanuel Kant, who devoted much attention to the subject of time and space in his classic work *Critique of Pure Reason*, first published in 1781. Kant argues that time does not exist as an independent property of itself, nor as a property of anything external – it is not real in the sense that something material is real. Rather, "time is nothing other than the form of inner sense", a creation by the human mind, which is projected

onto external objects, in order to perceive and experience those objects (163). Another, more recent contributor to the discussion about time is Italian physicist Carlo Rovelli, whose approach to the subject shares some fundamental similarities with that of Kant. Rovelli argues in his *The Order of Time* from 2017 that the traditional perception of time as consisting of a past, present and future is not true. In fact, there is no single present universal time, as "our present does not extend throughout the universe. It is like a bubble around us" (38). He further states that time, in particular present time, is just an illusion and "an illegitimate extrapolation of our own experience" (39). Time is not uniform or absolute, and neither is the present, as it depends entirely on the person or object perceiving it.

Based on these theories, as articulated by Kant and Rovelli, certain conclusions regarding the nature of time can be drawn. These conclusions state that time is relative and depends on external objects by which it is perceived; that time is a projection created by the human mind; and that there is no universal present moment, rendering the traditional view on time a mere illusion. These conclusions can be applied to the field of literary theory in order to analyse the presence of time in fictional narratives. In the case of *Catch-22*, the present analysis of time in that novel will be based on the previously mentioned conclusions. This means that time in the world of the novel depends on the characters who experience it, that time is to some extent projected by the minds of the characters, and that there is no distinct narrative past, present or future.

In the following sections I will analyse various aspects of the concept of time in *Catch-22*. First, I will discuss the chronological structure of the novel, focusing on its composition, ways for the reader to navigate the timeline, and the soundness of the structure. Next, I will examine the nature of time in the novel in relation to certain characters. Focus is put on the attempts made by Dunbar and Hungry Joe to control or stop time. Lastly, I will analyse the apparent lack of forward motion in time, focusing on the theme of repetition and the cyclical nature of time. I will also discuss the change in the flow of time which occurs towards the end of the novel, when time begins to move in a more traditionally linear fashion.

3. The chronological structure of *Catch-22*

The chaotic chronological structure of *Catch-22* is established early on in the text, as the reader travels rapidly, and in non-chronological order, between events that cover a period of many months, within the space of a few pages. Through long sequences of digressions and flashbacks, the reader is then introduced to a number of important characters, several of whom are already dead by this point in the story. They are also told of several significant events, many of which have not yet occurred in the narrative. This narrative style continues throughout much of the novel, with quick and often unpredictable deviations from the narrative present into various points in the narrative past. Solomon describes this pattern by stating that all points in the narrative are treated as "equally present" (56), entailing that the story time lacks a distinct past or future. This also echoes Rovelli's conclusion that the idea of time as consisting of these elements is a mere illusion (38). This results in great difficulty for the reader to establish in what order events actually take place in the story. Because the story time does not consist of a distinct present or past, it is difficult to relate events to each other and order them sequentially.

The chronological structure of *Catch-22* can be illustrated by the following passage from the novel, in which Yossarian and his crew are attempting to avoid enemy fire in the air above Bologna:

> The plane zoomed upward again in a climb that was swift and straining, until he levelled it out with another harsh shout at McWatt and wrenched it around once more in a roaring, merciless forty-five degree turn that sucked his insides out in one enervating sniff and left him floating fleshless in mid-air (147)

Much like the pilot McWatt's erratic flying, the chronological structure of *Catch-22* is, for much of the novel, completely disorientating, taking sudden turns, and moving in unpredictable directions. The disorganized chronology gives the appearance of near complete formlessness. However, this is far from accurate. Heller himself stated that "[i]f anything, it was constructed almost meticulously, and with a meticulous concern to give the appearance of a formless novel" (Krassner 10). There is a well-formed chronological structure supporting the narrative, and it is possible to clarify that structure through a close reading of the text.

Although the novel is not explicitly divided into separate parts or volumes, a number of such divides can be discerned. The first of these comprises Chapters One through Sixteen and is

primarily of an introductory nature. As Merrill points out, most of the pivotal and significant events of the story are introduced in this first section (146). Through a complex web of digressions and flashbacks, the reader learns of Yossarian forging Washington Irving's signature, Milo Minderbinder's bombing of the squadron, Snowden's death above Avignon, and, perhaps most notably, the Great Big Siege of Bologna. The second section, encompassing Chapters Seventeen through Thirty-Three, has a slightly simpler chronological structure. As Solomon states, this section "contains somewhat more action in the present time" (60). Events and characters that were introduced in the previous section are here elaborated on in greater detail, along with a number of new scenarios which have not yet occurred by the beginning of the first section (such as the rivalry between the chaplain and Corporal Whitcomb and the deaths of McWatt and Kid Sampson).

The third and final section comprises Chapters Thirty-Four through Forty-Two and contains a marked shift in its chronological structure. Merrill describes this part as differing from the two previous "in that time does seem to advance" (147), and this is mainly a result of considerably fewer flashbacks being used. Instead, the narrative progresses steadily forward, with all pivotal events being previously unmentioned. The divisions between the sections are marked by scenes set in the hospital, which Yossarian enters under various circumstances. First, he has just survived the harrowing mission to Bologna, and next, he "punched Nately in the face with all his might and knocked him into the hospital with a broken nose" (359) during the tumultuous Thanksgiving Day celebration. The novel also both opens and concludes with Yossarian admitted to hospital, framing each section in hospital scenes.

Despite the perplexing chronological structure of *Catch-22*, there are ways in which the reader can navigate the timeline and place events in sequential order. The most obvious of these is by studying the number of missions that the men in Yossarian's group are required to fly before they can be sent home. Solomon remarks that Yossarian's life in the army is "punctuated" by these missions (56), and they do in fact control his time to a great extent. Colonel Cathcart continuously raises the missions each time Yossarian is near completing them, and he does this regularly throughout the novel. By relating events to the current number of missions, it is possible to determine when those events take place – the higher the number of missions, the further along Yossarian is in the story. Another way of navigating the chronology is by following the development of Milo Minderbinder's syndicate, 'M & M Enterprises'. The syndicate begins as a mere dream of Milo's but soon becomes an international monopoly of which "everyone has a share" (231). Milo's business grows exponentially and is referred to often and regularly throughout the text, allowing the reader to relate certain events to its current

size – the larger and more powerful the syndicate is, the further along the reader is in the chronology.

It is also possible to measure the progression of the narrative through character development and repeated imagery. One method is to consider the recurring hospital visits made by Yossarian throughout the novel, nearly all of which occur in close connection to a particularly traumatising event in his life. The first visit follows the first mission to Bologna, during which Yossarian is nearly killed by enemy fire. The second occurs after he is injured by flak over Leghorn (one of few actual injuries he sustains). Yossarian's final hospital visit takes place after Nately's girlfriend, who is a prostitute in Rome, "lunged at him murderously with a bone-handled kitchen knife that caught him in the side below his upraised arm" (429). The circumstances of Yossarian's hospitalizations are telling of both the progression of the narrative and of Yossarian's mental development.

Yet another method to measure narrative progression in the novel is to study the many references made to Snowden's pivotal death during the mission to Avignon. This event is only fully detailed in the penultimate chapter, despite occurring before the beginning of the first chapter. Snowden's death is closely linked with Yossarian's state of mind and character development, as the Avignon mission "was the mission on which Yossarian lost his nerve" (225). This is the single most traumatic incident Yossarian endures in his career as a bombardier, and it is not rendered in full until shortly before his climactic desertation in the final pages. For much of the novel, Snowden's death is presented only in fragments, and often humorously. Descriptions of the event become more detailed and more gruesome as the narrative progresses, culminating in a full account just before Yossarian reaches his breaking point.

While these navigational tools in the text have been duly noted by critics, the coherence of the novel's chronology has been subject to much debate. Solomon notably argued against the accuracy of Heller's timeline, concluding that it is impossible for all events to conform into a single chronology. Instead, he maintains the presence of two separate chronologies, which exist alongside each other (56). However, a close examination of the text reveals that Solomon is incorrect in his conclusion, as events quite clearly follow in a single sequential order. By studying the many references made to various events in the text, which provide different details each time, those events can be placed into a plausible time scheme. Gaukroger supports this idea, pointing out mistakes made by Solomon in his interpretation of said references (73). These errors are undoubtedly the cause for Solomon's implausible analysis, which has been disproved

by many critics since its publication. However, the debate surrounding the validity of Heller's timeline is also a testament to the complexity of the novel's chronology.

There are, however, a few inaccuracies to be found. The most prominent of these concerns Major Major's arrival on Pianosa. Major Major goes into seclusion sometime after he is promoted by Colonel Cathcart, who arrives on the island when Yossarian has flown twenty-three missions. However, when Yossarian and fellow officer Appleby first arrive, Appleby attempts to report Yossarian to Major Major for "refusing to take his Atabrine tablets" during the Splendid Atabrine Insurrection (106). He is unable to do so because Major Major is in seclusion. The obvious fault in this version of events is that Major Major has not yet gone into seclusion by the time of Yossarian and Appleby's arrival on Pianosa. Gaukroger concludes that "the whole matter might be interpreted as a slight slip in plotting" (75), which is entirely possible. But while the inaccuracies in the timeline may have been honest mistakes made by Heller in the writing process, this does not necessarily hurt the chronological structure in any significant way. If anything, it only serves to amplify the effect created by the tumult of the chronology, making it even more difficult for the reader to establish order.

It is now necessary to illustrate the coherence of the chronology in a chronological timeline of some significant events in the novel. Chronologically, the story begins in early 1942 when Yossarian is an enlisted soldier stationed in Colorado, where he meets ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen and discovers the sanctuary of the hospital. These events are detailed in Chapters Ten and Eighteen respectively, despite occurring before all other events in the novel. At some point before 1944, Yossarian is shipped overseas to Pianosa. The mission to Ferrara is flown in March of that year and Milo forms his syndicate in April. In June, Mudd is killed during the bombing of Orvieto, just a few weeks before the Great Big Siege of Bologna. In early July, the fateful mission to Avignon is flown. This mission, and the resulting death of Snowden, is first mentioned in Chapter Four, despite occurring more than halfway through the story (Heller 480). In August, Yossarian enters the hospital and meets the chaplain for the first time (the beginning of chapter one) and in September, he is wounded over Leghorn. Also, in September, Orr disappears and McWatt and Kid Sampson are killed.

It is around this point in the timeline, when Yossarian is admitted to hospital for his injury, that the chronological and narrative structures begin to converge. Nearly everything that occurs after this point is rendered chronologically. In December of 1944, Dobbs and Nately are killed over La Spezia and Dunbar is disappeared by army command. Yossarian is then stabbed by Nately's girlfriend and admitted to hospital, where he learns that Hungry Joe has been killed by Huple's cat. Finally, Yossarian is told that Orr is alive in Sweden and deserts from the army to

join him (Burhans 246-247). For much of the novel, the chronological and narrative structures exist almost independently of each other, with the chronology constantly leaping back and forth through the story time. It is only towards the end of the novel that the two structures align, and the story is told in the order that it occurs.

4. Relationships between time and characters

Time in the world of *Catch-22* is closely interconnected with the novel's characters, sometimes to the extent that a character is seemingly able to affect or manipulate the flow of time. The most prominent example of this concerns Dunbar, a fellow officer and close friend of Yossarian, and his quest to achieve perfect boredom. Dunbar is introduced in the first chapter, when he is a patient in the hospital along with Yossarian, and during which time "[h]e was working hard at increasing his life span. He did it by cultivating boredom" (9). Dunbar adheres to a theory which states that the length of one's life is determined by one's level of boredom and discomfort – the more bored or uncomfortable he is, the longer he will live, because time appears to move at a slower pace during such periods.

As a result of this belief, Dunbar enjoys and seeks out dull and tedious situations. He particularly enjoys Colonel Cathcart's private skeet shooting range, because "he hated every minute of it and the time passed so slowly. He had figured out that a single hour at the skeet-shooting range […] could be worth as much as eleven-times-seventeen years" (38). Dunbar is so committed to his methods that he has even devised a formula for the speed at which time passes in his various degrees of boredom. During one of the aforementioned skeet shooting exercises, Dunbar elaborates on his theories in a discussion with fellow officer Clevinger and explains just how quickly a year goes by:

> You're inches away from death every time you go on a mission. How much older can you be at your age? […] Only a fifth of a second before that you were a small kid with a ten-week summer vacation that lasted a hundred thousand years and still ended too soon. Zip! They go rocketing by so fast. How the hell else are you ever going to slow time down? (39)

The initially sceptical Clevinger is eventually convinced of Dunbar's argument and concedes, but then questions why anyone would want such a life. Dunbar responds that he does, because, as Stephen Potts articulates it, "life, for him, is all there is" (32). Dunbar is content with living a life of lethargy and discomfort because his only goal is to remain alive for as long as possible. The quality of that life is less important to him than the length of it.

While Dunbar's attempts to prolong his life are mostly met with scepticism among his peers, his theories are not entirely void of substance. Because the story time in *Catch-22* depends on the character who experiences it, it is possible that Dunbar actually is slowing down time by practicing boredom. This is in agreement with Rovelli's argument that time flows at different speeds depending on who or what experiences it, as the present moment only exists immediately around that object (38). If Dunbar experiences time as moving at a slower pace, then, at least for himself, time really is moving more slowly. He is actively altering the speed at which time around him flows by projecting time as moving at a slower rate.

The credibility of Dunbar's methods is reinforced by the circumstances of his untimely demise. While faithfully observing his own practices, Dunbar remains alive and almost completely unharmed for a majority of the novel. However, when Colonel Cathcart orders the bombing of an undefended village for the sake of a tighter bomb pattern, Dunbar voices his disapproval and, for the first time, shows real concern for his surroundings. A short time later, when he is visiting Nately in hospital after Thanksgiving, "the soldier in white was there, and Dunbar screamed and went to pieces" (363). Burhans describes Dunbar as a character who is primarily concerned with self-preservation and who goes to great lengths to avoid perilous situations (242). This description is true for most of Dunbar's time on Pianosa, until the sight of the soldier in white causes him to completely abandon his principles and drives him to near insanity. Because of his extreme agitation, time now moves very quickly, and he is, within minutes, met with his abrupt and ambiguous end when he is disappeared by higher army forces. As Yossarian points out, this "isn't even good grammar" (364), and the exact details of this procedure are left unexplained. Nevertheless, Dunbar is not seen or heard of again after this incident. His disappearance shows that Dunbar is successful in his endeavour to slow time down, but only for as long as he adheres strictly to his practices.

Hungry Joe, the only soldier in the squadron who manages to finish his missions on time, has a similar relationship to time as Dunbar, as he also attempts to gain some control over its passing. Hungry Joe suffers from terrible and nearly debilitating nightmares every time he has finished another round of missions and has to wait for orders to return home. Because of administrative delays, these orders never arrive, and, knowing this, he "crumbled promptly into

ruin every time he finished another tour of duty" (53). But, whenever the missions are again raised by Colonel Cathcart and Hungry Joe is returned to combat duty, he is relieved of the nightmares and grows considerably calmer. In this sense, Hungry Joe acts as a kind of representative or literary manifestation of the reader. The current number of missions the men are required to fly is a way for the reader to navigate the novel's chronology, and they have a similar function for Hungry Joe. He is calm whenever he has more missions to fly because time is then being measured and he has some control over the passing of time. He suffers when he has no missions to fly because that leaves him entirely without control. Hungry Joe's dependence on the number of missions he is required to fly mirrors the reliance of the reader on the missions as a navigational tool.

Hungry Joe's fear of time passing him by without affecting him is also manifested in his reaction to small noises, particularly the sound of a ticking clock. Whenever he is waiting to be discharged, he is enraged by the noise, as "the steady ticking of a watch in a quiet room crashed like torture against his unshielded brain" (51). While Hungry Joe is between tours of duty, he does not have the protection and comfort that the missions bring him. He is exposed to the passing of time without any way of governing it. He even forces his tentmate Huple to "roll [his] wrist watch up in a pair of wool socks every night and keep it on the bottom of [his] foot locker on the other side of the room" (51). When he has finished his missions, Hungry Joe can only wait for something to happen to him. He has no influence or command over his life. Hearing the ticking of a clock reminds him of this, as it is the almost literal sound of time passing by out of his control.

Hungry Joe's desire to have some control over time drives him to take action, and he actually attempts to stop time altogether. Whenever he is in Rome on leave, Hungry Joe always carries with him a camera with which he is constantly attempting to take photographs of the women he sees. He is desperate to capture these images, but he often debates whether he should focus on taking pictures or simply enjoy his time with the women instead. His struggles culminate during a visit to Nately's girlfriend's brothel, when he realises that he has forgotten his camera and frantically tries to decide if he should return for it:

> Then he let out a piercing shriek suddenly and bolted toward the door in a headlong dash back toward the enlisted men's apartment for his camera, only to be halted in his tracks with another frantic shriek by the dreadful, freezing premonition that this whole lovely, lurid, rich and colorful pagan paradise would be snatched away from him irredeemably if he were to let it out of his sight for even an instant. (242)

By taking pictures of the women he sees, Hungry Joe would be able to capture a moment in time, and, in a sense, stop time from passing. However, he is never able to take his pictures because "[t]hey never came out. He was always forgetting to put film in the camera or turn on lights or remove the cover from the lens opening" (52). Therefore, Hungry Joe is never is able to capture time. To stop time from moving means to eliminate the element of time entirely, which, according to Kant, is impossible. He states that while time is a product of the human mind, it is not possible to remove time from the mind's perception of the world (162). The projection of time can be altered and the appearance of objects in time can change, but time cannot be removed from the equation altogether. Hungry Joe is unable to stop time because he is attempting to accomplish something that is simply not possible. While Hungry Joe might be able to influence the speed at which time flows, he cannot stop or halt it altogether.

5. The motion of time

One defining characteristic of time in *Catch-22* is its apparent want of direction, as the novel's story time lacks a sense of progression and forward movement. Rather than flowing steadily forward, time in *Catch-22* flows in an essentially cyclical or circular manner. It is worth noting, however, that the narrative time of the novel remains unaffected by this motion. As established by Genette, the narrative time of a text is separate from the story time and does not concern the amount of time that passes in the world of the story (27). It is the story time of *Catch-22* that appears cyclical or stagnant. This story time behaves in accordance with Rovelli's conclusion that there is no universal present moment in time, as it only exists in our immediate surroundings (38). In the world of *Catch-22*, time does not consist of a distinct past, present and future, because it does not flow in a linear fashion. Subsequently, characters in the novel do not move in a strictly forward direction either. Rather, "[t]hey moved sideways, like crabs" (27). They are unable to move forward and progress through time, as they are stuck in a cycle of ever-increasing missions and nightmarish dilemmas.

The general motion of the novel's story time is reflected in the business model of Milo Minderbinder's syndicate, which has a similarly cyclical core structure. Milo explains the

organization to Yossarian on their way to Cairo, where Milo ends up cornering the market for Egyptian cotton instead of buying eggs:

> "Why don't you sell the eggs directly to you and eliminate the people you buy them from?" "Because I'm the people I buy them from", Milo explained. "I make a profit of three and a quarter cents apiece when I sell them to me and a profit of two and three quarter cents apiece when I buy them back from me." (231)

Despite Milo's repeated insistence that his syndicate belongs to everyone, the business essentially operates on the basis of Milo's sole ownership; Milo is both the buyer and the seller of all products that are handled in the syndicate and all profits made by the syndicate are collected by Milo himself. Nothing ever leaves the syndicate, but circles within it around the centre that is Milo, much like the characters in *Catch-22* circulate within their timeframe.

While the proceedings of M&M Enterprises revolve around Milo, Yossarian's life revolves mainly around his recurring visits to the hospital. Yossarian finds himself admitted to hospital at regular intervals, suffering from plights of varying legitimacy. Additionally, as Solomon remarks, many of Yossarian's hospitalizations coincide with the raising of missions by Colonel Cathcart (57). Between hospital visits, Yossarian experiences one or several dangerous, and sometimes traumatic, incidents, including Snowden's death and subsequent funeral, his injury in the air above Leghorn, and his being stabbed by Nately's girlfriend. The prompt raisings of the missions following most of these episodes trigger Yossarian to flee once again to the relative safety of the hospital, where "[t]hey couldn't dominate Death […] but they certainly made her behave" (165). The regularly recurring hospital scenes act as a nerve centre or focal point in the temporal mechanics of the novel, around which characters and events rotate in cycles. Each cycle, including the novel as a whole, begins and ends with Yossarian admitted to hospital, with a similar order of events in between.

This cyclical nature of time is directly experienced by several characters, most notably by the chaplain. He frequently experiences *déjà vu*, meaning the strange sensation of having seen or been through a certain situation before. The chaplain often encounters situations that he is certain, or almost certain, have already occurred and he spends a significant amount of time reflecting on his experiences. One of these instances occurs when he encounters his assistant Corporal Whitcomb engaged in conversation with an unidentified man outside his tent, causing him to reflect on the nature of this phenomena:

> *Déjà vu.* The subtle, recurring confusion between illusion and reality that was characteristic of paramnesia fascinated the chaplain, and he knew a number of things about it. He knew, for example, that it was called paramnesia, and he was interested as well in such corollary optical phenomena as *jamais vu,* never seen, and *presque vu,* almost seen. (204)

The chaplain's experiences of *déjà vu* are tangible manifestations of the cyclical motion of time in the world of *Catch-22*, as he perceives its non-linear flow. He most palpably experiences this phenomenon during the incident of the naked man in the tree at Snowden's funeral (whom the reader knows to be a traumatised Yossarian). For a long time after the event, he has difficulties determining what exactly it is he has witnessed. The chaplain is certain that "it was neither *déjà vu, presque vu* nor *jamais vu.* It was possible that there were other *vus* of which he had never heard and that one of these other *vus* would explain succinctly the baffling phenomenon" (268). Although the chaplain is not aware of it himself, he is feeling the effects of the cyclical or circular nature of the novel's story time.

Apart from the chaplain's *déjà vu,* there are also other instances of characters experiencing the effects of the repetitious motion of time. While stationed at Lowery Fields, ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen enjoys repeatedly deserting his post, for which he is "sentenced to dig and fill up holes six feet deep, wide and long for a specified length of time" (104). Whenever he has finished, he disappears again, only to be forced to continue digging. There is no purpose or end to this ceaseless task, as "[t]here was no future in digging holes" (105). The soldier in white, the unidentified soldier who is entirely encased in plaster, recurs at regular intervals throughout the novel and each of his appearances coincide with one of Yossarian's own hospital visits. He is often treated in the same hospital ward as Yossarian, who observes that "changing the jars for the soldier in white was no trouble at all, since the same clear fluid was dripped back inside him over and over again with no apparent loss" (167). The soldier is fed the same fluids that have just dripped out of him, in a never-ending cycle.

Meanwhile, Orr, Yossarian's tentmate and close friend, is occupied with the business of refurbishing their tent for the upcoming winter. He constructs a gasoline powered stove, one component of which is a small faucet. He never seems to finish this project, as "[h]e worked without pause, taking the faucet apart, spreading all the tiny pieces out carefully", before "reassembling the whole small apparatus, over and over and over and over again, with […] no indication of ever concluding" (22-23). Ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen, the soldier in white and Orr are all occupied by monotonous, repetitive actions which seemingly have no end in sight, as they live in a time which Solomon describes as having "no possibility of progress, only the near

certitude of death" (64). While this is not entirely true for the whole of the novel (as will be discussed shortly), the time which these characters live in is distinctly stagnant. There is little opportunity for characters to make any significant progress through this time while they live and operate within its confines.

The seemingly illogical motion of time in *Catch-22* also causes some characters to become completely stuck in time, trapping them, and hindering them from experiencing any change in time. One such character is the soldier in white, who is completely incapable of movement as a result of his full-body cast. No sign of life is ever discerned from the soldier, apart from Nurse Duckett's daily inspection of the patient's temperature. One morning, when performing this task, Nurse Duckett discovers that the soldier in white has died inconspicuously, and "if she had not read the thermometer and reported what she had found, the soldier in white might still be lying there alive exactly as he had been lying there all along" (167). The only reason that the soldier in white dies, is because he is discovered to have died; had he not been discovered, he would still be trapped motionless in time. This idea follows Aristotle's argument that time is measured by the perception of change (Falcon 53). In this case, the change (the soldier's death) is perceived by Nurse Duckett. Her perception of the change in the soldier's state signals that time has passed, allowing the soldier to finally break free.

Mudd, also known as the dead man in Yossarian's tent, is in a similar predicament. He is "a new officer [who] had shown up at the operations tent just in time to be killed" (108). The day he arrives on Pianosa, he is assigned to Yossarian and Orr's tent, and only has time to leave his belongings on his cot before he is mistakenly assigned to the mission to Orvieto, during which he is swiftly killed. Because he is not registered before he dies, he never officially arrives on the island and, therefore, never officially dies as a member of the squadron. Mudd's belongings are left untouched in the tent, as no one knows quite what to do with them, and Mudd himself, much like the soldier in white, is left trapped in time.

While time stands relatively still for much of the novel, it begins to move forward as the end of the story approaches. The first sign of movement occurs when Mudd, who has been trapped in his tent since his death months earlier, suddenly becomes unstuck and is released from his temporal prison. This is caused by Yossarian's new roommates, who move into his tent when he is left its sole occupier following Orr's disappearance. Solomon accurately comments that they "arrive and commit the weirdest of murders" by throwing out Mudd's belongings to make room for their own (60). Yossarian discovers this monumental change when he returns to the tent after discussing his dislike of his new roommates with fellow soldier Chief White Halfoat:

> And the very next morning they got rid of the dead man in his tent! Just like that, they whisked him away! […] In a matter of moments they had disposed energetically of a problem with which Yossarian and Sergeant Towser had been grappling unsuccessfully for months. (349-350)

Yossarian and Sergeant Towser, who have both been on Pianosa for some time, are unable to remove Mudd's belongings, while the new recruits, who just arrived on the island, solve the problem quickly and efficiently. They are able to do this because they do not yet belong to the world and time of Pianosa and *Catch-22*. They still operate based on a more regular sense of time. Yossarian and Sergeant Towser are unable to do it because they still function within the time of *Catch-22.*

Finally, in the last chapter of the novel, Yossarian also manages to escape the absurd timeframe that he is trapped in. This occurs when he decides to desert from the army and join Orr, who has already deserted, in Sweden. Yossarian's desertation is the climactic event of the novel, and occurs, as Alberto Cacicedo puts it, "when Yossarian has finally remembered, clearly and with no ambiguities, the death of Snowden" (359). Throughout the novel, obscure references are made to Snowden, a young radio-gunner and member of Yossarian's crew, who is injured by flak and dies in Yossarian's arms during the first mission to Avignon. His death is revealed only in parts, often in humorous context and for comedic effect. The first reference to Snowden is made with Yossarian's seemingly rhetorical question of "[w]here are the Snowden's of yesteryear?" posed in a moment of hilarity during one of Clevinger's educational sessions (33). However, references to the event gradually become more detailed and more gruesome as the narrative progresses. In the penultimate chapter, the full story of Snowden's fate is revealed by Yossarian, as he reminisces on the fateful mission while being treated for his stab-wound in hospital. This is one of the few genuinely necessary hospitalizations Yossarian endures, and it is also the most seriously wounded he has been in his carrier as a bombardier. His full recollection of Snowden's fate is, at least in part, caused by his own near-death experience.

The full revelation of Snowden's death is closely connected to the chronological structure of the novel. As Yossarian's memory of the event becomes more detailed, the chronological and narrative structures of the text become more orderly. The two coincide when Yossarian finally allows himself to remember the full horror of what he has seen, in the final two chapters. When Yossarian confronts his memory, he quits attempting to escape his past, as he tells Major Danby that "I'm not running *away* from my responsibilities. I'm running *to* them" (451).

Yossarian's ultimate decision to desert is the moment when he breaks away from the fantastical time of the world of *Catch-22* and leaves to rejoin a more normal and sensible time structure. Despite his many previous, and failed, attempts to do just that, Yossarian can only break free when he confronts his memories of the past and makes the decision to take control of his future.

6. Conclusion

In this essay I have discussed the ideas of time and chronology in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, by drawing on various literary and philosophical theories about the nature of time. I have showed that there is no single, uniform temporality in all literary works and that narratives are not always presented in a chronological order. According to the theory of relational time, as supported by Kant and Rovelli, time is highly relative and flexible, and these thoughts are reflected in *Catch-22*. The flow and speed of time in the novel is dependent on the characters who perceive them, and the story time has no single narrative present.

The chronology in *Catch-22* is seemingly illogical, with rapid and elaborate flashbacks into the narrative past. However, as I have shown, there is a logical structure to be found. The narrative can be divided into three separate parts, each of which has a different chronological structure. I have also shown how the reader can navigate the chronology by following, among other things, the current number of required missions and the gradual reveal of Snowden's death. While the chronology contains a few minor inaccuracies and discrepancies, this does not harm the narrative in any significant way – rather, it only serves the purpose of the confusing chronology.

The relativity of time is reflected in its treatment by the characters of Dunbar and Hungry Joe. I have shown how Dunbar's theory of boredom is ultimately proved to have some validity, as he meets his end immediately after abandoning that theory. This shows that time moves at a slower pace when he is bored and at great speed when he is not. This idea is also supported by Rovelli's conclusion that time is not absolute but depends on the person perceiving it. Meanwhile, Hungry Joe repeatedly fails in his attempts to stop time, as he is never able to take a single picture. I have shown how his failure indicates that while time can be made to move at a slower pace, it cannot be made to stop moving altogether. This is in accordance with Kant's idea of time being necessary for the perception of our surroundings.

The novel's story time appears to flow in a cyclical manner, with hospital scenes acting as focal points around which characters circulate. I have pointed out various ways in which this pattern is manifested, such as the chaplain's case of déjà vu and Orr's incessant tinkering. I have also shown how Mudd exists in a state between life and death, and how time, therefore, does not flow in any direction around him. He is only released from this state by newly introduced characters, who seem to operate on the more standard time of the non-literary world. Additionally, I have discussed Yossarian's escape from the novel's story time, showing how he only does this after confronting his past and finally allowing himself to recognize the full details of his most traumatic memory.

The absurd internal logic employed in *Catch-22* is reflected in its chronology and approach to time. The time of *Catch-22* does not directly correspond to the time of the non-literary world, where, although it is still relative, time flows in a decidedly more linear fashion. Instead, there is no distinct past, present and future, and the speed at which time flows depends heavily on the characters who experience it. It is a fittingly absurd approach to time for an equally absurd novel.

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