

จาก *Catch 22* ถึง *Closing Time*: ความเชื่อมโยงแห่งความเป็นอื่น

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บทคัดย่อ

Joseph Heller นักเขียนนวนิยายอเมริกัน มีชื่อเสียงจากการตีพิมพ์ *Catch 22* นวนิยายเรื่องแรกของเขา ซึ่งใช้ฐานทัพอากาศในบริเวณทะเลเมดิเตอร์เรเนียนระหว่างสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2 เป็นฉาก นวนิยายเรื่องนี้เสียดสี ทั้งองค์กรทหาร ความเกินสมควรและความไร้เหตุผลในวงการที่ไร้ความเป็นปัจเจกชน รวมทั้งวงการเมืองช่วงหลังสงคราม เนื่องจากเป็นงานที่เขียนขึ้นในบริบทแห่งการปรับเปลี่ยนทางวัฒนธรรมครั้งสำคัญจากค่านิยมทางการเมืองและสังคมที่ค่อนข้างอนุรักษ์นิยมแห่งทศวรรษ 1950 มาสู่ขบวนการเสรีนิยมอันแข็งกร้าว และการเปลี่ยนแปลงอันสับสนแห่งทศวรรษ 1960 นวนิยายเรื่องนี้จึงเป็นทั้งเอกสารทางประวัติศาสตร์ที่มีประโยชน์และวรรณกรรมที่ทรงคุณค่า

ใน ค.ศ.1994 Heller ตีพิมพ์ *Closing Time* เป็นงานต่อเนื่องจาก *Catch 22* และเช่นเดียวกับนวนิยายเรื่องแรก บทประพันธ์เรื่องใหม่นี้เป็นทั้งตัวบทแห่งการเสียดสีและการร่วมวิพากษ์สังคมร่วมสมัย นวนิยายเรื่องหลังนี้สะท้อนข้อห่วงใยหลายประการของนักเขียนนวนิยายและนักวิจารณ์วัฒนธรรมช่วงปลายศตวรรษที่ 20

บทความนี้เปรียบเทียบนวนิยายทั้งสองเรื่องด้านการเสนอแก่นเรื่อง โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งผลการขยายตัวของทุนนิยม และความปรารถนาความหลากหลายทางการเมือง ทั้งนี้จะมุ่งพิจารณางานเขียนทั้งสองเรื่องนี้ในฐานะตัวชี้บ่งความวิตกกังวลในช่วงสี่ทศวรรษสุดท้ายของศตวรรษที่ผ่านมา ซึ่งเกิดจากการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางเศรษฐกิจการเมือง และสังคม ในวัฒนธรรมอเมริกัน และอันที่จริงก็คือวัฒนธรรมโลกนั่นเอง

คำสำคัญ: Joseph Heller, *Catch 22*, *Closing Time*, นวนิยายอเมริกัน

From *Catch-22* to *Closing Time*: A Decline of Otherness

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*The American novelist Joseph Heller achieved fame with the publication of his first novel, *Catch-22*, in 1961. Set on a Mediterranean airbase during World War II, the story satirizes not only military organization but also excesses and absurdities in the corporate and political spheres of the post-war period. The novel was written in the context of a major cultural shift from the relatively conservative social and political values of the 1950s to the stridently liberal and tempestuously radical movements of the 1960s. For this reason, it remains a useful historical document as well as an accomplished literary work.*

*In 1994, Heller published a sequel to this novel, *Closing Time*, again a satirical text and once more entering a dialogue with its contemporary milieu. In many respects, the later work reflects the concerns of many fiction writers and cultural critics at the end of the twentieth century.*

This article compares the two novels in their treatment of specific themes, particularly the effects of capitalistic expansion and the desire for political diversity. It seeks in the process to read the works as indicative of anxieties produced by major economic, political and social changes in American, and indeed global, culture in the last four decades of the last century.

Keywords: Joseph Heller, *Catch 22*, *Closing Time*, American novel

The recent death of the American author Joseph Heller will have launched a flurry of publishing activity, given that Heller's *Catch-22*, his first novel and the work with which his name has become identified, was such a landmark of twentieth century literature. The term "Catch-22", which Heller invented for the story, entered popular vocabulary. The novel itself, with its inexhaustible comic critiques of military and other bureaucratic structures, represented a highpoint of black humor and the emergence of a western culture of resistance that would eventually be inextricably associated with the 1960s. It was probably inevitable that Heller's "sequel", *Closing Time*, published in 1994, would be regarded with a sense of disappointment, since all of

Heller's writings after that spectacular debut in 1961 have been popularly received in such terms, even if they have often been critically well-regarded. But there is another reason why disappointment may accompany our reading of *Closing Time*: the presence of disappointment as a theme and underlying mood in the novel itself right up to and including the last lines. In this respect, though in important ways the novel is truly a continuation of its predecessor, the sequel departs from the hopeful anger and comic exuberance of the original. It is that difference I wish to examine here. While there are quite obvious biographical determinants, I believe, the differences also have something to tell us about changes in American and perhaps other western

cultures in the later decades of the twentieth century.

The most readily apparent change in the narrative techniques of *Catch-22* and *Closing Time* is in the point of view. Where the former text employs a limited third person perspective focusing on and often through the character of the Assyrian/Armenian airman Yossarian, the latter novel begins with the first person voice of another airman, Sammy Singer, now long retired. It then shifts throughout the narrative, before concluding with a third person psychological description of the same character. Because both the first person beginning -- prologue, if you like -- and the third person epilogue clearly suggest a degree of authorial autobiography (Singer having worked at *Time* magazine as Heller had done, for example), the effect is to personalize the novel. While *Catch-22* is no less humanitarian, even humanistic, in its overriding moral concerns, *Closing Time* introduces the reader into a more intimate relationship with at least one of the characters. Because that character shares background with Heller himself, the text seduces us into believing at times that we are indeed hearing from the author, that he is emerging from behind his art.

Since we know that Heller viewed *Closing Time* as his last major fictional work, as confirmed by the title, it is easy to interpret this authorial intrusion as a final bow. On the other hand, we can read the shifting point of view in relation to Sammy Singer as denying the reader any comfortable, unproblematic identification of narrative point of view and authorial position, in this respect reflecting a postmodern epistemological uncertainty and ontological instability. In fact, both of these readings may be applied, and yet alone they still fall short. For there is another impulse at work here, I believe: the reassertion of the private and psychological, terms inextricably connected to humanistic notions of the individual, in the face of what is perceived as a cultural attack by political-economic forces upon concepts of the human in general. Thus, the reflections upon childhood and early adulthood of

the opening chapter, and the eulogizing of the musical art of Mahler in the novel's closing lines, are not merely the nostalgic and aesthetic withdrawal of an elderly man facing death, though they may be these things too. To reduce the text to such psychology is to accept the prejudice that the elderly are somehow beyond the political realm with its orientation towards the future.

The novel's reflections upon childhood in Brooklyn are not simply pleasurable exercises in nostalgia; they are meaningful confirmations of the function of memory in the context of a culture that prefers to forget. Singer's preference for the downbeat -- "Mostly of late in music he preferred the melancholy to the heroic" (Heller, 1994, 464) -- reflects in part the resignation of an old man. But it also enacts a resistance to the kind of oppressive optimism, the relentless enthusiasm, hyperactivity and "hyperinformation" (Baudrillard, 1988, 211) that is crucial to consumer-capitalist culture. That position is earlier expressed through the character of the older Yossarian:

I'm tired of information I can't use. I wish the daily newspapers were smaller and came out weekly. I'm not interested anymore in all that's going on in the world. Comedians don't make me laugh and long stories drive me wild. Is it me or old age? Or is the planet really turning irrelevant? TV news is degenerate. Everyone everywhere is glib. My enthusiasms are exhausted (Heller, 1994, 23).

To dismiss the interrogatives here, to assume that the problem is indeed with the typically jaundiced perspective of the older person is to not only submit to ageism but to miss a genuinely useful cultural critique.

This critique, an extension of the satirical insights expressed through Yossarian in *Catch-22* and not a retreat from them, finds parallels in scholarly cultural critical writings of the late twentieth century as well as in other recent fiction: in Milan Kundera's writings from France in the 1990s, for instance. In the novel *Immorta-*

lity, one of Kundera's characters remarks, "They all just want to amuse themselves!" (Kundera, 1991, 372). In the novella *Identity* another is seen tragically to lose herself in a mindless immersion in a culture of entertainment: "Whether it's good luck or bad to be born onto this earth, the best way to spend a life here is to let yourself be carried along, as I am at this moment, by a cheerful, noisy crowd moving forward" (Kundera, 1998, 123).

These are literary visions of contemporary consumer culture and the postmodern atmosphere of play it generates. They suggest that the obsession with amusement, with being enthused, is not only a type of conformism, but an exclusion of large parts of emotional experience, a regression towards infantilism. At a social and political level it reveals something more frightening -- the absence of dissent. This is observed by the cultural theorist Theodor Adorno, who refers to the personal and political significance of "pseudo-activity." People "prefer to be distracted by spurious and illusory activities, by institutionalized vicarious satisfactions, than to face up to the awareness of how little access they have to the possibility of change today" (Bernstein (Ed.), 1991, 295).

The culture of amusement, of amused compliance, is a thematic reference point throughout *Closing Time*, rendered concrete in images of an amusement park and that definitive symbol of an urban life of consumption, the shopping mall. And it is in this context that we should read the enveloping chapters of the novel dealing with Sammy Singer's rejection of the cult of glib enthusiasm. The boldly declarative sentence "Sam Singer had no illusions" which introduces the novel's final scene, strongly reaffirms a deliberate non-participation in the hyperreal. The simple diminutive "Sam" in preference to the "Sammy" used throughout the novel, confirms a willful acceptance of maturity and age in a society of infinitely protracted adolescence, obsession with youth, absorption in timelessness.

That the closing lines of the novel have the character withdrawing into the tragic realm of

traditional aesthetic consolation is not something that we should ignore or regard as simply reactionary. What it reveals is the apparent dearth of alternatives to the cheerful optimism of the dominant culture. In the contemporary world Heller presents, there is only cheerful optimism or melancholy fatalism, and the latter of these, indulged by Singer as the world of the novel moves inexorably towards nuclear apocalypse, has become marginal. Heller's use of the anachronistic imagery of Cold War nuclear Armageddon after the fall of the Berlin Wall is an attempt to illustrate the disempowerment of the masses, the absence of resistance to an irrational momentum. This is typified in a dialogue between the aircrew of a nuclear bomber as it proceeds towards its target at the end of the novel, crossing the path of Singer's passenger aircraft:

"Then we have to go on. It's another mission for us".

"Where to?"

"I've forgotten. But inertia will guide us. Our inertial guidance system will always take us" (Heller, 1994, 461).

This typically dense passage, when read through the metaphorical resonance of satire rather than as straight mimesis, foregrounds four perceived characteristics of contemporary culture: a reduction to dogmatic reasoning (This is our job); an absence of meaningful ends, or in the language of philosophy, a teleological breakdown that forces the eschatological to re-emerge ("Where to?"); a failure of memory, of historical perspective, that reduces being to the atemporality of the moment ("I've forgotten"); and blind faith in technological momentum, the attribution of transcendental significance and a guiding logic to machines ("Our inertial guidance system will always take us").

It is in this context that Singer's melancholy assumes a more positive function. Even the character's nostalgic thoughts of childhood, by reaffirming memory and the continuity of history, might be seen to constitute protests against the

represented, whether accurately or not, a seemingly sane alternative to the mutually reinforcing rhetorics of both sides in the Cold War.

Because the character's centrality is only revealed at the climax of the story, we tend to overlook as readers an earlier scene which prefigures this ending and furnishes its underlying causal logic. Yossarian, who shares a tent with the diminutive Orr, is watching his colleague renovate, with seemingly limitless patience, a gas stove that will keep the tent warm during winter. The scene functions dramatically through a radical difference in the way the two characters relate to this task:

... working with slow, tireless, interminable precision, his rustic ungainly face bent very close to the floor, picking painstakingly at the minute mechanism in his fingers with such limitless, plodding concentration that he seemed scarcely to be thinking of it at all (Heller, 1961, 330).

... never quickening his movements or slowing them down, never tiring, never pausing in his relentless, methodical, monotonous procedure unless it was to leer at Yossarian with maniacal mischief. Yossarian tried not to watch him. He counted the parts and thought he would go clear out of his mind. He turned away, shutting his eyes, but that was even worse, for now he only had the sounds, the tiny maddening, indefatigable, distinct clicks and rustles of hands and weightless parts. Orr was breathing rhythmically... (Heller, 1961, 333).

A crescendo of dramatic tension is generated from the juxtaposition here of two vastly different modes of temporal experience, a difference which eventually defines both characters. When Yossarian complains, "I just haven't got the patience right now to watch you working over things that are so goddam unimportant," Orr observes that "Just because they're small doesn't mean they're unimportant", a narrative reference to the diminutive Orr himself, perhaps, and a

foreshadowing of his eventual importance to the story (Heller, 1961, 330).

Yossarian never has adequate patience because anxious, frantic temporality is an unavoidable consequence of the generalized desire/frustration which saturates his environment. In interview, Heller referred to the way in which cultural hyperactivity, a generalized atmosphere of busy-ness, prevents us from recognizing social injustices and human suffering. He remarked, "Somehow they get lost in the swirl of things of much less importance" (Heller, 1962, 27). This perception of an indifferent, impersonal "swirl of things" can be seen to inform the temporal disjunctions, and the acceleration of negative effects upon the primary and numerous secondary characters, which characterize the structure of *Catch-22*. It is as a counterpoint to that irrationalistic crescendo that Orr's intricately, painstakingly planned escape to Sweden is revealed at the end of the novel: the affirmation of at least the hope of a more rational temporality.

There is yet another important way in which *Catch-22* resists being co-opted by the purely absurdist vision that was so common around the time of its writing: its attribution, directly or indirectly, of causes to events. Kennard's assertion that the novel "reflects a view of the world which is basically that of Jean Paul Sartre and the early Albert Camus" (Kennard, 1970, 75) is difficult to sustain, given the more genuinely social thrust of Heller's work. The protagonist, Yossarian, is rarely viewed in isolation and rarely views the world as a unique individual construct the way the early existentialism of *Nausea* and *The Outsider* did. Thus Seltzer argues against a tendency in criticism to submerge the novel's satirical thrusts under unbridled philosophical speculation and unfathomable ontological dilemmas. "What has yet to be revealed," he argues, "is how the novel's absurdities ... operate almost always to expose the alarming inhumanities which pollute our political, social, and economic system" (Seltzer, 1984, 75). Not surprisingly, capitalism, as it is embodied in the character of Milo Minderbinder, the novel's irrepressible pro-

fiteer, is singled out as the dominant satirical subject: "This satire can best be seen as a blistering attack on our capitalistic system, a system that has perverted universally accepted ethical norms by unwittingly encouraging the unscrupulous pursuit of wealth and power" (Seltzer, 1984, 75). Seltzer's questionable assumption of a universal ethics aside, a clear case can be made that capitalism is indeed a central concern of the novel's satire, a case strengthened by the prominence of Milo and his networks of power in the later *Closing Time*.

In fact, it is not necessary for us to pursue an either/or argument, to attribute the tragicomic incongruities and paradoxes of the novel to either existential absurdity, the madness of war or the forces of expansionary economics. Each of these may be discerned in and through the text. However, economics provides the strongest connection between *Catch-22* and its sequel and the most effective conceptual framework through which to examine the historical transition between the two. Firstly, it should be understood that even though *Catch-22* is set during the war, it was written some time after, when the United States was undergoing a major economic transition from war and pre-war production-centered imperatives: "That society was losing contact with a residual set of production-oriented values as it committed itself wholeheartedly to mass consumerism and the resultant ideological conflict lead to anxiety and disorientation among individuals living through that social change" (Spindler, 1983, 212). It is difficult not to see the absurd atmosphere of *Catch-22*, written through much of the 1950s, as in part a reflection of this economic change and what amounted to a rapid acceleration of consumption and economic activity in general. This seems particularly true given the conspicuous and ubiquitous role in the narrative of the capitalist, Milo Minderbinder, and the knowledge that Heller served as an advertising copywriter during this time (Barnard, 1973, 296).

Significantly, Milo at one point conducts business with the German enemy, leading to the

unretaliated bombing of his own airfield. The novel here suggests the subjugation of political and military discourses to the imperatives of the expanding free market. It could even be seen to foreshadow the triumph of the global marketplace over the political geography of the Cold War. Recalling the Communist Manifesto, Jean-Francois Lyotard would in the 1970s make the following observations concerning the deterritorializing effects of capitalist dynamism: "... all is swept away... capitalism deculturalizes peoples, dehistoricizes their inscriptions you can produce and consume everything, exchange, work or inscribe anything anyway (sic) you want if it comes through, if it flows The only untouchable axiom bears on the condition of metamorphosis and transfer: exchange value" (Lyotard, 1977, 20). The exchange of goods, then, becomes the dominating imperative. This force, though it would increase in strength and accelerate over the ensuing decades, is already evident, and satirized, in *Catch-22*, especially in the inexhaustible, multinational commercial activities of Milo's M & M Enterprises, ostensibly the squadron's privatized catering company.

But the men back at the squadron never saw any of the bananas, for it was a seller's market for bananas in Istanbul and a buyer's market in Beirut for the caraway seeds Milo rushed with to Bengasi after selling the bananas, and when they raced back into Pianosa breathlessly six days later at the conclusion of Orr's rest leave, it was with a load of best white eggs from Sicily that Milo said were from Egypt and sold to his mess halls for only *four* cents apiece so that all the commanding officers in his syndicate would implore him to speed right back to Cairo for more bunches of green red bananas to sell in Turkey for the caraway seeds in demand in Bengasi (Heller, 1961, 255).

Heller employs one long, fast-paced sentence to evoke breathlessness and a disorientating urgency. It is an attempt to replicate not merely the cross-cultural freedoms of the emerging glo-

bal market, but the speed with which transactions take place. In a sense it is that speed -- Yossarian and Orr are wanting to sleep but are harassed into work by Milo -- that renders the activity invulnerable. At a first reading, the sentence appears to relate a nonsensical, possibly circular, concatenation of transactions. Importantly, though, the nausea we might feel is not the effect of cosmic absurdity, but rather of the speed of commerce: the dizzying effect of commercial hyperactivity. Moreover, this speed serves a strategic function, since it allows Milo to obfuscate and to endlessly defer rational criticism and resistance. The passage is an efficient critique of what would be referred to three decades later as "fast capitalism," an ideological oppression not through traditional static, monolithic structures of power, but by a bewildering speed that leaves no time for dissent (Agger, 1989, 58).

It is this temporal domination that Orr, whose rest leave is utterly ruined by Milo's demands, resists in his infinite patience and attention to detail. And it is this mercantile oppression which he plots silently against and perhaps finally escapes when he reaches the "advanced" social democracy of Sweden. That at least is the invigorating hope allowed the protagonist Yossarian and the reader of *Catch-22* in the early 1960s, before the United States became embroiled in Vietnam, before the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers, and before the conspicuous failures of leftist politics. By the end of the millennium, it was no more than a dream, and the consequent disillusionment, both personal and social, is given literary expression in Heller's *Closing Time*. Perhaps the most disturbing line in the sequel is one that could easily be glossed over if one were not reading the text in relation to its predecessor. This is the short passage that relates to Orr, the character who earlier marked the possibility of rational restraint and resistance: "I went down to Kentucky and saw him there," said Yossarian. "He was a handyman in a supermarket, and we didn't have much to say to each other anymore" (Heller, 1994, 461). The revelation of Orr's existence this time is deeply ironic

and full of pathos. The character's situation as a minor employee of a supermarket, overt symbol of contemporary consumer culture, represents an utter vanquishing of resistance, the appropriation of practical thinking skills to the cause of consumption, and a tragic loss or suppression of idealism. It is difficult not to read that typically efficient phrase -- "He was a handyman in a supermarket" -- along with Yossarian's unresponsiveness, as an indictment of the three decades of history that separates the two novels.

Another way in which a deterioration of hope is manifested in *Closing Time* -- again requiring reference to *Catch-22* -- is the substitution of "Sweden" with the mock-Scandinavian ice-cream brand name "*Häagen-Dazs*". As the novel moves towards its apocalyptic ending, characters use the term "*Häagen-Dazs*" repeatedly, absurdly transforming it into a form of multi-functional and ultimately meaningless catchphrase, and contrasting it with another ice-cream brand name, "Ben & Jerry's". The implication is unmistakable: the signifier "Sweden" of the earlier novel, though idealized, referred to a real geographical place and political-economic alterity; at the end of the century, only a brand name is left, an empty marketing deception intended to mislead consumers into believing a product has an exotic foreign source. There is no genuine referent and no otherness, only competition between producers in a world that has become ideologically homogeneous. A character's reference to a part of the post-apocalyptic world as "Ben & Jerry territory" (Heller, 1994, 458), establishes that political geography is redundant, that borders have been subsumed by corporate territoriality.

In a sense, this is not indulgence of satirical license, because in 1994, as *Closing Time* was published, Sweden was acceding to pressure to give up its political-economic independence by joining the European Community, the "economic fortress" being constructed primarily as a defense against United States dominance. Indeed, in 2000 Sweden has decided to join the common European currency. This does not mean that the nation has become a brand name exactly, but it does

symbolize a loss of sovereignty, the subservience of the state to economic imperatives and a serious erosion of Swede's uniqueness, its otherness, along with the independence of each of the other member nations. The novel's references to the "sick man of Europe," an executive of the European Economic Community, allude to this economic plight. With "his absolute belief that nothing he, his colleagues, or any organization of ex-perts could do would have any enduring corrective effect on the economic destiny of his continent or the Western world" (Heller, 1994, 447), this overtly metaphorical character confirms Heller's continued concern with broad political issues, as well as the cause for pessimism.

By setting the novel's ending in various locations, including on two separate aircraft in transcontinental flight, *Closing Time* portrays a global culture (and deculturalization) that no longer makes sense in terms of space, but only as a seemingly autonomous movement. But only seemingly, because the ideological imperatives informing that momentum are quite plainly located in the novel in the manipulations of business and government by M & M Enterprises, the transnational conglomerate. It is the absence of even the conceptual apparatus for resisting this momentum that makes the ending of the novel so dark, if broadly accurate.

An important historical difference between the context of production of *Catch-22* and of *Closing Time* in this respect is the repeated failures in the intervening years of Marxist praxis -- in Prague (1968) and Berlin (1989) -- and of Marxist theory:

Marx simply did not foresee that it would be possible for capital, in the face of the imminent threat to its existence, to transpoliticize itself, as it were: to launch itself into an orbit beyond the relations of production and political contradictions, to make itself autonomous in a free-floating, ecstatic and haphazard form, and thus to totalize the world in its own image (Baudrillard, 1993, 10).

In effect, residing amid the slower rhythm of mid-nineteenth century Europe, Marx had not accounted for the assault upon both space and time which would later allow capitalist ideology, in its dynamism, to neutralise sites of resistance.

This is not to suggest that *Closing Time* is the work of a disappointed Marxist. Only that the perceived failure of Marxism has eroded faith in the possibility of effective criticism and alternative routes. The collapse of the Soviet Bloc, for example, has certainly affected Western European politics, including the left, and including the theoretical underpinnings of Scandinavian social democracy. Without the sense of genuine alterity, what has emerged is a kind of desperate, but largely unsupported faith that the hegemony will outrun itself. Such a belief is evident in Lyotard's invocation of "a machine whose velocity can be displaced towards positive infinity, bringing it to a halt" (1977, 26). It is typified in what Beddoes (1997, 35) calls the "techno-utopian futures of the information age", the belief that new technologies (say, the internet) will themselves miraculously subvert the ideological forces that produce them, creating freedom and alterity (see also Roszak, 1986). This is precisely the kind of willed self-deception that *Closing Time* satirizes through the bomber crew's absurdly optimistic assertion that the aircraft's inertial guidance system will confront the future on their behalf.

Another dubious alternative is that suggested by mythologies of desire, which began to assume prominence in 1960s counterculture and gained momentum in the academies, particularly in France, with the spectacular failure of Marxism in 1968. Kristeva's *Desire in Language* (1981), Derrida's radical philosophical reduction of texts to the operation of desire, or *différance* (1978), and Deleuze and Guattari's radical re-interpretation of being in terms of a "desiring machine" (1983) are the most famous gestures towards an ontological dynamism which seeks to secure freedom through ecstatic myths of liberated desire/energy. Yet they may ultimately succeed only in undermining the sites from which

resistance might be born. Again, we can see this satirized in *Closing Time*, specifically in Yossarian's leaving the fallout shelter in order to pursue his young, pregnant girlfriend, denying the reality of impending doom and "stimulated joyously by a resurrection of optimism" even though "this was nonsense, he knew" (Heller, 1994, 461).

The assertion that "unlike Yossarian" Sam Singer "had no illusions" can be read as the novel's questioning of ill-founded optimism, and as a reaffirmation of Enlightenment ideals of truth, especially since it is Singer's consciousness that closes the story. On the other hand, such a reading is itself probably overly optimistic, ignoring Singer's own willed self-deceptions: his immersion in nostalgia and aesthetic consolation. These may be understandable forms of private refusal, but they do not offer realistic worldly solutions. Furthermore, there is the irony that the supposedly "dis-illusioned" protagonist is enthusiastically looking forward to his holiday with friends from his youth, unaware that the contrails above belong to aircraft about to launch nuclear Armageddon. So there is no shining light in *Closing Time*, little suggestion of a positive resolution or any future at all. While *Catch-22* had likewise presented a dark vision of contemporary American culture, the difference in the later novel is that there is no Orr and no Sweden, no effective alternative, not even a Sweden of the mind. Yes, this may in part be the literary vision of an elderly man himself faced with mortality. But there is clearly something more disturbing here: the suggestion that in the three or more decades separating the two novels -- and for all the joyous cries of freedom in those intervening years -- the world had become a smaller place, that a kind of global claustrophobia had set in.

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