



Closing Time

By Joseph Heller

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In a novel as darkly comic and audaciously ambitious as was *Catch-22*, Joseph Heller has dared to write the sequel to his American classic, using many of *Catch-22*'s characters, now older if not wiser, to deftly satirize the realities and the myths of America in the half century since they fought World War II. In 1961, Joseph Heller's remarkable first novel made its way immediately into the American psyche and came to symbolize the absurdity of war and of life. *Catch-22* was recognized overnight as a classic and has sold nearly ten million copies in the United States alone. It remains perhaps the funniest - and the most serious - novel ever written about war, "an apocalyptic masterpiece," in the words of one reviewer. Now, thirty-three years later, Joseph Heller has written the sequel. You don't have to have read *Catch-22* (But then, who on earth hasn't?) to enjoy *Closing Time*, which is a fully independent companion work, a comic masterpiece in its own right, in which Heller spears the inflated balloons of our national consciousness - the absurdity of our politics, the decline of society and our great cities, the greed and hypocrisy of our business and culture - with the same ferocious humor that he used against the conventional view of warfare. His characters are those of *Catch-22*, coming to the end of their lives and the century, as is the entire generation that fought in World War II: Yossarian, and Milo Minderbinder, the chaplain, and such newcomers as little Sammy Singer and giant Lew, all linked, this time in uneasy peace and old age, fighting, not the Germans this time, but The End. *Closing Time* is outrageously funny and totally serious, and as brilliant and successful as *Catch-22* itself, a fun-house mirror that captures, at once grotesquely and accurately, the truth about ourselves.

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Closing Time By Joseph Heller Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Worked on for many years and long anticipated (and perhaps dreaded) by admirers of the incomparable original, Heller's "sequel" shares with his great WWII saga a surreal sense of the absurd and of the fatuity of most human institutions. But it is hard to avoid a sense of keen disappointment, nonetheless. The satirizing of American contemporary life has been done so frequently-and often successfully-since the 1961 *Catch-22*, which helped make so much of that satirizing possible, that Heller is in effect competing with himself, and failing. Here again are John Yossarian, Milo Minderbinder, Sammy Singer, Chaplain Albert Tappman, and the giant Lew. Newcomers include Washington finagler G. Noodles Cook and the mysterious and ubiquitous know-it-all Jerry Gaffney. The wartime buddies are old men now, worried about their health, their sex lives and their children, but they find 1990s civilian life as corruptly absurd as the old Air Force days. There are flashbacks to the war, some of which recall the power of Heller's original inspiration; there are nostalgic passages about Coney Island, long Jewish dialogues that could have been penned by a whacked-out Neil Simon, bravura passages (notably, a magnificent wedding reception held at New York's Port Authority Bus Terminal) and hare-brained Pentagon meetings to discuss the new Shhhh super-quiet warplane. There are patches of vaudeville, dreamscapes, far too much sophomoric doodling, and longueurs when Heller seems simply to be filling pages. In the end, despite flashes of the old wit and fire, this is a tired, dispirited and dispiriting novel. 200,000 first printing; first serial to *Playboy*.

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From Library Journal

Just like the original *Catch-22*, this sequel opens with Yossarian in a hospital bed, flirting with the nurses. Now in his seventies, Yossarian is depressed by his perfect health: things can only get worse. He lives alone in a Manhattan apartment not far from most of his old war buddies, including Milo Minderbinder, a defense contractor straight out of Dr. Strangelove. Yossarian and company mourn the decline of New York City and American culture in general and look back longingly to the golden age of prewar Coney Island. The symbolic center of the book is a surreal wedding extravaganza held at the Port Authority Bus Terminal and hosted by Minderbinder, who recruits highly paid actors to portray derelicts and prostitutes. This work attempts the same sort of giddy black humor that made its predecessor a classic, but the underlying mood is somber, almost elegiac. A profoundly disturbing novel, if not quite up to the standard of *Catch-22*; recommended for all fiction collections.

Edward B. St. John, Loyola Law Sch. Lib., Los Angeles

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From [Booklist](#)

A sequel to *Catch-22*? Not possible, not desirable, and bound to fail. That said, *Closing Time* remains a brilliant book--broadly, about the end of culture, the end of the U.S. as a wonderful place for ordinary working stiffs, and death itself. Like the original novel, it opens with Yossarian in a hospital; there's nothing wrong with him except that he's old and no longer enjoys life. Someone is tapping his phone, and somehow that's connected with Milo Minderbinder and Chaplain Tappman. Milo, a defense contractor, is trying to sell the Pentagon a silent bomber that will do anything they want it to--of course it will, since the bomber will never be made or even drawn. Meanwhile, the chaplain becomes a military secret because he has begun to pass heavy water, and if the process can be patented it's worth millions. The president, very nice and incredibly stupid, also appears; he loves video games and inadvertently plunges the world into nuclear war. This plot line is loosely tied to a vast underground industrial complex that resulted when George C. Tilyou, a "Coney Island entrepreneur," became the first person in history to take his wealth with him, somehow

sinking it, piece by piece, beneath the city. Maybe his empire has become part of secret, military goings-on, and maybe it's hell, and maybe they are the same. Can you oppose the very end of the earth? Heller's characters, at the end themselves, sort of do, but one really should read this novel as an expression toward the end of a grand career, a summing up. Heller is savage as ever, and--particularly in his brutal portrait of the decline of New York City--mournful. *John Mort*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jay Burke:

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Lily Terry:

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