



Catch 22

The novel is a satirical novel written in 1953 but set during World War 2 from 1942-44. Most of novel takes place on the island of Pianosa, off the coast of Italy in the Mediterranean Sea. It is a non-chronological text told through the eyes of different characters, but primarily Yossarian. It presents ideas about the absurdity of war and military life, while the soldiers attempt to maintain their sanity whilst fulfilling their responsibilities.

Historical context

The idea for Catch 22 was based on Joseph Heller's personal experiences during WW2. Heller completed 60 bombing missions in a six month period, but was unable to write about it until 1953. The novel embodied the feelings that many young people had towards the Vietnam war and as a result developed a cult-like following that resulted in 8 million copies being sold.

Island of Pianosa

Pianosa is in the Tuscan archipelago off the coast of Italy. It is approximately 10.25 km with a perimeter of 26km. In the early 1900's it was used as a prison and became 'home' to 800 prisoners. In 1943 it was invaded and occupied by German Forces before being bombed by the allies a year later. After the war it resumed as a prison.

Captain John Yossarian

He is a 28 year old American in the US Air Force. His main concern is that people are trying to kill him, either by attacking his plane or forcing him to go on another mission. His main objective is to survive. He tries to escape the reality of war by getting drunk, overeating and having sex. At the end of the novel he accepts a deal which allows him to go home, but leaves him feeling like a traitor, both to himself and his fellow soldiers.

Key Term	Definition
Paradox	Something that has contradictory qualities. For example, Yossarian comes to fear his commanding officers more than the Germans as they keep raising the number of missions he needs to complete before returning home.
Satire	The use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticise people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.
Archipelago	A chain or cluster of islands spread out through a large body of water. Most archipelagos were formed by volcanoes erupting under the ocean floor.
Antihero	Classic heroes are usually endowed with exceptional physical strength, ability, or natural beauty. War brings out the best in them; they love battle and relish in victory. Yossarian considers concepts like "courage" and "heroism" to be foolhardy at best and deadly in the end. Initially, the only cause he is devoted to is his own survival.
Motif	A recurring theme in the novel. The theme of 'Catch 22' recurs throughout the text and manifests at the end when Yossarian must accept a deal which goes against his principles or be court-martialled.