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Absurdity and Crisis of Identity in Heller's *Catch-22*

Absurdita a krize identity v Hellerově *Hlavě XXII*

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This BA thesis focuses on *Catch-22*, a novel written by the American author Joseph Heller in 1961. The book is set at the end of the World War II on Pianosa, a small island near Italy. It is about a group of American soldiers led by Colonel Cathcart, who never allows any of his men to return home after having flown certain number of missions, something that soldiers in other squadrons are normally free to do. Instead, Cathcart always increases the minimal number of flights, so all the people in his squadron have to keep fighting, and none of them can escape the war.

Colonel Cathcart and other commanding officers create an absurd world of the novel which the enlisted soldiers have to face in order to stay alive. The central aim of the thesis is to analyse the absurdity of the world in which the novel takes place and consequently to scrutinize the crisis of identity which the soldiers experience in their effort to fight and survive, even though the circumstances are unfavourable for them, because both the enemy and their superiors are against them. Having done so, a hypothesis will be eventually stated to what extent Heller was inspired by existentialism and the philosophy of the absurd.

The thesis is divided into two fundamental parts: the theoretical and the practical part. The main purpose of the theoretical part is to offer a definition of two crucial terms, absurdity and identity. Since these terms are not easy to define and more interpretations are possible, three approaches are used in the thesis. The first approach is philosophical, which defines absurdity on the basis of Albert Camus' book *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Identity is defined according to Martin Heidegger's treatise *Being and Time*. The second approach introduces the aforementioned terms in the context of psychology; absurdity is described according to Joel Feinberg's essay "The Absurd Self-Fulfillment" and the explanation of identity is based mainly on works of developmental psychology, represented by Erik Erikson. The final section

is concerned with the approach of literary theoreticians to identity and absurdity in literature. *The Theatre of the Absurd* by Martin Esslin will be used in order to demonstrate the presence of absurdity in literary works, and Jonathan Culler's book *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* will serve as the source for the introduction of possible definitions of identity of a literary character.

In the practical part the identity and the development of John Yossarian, Chaplain Tappman and Doc Daneeka will be scrutinized in order to show how each of them manages to face the absurd world of the novel. These characters are chosen, because they all experience crisis of identity, even though each of them in a different manner. The detailed analysis of these protagonists and their development allows stating a hypothesis, whether Heller was directly influenced by the philosophy of existence and absurdity, or whether there is no connection to be recognized between *Catch-22* and the tradition of existentialism and Camus' ideas about the absurd.

KEY WORDS: Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*, identity, absurdity, existentialism, American literature, twentieth-century American novel

ABSTRAKT

Tématem této bakalářské práce je otázka absurdity a identity v *Hlavě XXII*, románu amerického autora Josepha Hellera z roku 1961. Děj této knihy se odehrává ke konci druhé světové války na malém italském ostrově Pianosa a vypráví příběh skupiny amerických vojáků vedené plukovníkem Cathcartem, který nikdy nedovolí žádnému z nich vrátit se domů poté, co dokončili určitý počet misí, což je v jiných oddílech vojákům dovoleno. Místo toho Cathcart vždy navýší požadovaný počet misí, takže všichni jeho muži musí pokračovat v bojích a nikdo se nedokáže dostat z války domů.

Plukovník Cathcart a ostatní velící důstojníci vytvářejí absurdní svět, kterému ostatní obyčejní vojáci musí čelit, aby zůstali naživu. Hlavním cílem této práce je analyzovat absurditu světa, ve kterém se román odehrává, a v závislosti na tom popsat krizi identity, kterou zažívají vojáci ve své snaze zůstat naživu i přesto, že jak jejich nepřátelé, tak jejich nadřízení jsou proti nim. Na základě této analýzy bude v závěru vyřčena hypotéza, do jaké míry se Heller inspiroval existencialismem a filosofií absurdity.

Bakalářská práce je rozdělena na dvě základní části, na část teoretickou a část praktickou. Hlavním cílem teoretické části je definovat absurditu a identitu, dva základní pojmy práce. Protože vysvětlit tyto pojmy není snadné, práce využívá tří odlišných přístupů. První přístup je filosofický a definuje absurditu na základě knihy Alberta Camuse *Mýtus o Sisyfovi*. Identita je definována podle spisu *Bytí a čas* Martina Heideggera. Druhý přístup vysvětluje tyto dva již zmíněné pojmy v kontextu psychologie. Absurdita je definována podle eseje „Absurdní sebenaplnění“¹ Joela Feinberga a identita je popsána především pomocí vývojové psychologie, již reprezentuje dílo Erika Eriksona. Poslední přístup se zabývá tím, jak identitu a absurditu v literatuře definují literární teoretikové. Za účelem ukázat, jak vypadá absurdita

¹ Vlastní překlad

v literárních dílech, využívá práce knihu *Absurdní divadlo*² Martina Esslina. V knize *Literární teorie: Velice krátký úvod*³ ukazuje Jonathan Culler, jaké se nabízejí možnosti definovat identitu literární postavy.

Praktická část práce se soustředí na vývoj identity Johna Yossariana, kaplana Tappmana a doktora Daneeky především proto, abychom ukázali, jak každá ze zmíněných postav dokáže čelit absurdnímu světu, ve kterém se román odehrává. Byli vybráni právě tito tři hrdinové, protože všichni zažívají krizi identity, ale přesto každý z nich zcela jiným způsobem. Díky detailní analýze těchto tří postav a jejich vývoji je možné vyřknout hypotézu, zda byl Joseph Heller přímo ovlivněn filosofií existence a absurdity, nebo zda neexistuje žádné spojení mezi *Hlavou XXII* a tradicí filosofie existence a Camusových představ o absurditě.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA: Joseph Heller, *Hlava XXII*, identita, absurdita, existencialismus, americká literatura, americký román dvacátého století

² Vlastní překlad

³ Vlastní překlad

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1. Introduction

Joseph Heller was an American writer and teacher born in 1923 in New York. During the World War II he served as a bombardier in Italy, which strongly influenced his choice of setting for his best-known novel *Catch-22*. Heller also published several other novels like *Something Happened*, *Good as Gold* or *Closing Time*. None of his books was, however, as successful as his literary debut, *Catch-22*. He died in 1999 of heart attack at the age of 76.

As Joseph J. Waldmeir argued in his essay, *Catch-22*, published in 1961, is one of the earliest American absurd novels.⁴ The structure of *Catch-22* resembles in some ways literary works which are nowadays considered as representative plays of the tradition called the Theatre of the Absurd; the main feature is the repetitiveness of action and phrases, which can be clearly recognized in *Catch-22*. Not only the structure, but also the plot of the novel is absurd. The world of the novel is an artificial inhuman world created by the bureaucracy of the army, represented by Colonel Cathcart, for whom medals are more important than lives of his soldiers. The central goal of this BA thesis is to analyse the absurdity of the novel and consequently to scrutinize the identity of three protagonists - John Yossarian, Doc Daneeka and Chaplain Tappman. The way in which the theme of identity is approached in the novel will be compared with the way the philosophy of existence deals with the question of being of individuals, so that it can be consequently considered, whether Heller's process of writing *Catch-22* was directly influenced by existentialism or not, which is the aim of the thesis to decide.

In order to show whether Heller was influenced by philosophy of existence, it is firstly necessary to define the terms *identity* and *absurdity*. It will be done from three different perspectives in the first part of the thesis; from philosophical, psychological and literary

⁴ See: Joseph J. Waldmeir, "Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Autumn, 1964).

theoretical. In the second part of the thesis three aforementioned characters will be analysed in detail in order to demonstrate how their identity is affected by the absurd situation of the novel, and how their identity develops in order to discover in what extent Heller focused on identity of his protagonists when he was writing *Catch-22*.

2. Theoretical Part

2.1. Philosophical Section

2.1.1. Understanding Identity and Absurdity as Philosophical Concepts

The main focus of this thesis is firstly the crisis of identity of the characters in Heller's novel *Catch-22* and, secondly, the absurdity, which is used by Heller to demonstrate how the identity of the protagonists is damaged by the circumstances they have to face, i.e. the meaningless world of the novel created by the superior officers in the army. The concepts of identity and absurdity are connected in the novel and it is not possible to speak about the crisis of identity without discussing the absurdity of the novel. Therefore it is important to define the identity and absurdity from the philosophical point of view before the novel itself can be analysed. The concept of identity will be based on the ideas of Martin Heidegger, a German phenomenologist, namely on his treatise *Being and Time*. The philosophical definition of absurdity will be based on "The Myth of Sisyphus" by Albert Camus, a French philosopher.

The main focus of Heidegger's book *Being and Time* is the concept of Da-sein. The whole treatise is centred on Da-sein and the influence of such phenomena as language or fear on it. For the purpose of the thesis it is neither crucial nor possible to discuss the whole problem of Da-sein and its origin. The very first definition of Da-sein as being which is always ours, so its essence is in its existence, will be used⁵, which facilitates the understanding of what identity and existence mean.

Albert Camus introduced his ideas on absurdity in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus". If "The Myth of Sisyphus" and *Being and Time* are about to be combined, it is necessary to recognize what features Heidegger and Camus share. The most important common element for the purpose of the thesis is the stress on the inseparable connection between the existence of "I"

⁵ See: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany. State University of New York Press, 1996) 39.

and the world. We are always conscious of the world surrounding us and we are always conscious of us being an inherent part of the world, in which we care for our being.

Camus, however, provides different conclusions than Heidegger does. The goal of the thesis is not to focus on the solution that Heidegger offered. Heidegger's philosophy is only supposed to introduce the terms *existence* and the term *identity* which it implies. On the other hand when regarding Camus' philosophy, it is more important to look at the conclusion of his essay; mainly because in the conclusion Camus introduces the possible approach of individuals towards the absurdity, which is the second crucial term discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis.

Camus asks an important question: Is there any solution to our existence or is suicide necessary? And he answers that suicide is not a solution. The solution is only admitting the state of the world and admitting its absurdity. Sisyphus is, according to Camus, an absurd hero, who is in a way happy with his stone.

The novel asks the same question and answers it in the same way as Camus does. The characters all face the absurd world created by their superiors. The repetition of action, which is typical of the novel, resembles very much the situation of Sisyphus and the stone. Each of the characters responds in a different way to Camus' theory of the absurd and the need for accepting it. All three characters discussed in the thesis (John Yossarian, Chaplain Tappman and Doc Daneeka) share, however, the common assumption that suicide (or death) is not a correct solution, even though they see how the world of the novel is absurd.

In the following part of the thesis Heidegger's theory of existence and Camus' theory of absurdity will be more closely explained, so that they can be applied to the concrete situations of the novel.

2.1.2. Being of an Individual: Concepts of Da-Sein and Being-in-the-world

In order to explain the concept of identity the interpretation of the term *existence* as it was introduced by Martin Heidegger, a famous phenomenologist, will be used. Heidegger claimed that contemporary philosophy is not able to ask this crucial question because philosophers find it already explained or not that important. Heidegger even opens his most important treatise *Being and Time* with a chapter called “The Necessity, Structure, and Priority of the question of Being”⁶, in which he argues that the question about being has “ceased to be heard as a thematic question of actual investigation”⁷.

The question of being can be understood as a question of identity, because in Heideggerian terms existence is supposed to be understood in the same manner as identity, more specifically as the way people are (exist).

In *Being and Time* Heidegger introduced an important concept of ontological difference which explains the difference between being and a being (beings). Lee Braver explains this term in his book *Heidegger: Thinking of Being* as follows:

Beings are just things and people around us – this book, that cup, Marlon Brando, toenails, etc. Being [...] is the way they are, the different kinds of behavior we can expect from them. These ‘levels’ are not separate or separable, but are fundamentally different kinds of phenomena, which [Heidegger] calls ‘ontic’ and ‘ontological,’ respectively.⁸

This quote implies what Heidegger means by existence⁹ which he understands as being of people, or in other words, the way people are. Since for Heidegger being is much more important than beings (things), it can be argued that the way people are is the central point of his whole treatise. Thus we can say that the term *identity* which will be discussed in this thesis is exactly what Heidegger writes about.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) 1.

⁷ Heidegger 1.

⁸ Lee Braver, *Heidegger: Thinking of Being* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2014) 12.

⁹ Heidegger does not understand the term *existence* in its most traditional meaning. He understands it in a narrower context as being of people. The term *existence* is thus in his interpretation not related with spatial occurrence of things or people. Moreover, objects like stones, books etc. cannot exist.

For the purpose of this thesis the most important Heideggerian term is Da-sein, a concept invented by Heidegger and referring to being of people (their existence). Braver argues later in his book: “Heidegger uses the term ‘existence’ exclusively for our way of being so, technically, only Da-sein exists, other things have their own ways of being.”¹⁰ This quote leads us to understanding of terms *existence* and Da-sein as connected because only Da-sein has faculty to exist and on the other hand when something exists, it is always Da-sein, meaning a person. Heidegger himself defines the being of Da-sein in his book as well:

The being whose analysis our task is, is always we ourselves. The being of this being is always *mine*. In the being of this being it is related to its being. It is being about which this being is concerned. From this characteristic of Da-sein two things follow:

1. The “essence” of this being lies in its to be. The whatness (*essentia*) of this being must be understood in terms of its being (*existentia*) insofar as one can speak of it at all. [...] ¹¹

This quotation shows one particularly important feature of Heidegger’s notion of Da-sein. We cannot speak about an essence of a being (or of being) which would precede the being and determine its purpose. As Heidegger emphasized, we have only our being which we can use as a source for answering the question about being and its purpose (essence). This question cannot be answered from the outside, by objective observations of different beings.

Wolfgang Janke comments on this abandonment of the ontological necessity of an essence preceding the existence, introduced by the philosophers of existence, including Heidegger, as follows:

Existentia byla tak pochopitelná jedině na základě analogie (dialektiky) k *essentia*. Existence je ve skutečnosti (*actualitas*) tím, čím je ‘bytnost’ již podle své umožňující možnosti (*possibilitas*): jsoucno každé bytnosti od boha až po zrnko písku. Takovému esencialismu

¹⁰ Braver 14.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) 39.

odporuje existencialismus v Sartrově stylu. [...] U člověka se přinejmenším esence určuje z rozvrhu existence.¹²

The essence of being of Da-sein is, according to Heidegger, the fact itself that it is (exists) and that we always care for our being because it is always ours. This theory implies that our identity cannot be based on some predestined purpose; its purpose is only to be. The limitations of what one can say about the essence of being can be demonstrated by quoting another passage from *Being and Time*: “The ‘essence’ of Da-sein lies in its existence. The characteristics to be found in this being are thus not objectively present ‘attributes’ of an objectively present being which has such and such an ‘outward appearance’, but rather possible ways for it to be, and only this.”¹³

Since the central point of the being of a human (existence) is being itself, it is only natural that this being is always ours. What Heidegger means by this is that it is logical that we naturally care for our being, it is an ability we have because we are human beings. It is impossible for us that we should be indifferent towards our being. Even the choice of being indifferent would be a choice of how we want to be. Braver understands the intimacy of being in this way: “A human life doesn’t just happen; it is owned. This is *my* life; I have an intimate connection with it in a way that I don’t with yours and that a rock doesn’t with its.”¹⁴ The central point of our existence and thus also of our personal identity is that we always care for it, and the being we speak of, is always ours.¹⁵ An important fact implied by this theory is that we can never think of our being as a mere passive presence in the world. We are always aware of our being

¹² *Existencia* was comprehensible only thanks to the analogy to *essentia*. Existence is in fact (*actualitas*) what ‘a being’ is already according to its enabling possibility (*possibilitas*): any being from God to a grain of sand. Such essentialism is opposed by existentialism of Sartre’s style. [...] At least by human beings their essence depends on their existence. (Own translation)

Wolfgang Janke, *Filosofie Existence*, trans. Jaromír Loužil (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1995) 179.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) 40.

¹⁴ Lee Braver, *Heidegger: Thinking of Being* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2014) 23.

¹⁵ See: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) 41-2.

because our existence depends on our awareness of it and on our relationship we have with our being.

In order to apply Heidegger's theory of Da-sein to Heller's *Catch-22* one more central feature of his theory remains to be discussed. This is Being-in-the-world as fundamental and inseparable constitution of Da-sein, exercised mainly via our 'concern'. According to Heidegger our Being-in-the-world must not be understood as an occurrence of one object in another one. Being-in-the-world does not simply mean that Da-sein is surrounded by the world. The preposition "in" implies this spatial relationship but Heidegger uses it in a completely new context. What Heidegger means, is more temporal than spatial.

Braver describes this phenomenon of Being-in-the-world like this:

We are in the world not by being spatially located within this level of reality or the atmosphere of the earth, but by taking care of things. I must do this because my being is at issue and so I have to perform activities in order to be a certain kind of person, and because this life is mine, it is my concern to deal with.¹⁶

This understanding of being-in implies that it is concerned rather with our choices we make as people existing in the world than just some passive occurrence. Our Being-in-the-world is an activity. It is still vital to specify what Heidegger means by "world", as it is not understood as certain space in which we are present. As was already mentioned, it is natural that Da-sein always cares for its being. Jiří Pechar explains in his book called *Problémy fenomenologie* Heidegger's idea of being-in-the-world as follows:

Toto 'bytí ve světě' se projevuje různými způsoby toho, co Heidegger souhrnně označuje jako obstarávání; jako jejich příklady uvádí: mít s něčím co dělat, něco zhotovovat, něco zařizovat a o něco pečovat, něco používat, něco podnikat, prosazovat, zjišťovat, na něco se ptát, o něčem uvažovat [...]¹⁷.

¹⁶ Lee Braver, *Heidegger: Thinking of Being* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2014) 28.

¹⁷ This 'Being-in-the-world' shows itself in different manifestations of what Heidegger calls 'concern'; as their examples he mentions: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing,

Braver explains Heidegger's idea of the world in a very similar context as Pechar did: "We are in-the-world through concern, through carrying out tasks and pursuing goals, so the world must be the context for these concerns and tasks, that wherein we carry out our daily business."¹⁸ It is always necessary to stress that the context of our concern is usually composed of the most trivial things, relationships etc. because we exist for most of our life in our everydayness, which, therefore, is also the most important source for understanding of how we are. There is no sense in focusing more on our mode of being under extreme circumstances, as it is certainly true that the everydayness is the most prevalent mode of our being.

The attempt to introduce the most relevant terms from Heidegger's *Being and Time* was simplified in this chapter because in order to be able to use Heidegger's term for the interpretation of Heller's novel, the basic understanding of concepts as Da-sein, *existence*, Being-in-the-world and *concern* should be sufficient. When reading the novel the characters have to be perceived as existing Da-seins and therefore as beings concerned with their being. The main reason for a crisis of their existence is the fact that they have to face situations of the war and the idiotic superiors who are in charge. Furthermore they have to accept the fact that their Being-in-the-world is not designated by themselves but they are forced to encounter situations which they do not want to experience. This sense of limitations cast by their superiors leads to the crisis of their identity, hand in hand with the fact that the mode of their being is not their everydayness but rather an extreme situation of war.

interrogating, considering [...] (Own translation)

Jiří Pechar, *Problémy fenomenologie: Od Husserla k Derridovi* (Praha: Filosofía, 2007) 133-4.

¹⁸ Lee Braver, *Heidegger: Thinking of Being* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2014) 31.

2.1.3. Facing Absurdity of the World: Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Having presented the concept of identity as it was described by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, it is also vital to describe the term absurdity and how it is supposed to be treated.

Albert Camus, a French philosopher and artist born in Algeria, was concerned with the origin of absurdity and also with the way people should treat the absurdity of the world. In this chapter his ideas on absurdity will be scrutinized, based on his two important essays, "The Myth of Sisyphus" and "An Absurd Reasoning".

Albert Camus sees the act of suicide as the central theme of his ideas about life and its absurdity. He asks whether the feeling of the absurdity of the world that surrounds us leads inevitably to committing suicide. He even believes that the act of suicide is one of possible approaches to the aversion people have towards the idea of keeping themselves alive. The inevitability of suicide is, according to Camus, the only question which matters in philosophy. It is important not to forget that Camus is a philosopher of subjectivity; he is interested in subjective attitudes of people towards their lives. This implies that his main interest is the subjective effort to find one's life meaningful. He explains it in his essay called "An Absurd Reasoning":

I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see other paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions.¹⁹

The situation which Camus presents is quite clear. A human being inevitably realizes during his or her life that the life he or she leads is absurd. Camus then argues that when a person commits suicide, it is an act of admitting that the life is not worth living it anymore.²⁰ The whole life is absurd, Camus claims, which is a statement we do not have to doubt, at least according to Camus, who seems to present it as an axiom. The main reasons why the world is

¹⁹ Albert Camus, "An Absurd Reasoning," *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, 2005) 2.

²⁰ See Camus 4.

absurd is that it never matches with the ideas and expectations people have. The confrontation of our subjectivity with the world creates absurdity:

This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together. It binds them one to other as only hatred can weld two creatures together. This is all I can discern clearly in this measureless universe where my adventure takes place.²¹

This quotation shows very clearly that our knowledge of absurdity and the world can be nothing but subjective. Camus refuses any objective observations. The absurdity of the world is rooted in the interaction of the world with a human being, which strongly resembles the concept of Da-sein and its Being-in-the-world; that is why Camus and Heidegger were chosen as the ideal representatives of the concepts of absurdity and identity for this thesis.

Camus adds that the antagonism which is found between the ideas of some individuals in their hearts²² and the world that never responds to the wishes of these individuals, gradually leads to suicide which is described as follows: “Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of [...] the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation and the uselessness of suffering.”²³

Camus tries to conclude his essay by speculating on whether suicide can be avoided, or not. Steven Luper describes in his book Camus’ thoughts on the inevitability of suicide and the origin of absurdity in our lives in the following manner:

Camus finds himself struck with the absurdity of the world. He longs for a world that assigns itself and him in interpretation, a meaning and a value, but finds that the world he lives in does not do so. [...] In the end Camus suggests that suicide is not the proper response to absurdity. Instead, we should live on with scorn for the world, knowing fully that the world is absurd, and while living, we should remain unresigned to the

²¹ Camus 20.

²² See Camus 3.

²³ Camus 4.

absurdity of the world. We should live as an act of rebellion. 'That revolt,' [Camus] says, 'gives life its value.'²⁴

The idea that the absurdity of the world has to be acknowledged and accepted instead of resigning to it and committing suicide, led Camus to write "The Myth of Sisyphus". For Camus, who further develops the traditional Greek myth of Sisyphus' sufferings, Sisyphus is an example of an absurd hero. Camus describes him at the beginning of his essay as a person who "[...] is the absurd hero. He *is*, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the Gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing."²⁵

Camus argues that the most important part of the myth is the moment when Sisyphus has to start descending down from the mountain in order to begin his effort again. It is the moment, when Sisyphus understands the absurdity of the world completely. Camus calls this moment a moment of "consciousness"²⁶. Sisyphus is able to understand the endless torture of his fate, but he does not resign; he becomes superior to his fate because he accepts it and revolts against it by not giving his task up. According to Camus, "he is stronger than the rock."²⁷ In his interpretation of this passage of the essay, Wolfgang Janke claims that what Sisyphus sees when he is descending from the mountain is the moment of understanding the "absurd truth," which is the centre of Sisyphus' revolt against the Gods and his destiny.²⁸

Albert Camus concludes his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" with a well-known sentence: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy."²⁹ This last line of the essay sums up Camus' ideas on absurdity. It is something to which our life inevitably leads. Sooner or later we, humans, are

²⁴ Steven Luper, *Existing: An Introduction to Existential Thought*. (Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000) 389.

²⁵ Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, 2005) 116.

²⁶ Camus 117

²⁷ Camus 117.

²⁸ See: Wolfgang Janke, *Filosofie Existence*, trans. Jaromír Loužil (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 1995) 91.

²⁹ Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, 2005) 119.

forced to acknowledge that the lives we lead in the world are absurd and that the world itself is absurd. Even though people know that their lives are absurd, suicide is not a solution for Camus. The only meaningful way is to admit that the world is absurd, and to revolt against it. Sisyphus is the greatest example of an absurd hero who revolted against his fate, even though Gods themselves defined his destiny. The only possible way to lead a purposeful life is, according to Camus, to despise the absurdity of the world.

Absurdity is a term which is supposed to be understood as an inevitable realization that people are never going to accept the world as a place which could fully correspond with their expectations. There is always tension between people's anticipations of the world and the consequent disappointing reality, which is the source for the feeling of absurdity. Absurdity can be found neither in the world nor in the humans. It is only the relationship between people and the world that creates the feeling of absurdity in people. In exactly the same context the absurdity in *Catch-22* should also be understood. There is also this tension between the protagonists of the novel and their surroundings, which is the crucial source of absurdity in the novel.

2.2. Psychological Section

2.2.1. Absurdity and Identity of Individuals

Having presented the concepts of *identity* and *absurdity* as they were understood by two important philosophers, it is important to show how these terms are interpreted by psychologists. In psychology, the questions of identity and absurdity become questions of lives of individuals. The absurdity of the world presented by Camus is supposed to be understood as a universal issue affecting all people, simply because they are people. In this section absurdity will be shown not in this context, but as a quality of situations people experience in their everyday lives. The explanation of the term *absurdity* will be based on an essay by Joel Feinberg called “The Absurd Self-Fulfillment”. Feinberg claims that absurdity is recognized by cognitive abilities of an individual in situations he or she witnesses. The presence of absurdity in a situation is judged according to the degree of irrationality perceived by the individual.³⁰

Psychologists interested in the origin of identity attempt to explain what identity means and where it comes from. Mark L. Leary and June Price Tangney attempted to describe the origin of identity in *Handbook of Self and Identity*³¹. In this section their ideas will be paraphrased in order to present a comprehensive definition of identity in psychology. According to them identity is constructed by many different factors which create a self-concept. The self-concept defines what a person is like, answering the question: “Who am I?” In this context identity has to be understood as a subjective matter, i.e. knowledge of one’s self. Ideas of Erik Erikson, a famous representative of developmental psychology, on the origin of one’s identity and the importance of its development will be discussed consequently as well.

³⁰ See: Joel Feinberg, “Absurd Self-Fulfillment,” *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

³¹ See: Mark L. Leary, June Price Tangney, *Handbook of Self and Identity* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2002).

2.2.2. Identity in Psychology

The question of one's identity can be paraphrased as a question of how individuals understand themselves. In 20th century identity was one of central interests of psychology. Many psychologists focused their research on the definition and the origin of one's identity and its development throughout the life of an individual.

Identity defines who we are as individuals. The awareness of one's identity enables people to understand themselves in the context of their lives. Identity of an individual is the ground for choices he or she makes. If a person judges that stealing something is wrong, this decision is based on his or her awareness of their identity. It is necessary to understand that identity is composed of a mixture of several factors which define people's identity and consequently all decisions they make as well.

Identity of an individual is constructed of several important parts, and it is always necessary to imagine one's identity as something dynamic. The identity of oneself develops in the course of one's life; mainly because people are permanently gaining new experience, which can shape the further development of their identity. This can also be seen in the definition offered by Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore and George Smith:

Identities are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group membership that define who one is. Identities can be focused on the past – what used to be true of one, the present – what is true of one now, or the future – the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the person one fears one may become. Identities are orienting, they provide a meaning-making lens and focus one's attention on some but not other features of the immediate context. Together, identities make up one's self-concept - variously described as what comes to mind when one thinks of oneself.³²

³²Note that the authors differentiate between “identities”, which should be understood as the factors that help create the self-concept. The self-concept is to be understood as a synonymic term to “identity”, meaning the knowledge of ourselves.

Mark L. Leary, June Price Tangney, *Handbook of Self and Identity* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2002) 69.

Since the identity of an individual works very often in the immediate context, it cannot be fixed. Each situation which we judge on the grounds of our identity is in its nature unique, so the identity is constantly being developed by all the experiences people have.³³

Identity is usually not seen as something innate. Individuals are supposed to create their self-concept in the course of their adolescence. People can gain their identity only when they care for their being. Since the identity can be focused on past, present or future, as was mentioned above, it becomes the source for our motivation to lead a good and satisfying life. This idea resembles Heidegger's concept of Being-in-the-world, because, according to Heidegger, it is impossible to live a satisfying life without any concern for our own being.³⁴

According to Erik Erikson, a German philosopher of Danish origin, one's identity starts to develop in adolescence. It is the period of human life when people start thinking about who they are and in what way they want to be perceived by others. In adolescence the question "who am I" is supposed to appear for the first time³⁵. This is a period of uncertainty when an individual experiences a crisis of identity which is an inevitable stage of development of his or her self. It is also possible that the identity of an individual is not constructed correctly. This state of existence is referred to as "identity diffusion".³⁶ Erikson further claims that in adolescence one has to learn what makes him or her a unique individual, but also what connects him or her with the social groups that surround them. If people identify themselves mainly by the way they differ from the others, they can become alienated. On the other hand when they do not manage to see the differences between the group and themselves, their autonomy may not develop properly.

³³ See: Leary and Tangney70.

³⁴ This topic was discussed in more detail in chapter 2.1.2.

³⁵ Alan Slater, Gavin Bremner, *An Introduction to Developmental Psychology*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 409.

³⁶ See: Slater and Bremner 410.

Identity is a concept that defines one's self. It is constructed of attitudes, experience and memories thanks to which people can gain the feeling of their identity or self-concept. It enables people to understand who they are and to make decisions, based on their knowledge of their self-concept, i.e. their identity. Identity is not an inherent part of our being and it has to be constructed. According to Erikson, identity is shaped mainly in adolescence, when people experience the crisis of their identity, which leads to their deeper interest in defining who they are and who they want to be. If they do not manage to establish their identity properly, they can become alienated from the society or they can lose their autonomy completely.

2.2.3. Absurdity as a Feature of an Individual Life in the Work of Joel Feinberg

The notion of absurdity of the world and the revolt of an individual who accepts the absurdity and defies it, were already discussed, having been based on the works of Albert Camus. Joel Feinberg, an American philosopher, focuses on absurdity from a different point of view. He understands absurdity as an inherent feature of human life; not in the sense of the absurd world, but rather in the sense of different absurd situations people encounter in their everyday lives. These situations are recognized thanks to different markers.

Feinberg opens his essay called “The Absurd Self-Fulfillment” with some commentary on the reanalysis of the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus, proposed by Richard Taylor. Taylor argues that “the gods, while condemning Sisyphus to [his] fate, [...] at the same time, as an afterthought, waxed perversely merciful by implanting in him a strange and irrational impulse, namely a compulsive impulse to roll the stones.”³⁷ This alternation of the myth implies that what Sisyphus does, is not an example of an absurd effort, but rather that Sisyphus does only what he is inclined to do by his nature. He does not have to analyse the absurdity of his doings, although, for anybody else, this situation would still seem absurd, supposing that nobody can understand why anybody should be inclined to push heavy stones up a hill.³⁸

Taylor does not use the word “absurd” in his writing. He prefers words as “meaningless”, “pointless” or “endless” in order to describe the fate of Sisyphus. Feinberg sees these words used by Taylor not as synonyms of the word “absurd”. He understands them only as words indicating certain features, on whose basis a situation can be judged as absurd. Feinberg claims that “[i]n either case, pointlessness and generic absurdity are not identical notions.”³⁹

The reason why Taylor uses such words is that he wants to distinguish the absurdity of

³⁷ Richard Taylor, *Good and Evil* (London: Macmillan, 1970) 259.

³⁸ See: Joel Feinberg, “Absurd Self-Fulfillment,” *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 297.

³⁹ Feinberg 298.

“pointlessness” from the absurdity of “loneliness” and “painfulness”⁴⁰. Sisyphus’ works are not absurd because he is lonely or it is painful; they are absurd because they are pointless, according to Taylor.

The aforementioned argument of Taylor’s is very important for our understanding of the difference between Camus’ concept of the absurd world and the concept of absurdity in individual human lives that Feinberg focuses on in the first part of his essay. In his concept of absurdity, there is not only one absurd world and people revolting against it. It is possible to distinguish several types of absurdity which are all inherent to our lives, “pointlessness” and “loneliness” being examples of different grounds on which a situation in our life can be seen as absurd. The focus moves from the absurdity of the world to the absurdity of individual situations in human lives.

Feinberg claims that the philosophers interested in absurdity can be divided into two groups, optimists and pessimists. The pessimists claim that the lives of people are ultimately absurd and there is no way to change it. On the other hand the optimists claim that when people manage to reach some degree of self-fulfillment in their lives, the lives are not ultimately absurd anymore. Feinberg writes: “Taylor suggests, quite plausibly, that life might be *both* absurd and at its best, sometimes, self-fulfilling.”⁴¹ The problem of the possibility of self-fulfillment is not the focus of this thesis; it is more important to identify specific examples of absurdity in individual humans’ lives.

The absurdity in lives has to be differentiated from the absurdity of life. The absurdity of life can be seen in Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*⁴². When absurdity of life is considered, it is not possible to divide this phenomenon into different subcategories. The absurdity in human lives

⁴⁰ See: Feinberg 298.

⁴¹ Feinberg 299.

⁴² See: Albert Camus, “An Absurd Reasoning,” *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien (London: Penguin Books, 2005) 20.

can be categorized, because different individual instances of absurdity in human lives may be observed. Because of this difference, absurdity in the context of situations of individuals' experience becomes a psychological topic. Absurdity in our lives comes from situations people encounter on everyday basis. Feinberg quotes Thomas Nagel who gave several instances of an absurd event in our lives: "Someone gives a complicated speech in support of a motion that has already been passed; a notorious criminal is made a president of a major philanthropic foundation [etc.]"⁴³

It is our task to judge which situation is absurd, and that we do, according to Feinberg, by identifying the degree of irrationality of the situation. Feinberg explains this practice as following:

[W]e also judge beliefs, hypotheses, convictions, desires, purposes, and even people to be absurd, and usually we can explain what this means in a fairly straightforward way by substituting the word 'irrational' and locating the absurdity in question on a map of the various species of irrationality.⁴⁴

This is the first feature, by which all the situations of human lives that are absurd, can be recognized as being so. The second feature which Feinberg mentions is that "[w]here there is absurdity there are always two things clashing or in disharmony, distinguishable entities that conflict with one another."⁴⁵ Feinberg refers to this element as "divorce" or "disproportion". This is vital because it shows how the concept of absurdity is created in our perception of the world. Absurdity is no longer an objective state of the world we revolt against, but rather our subjective construct which stems from our judging certain situations. The most subjective example concerning ourselves, the humans, is explained by Feinberg later in his essay. This example of "divorce" is based on our perception of the world and our position in it. Feinberg describes it as follows:

⁴³ Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd," *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 68, No. 20, 1971: 718.

⁴⁴ Joel Feinberg, "Absurd Self-Fulfillment," *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 299.

⁴⁵ Feinberg 300.

There is an unavoidable discrepancy between the natural subjective way of viewing ourselves – as precious in our own eyes, full of genuinely important projects, whole universes in ourselves, persons who ‘live only once’ and have to make the most of the time allotted us – and various hypothetical judgments made from a more universal perspective: we are mere specks, or drops in the ocean, or one of the teeming hive, absolutely inessential to the grand scheme of things [...]⁴⁶

We as humans all know that these two different views on our existence clash in each individual, which leads to labelling some events in our lives as absurd.

To summarize Feinberg’s ideas presented in “The Absurd Self-Fulfillment”, there are certain events in human lives which can be judged as absurd. Our decision that some situations in our lives are absurd depends on elements, such as “pointlessness”, “irrationality”, “divorce” etc. It is crucial to distinguish between absurdity of the world in Camus’ works and these examples of absurdity in individual human lives which are based on our perception of the world and our ability to judge a situation as being absurd. This implies that absurdity in this context appears when people actively create it. Absurdity is no more an objective phenomenon people have to face, but rather a conscious product of our cognitive abilities.

⁴⁶ Feinberg 301.

2.3. Literary Theoretical Section

2.3.1. Understanding Absurdity and Identity in Literary Theory

Since *Catch-22* is a work of literature, it is important to scrutinize how the terms *absurdity* and *identity* are treated in literary theory. In 20th century a completely new type of drama appeared for the first time, i.e. the Theatre of the Absurd, and in 1962 a theoretical book on the Theatre of the Absurd was published by Martin Esslin: *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Esslin's objective was to define some shared features of all the plays that theoreticians nowadays tend to classify as the representative plays of the Theatre of the Absurd, so he wanted to define what absurdity in literature looks like. In the first part of this section the introduction to Esslin's book will be scrutinized in order to analyse some vital features of the absurd drama which have certainly influenced Joseph Heller as well.

The second part of this section will focus on the concept of identity in literary theory.

Jonathan Culler in his book *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* foreshadows that there are several possibilities how the readers can think of the origin of literary characters.⁴⁷

This book was chosen for this thesis because several different approaches to identity in literature are compared there in a very comprehensive manner.

⁴⁷ See: Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 108.

2.3.2. Identity and Subject in Literary Theory

What is subjectivity and identity of a literary character is one of fundamental problems of literary theory. The question of subjectivity deals with the way protagonists of a literary work should be treated by the readers as subjects. Jonathan Culler argues in his book *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* that there are two basic questions which have to be asked before reading a work of fiction. He divides them in a following manner:

[F]irst, is the self something given or something made and, second, should it be conceived in individual or in social terms? These two oppositions generate four basic strands of modern thought. The first, opting for the given and the individual, treats the self, the 'I', as something inner and unique, something that is prior to the acts it performs, an inner core which is variously expressed (or not expressed) in word and deed. The second, combining the given and the social, emphasizes that the self is determined by its origins and social attributes: you are male or female, white or black, British or American, and so on, and these are primary facts, givens of the subject or the self. The third, combining the individual and the made, emphasizes the changing nature of a self, which becomes what it is through its particular acts. Finally, the combination of the social and the made stresses that I become what I am through the various subject positions I occupy, as a boss rather than a worker, rich rather than poor [...]⁴⁸

This division makes ground for different possible attitudes the reader may have towards the protagonists. Culler argues that most traditionally the subjectivity of a character is something given to him or her, on whose basis the motivation for deeds the subject does in the course of the story can be judged. This theory implies that a subject is always at least partly created by circumstances of his or her existence in the work of literature, not only by his or her free will. In *Catch-22* the circumstances that strongly influence the subjects are primarily the dangers associated with war.

There is a vital question, according to Culler, whether "characters make their fate or suffer it."⁴⁹ According to some theories identity of the characters is either something given by their

⁴⁸ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 108.

⁴⁹ Culler 110.

origin or something constructed in the course of their lives.⁵⁰ Culler tries to demonstrate this ambiguity on examples from general reading experience; sometimes the characters discover their identity by “acting in such a way that they become what then turns out, in some sense, to have been their ‘nature’.”⁵¹

The question of identity of a protagonist in a novel has always to be observed in the context of a group whose member the individual inevitably is. The identity of a subject is always constructed so that it responds in some way to the expectations of the group⁵². In *Catch-22* there is a strong presence of the group represented by the army. Culler explains that the fact that a subject is a member of a group tends to limit the range of possibilities the subjects have when identifying themselves.⁵³

It should not be forgotten that reading literary texts also influences the identity of the reader. Culler argues that “Poems and novels address us in ways that demand identification, and identification works to create identity: we become who we are by identifying with figures we read about.”⁵⁴ It implies that not only the identity of the character is being influenced in the novel, but the reader questions his or her own identity by judging the protagonists.

⁵⁰ See: Culler 110.

⁵¹ In this context the character discovers through his or her actions what he or she has always been like. This state of existence has only to be rediscovered. In other instances the characters gain completely new identity and they are changed in the course of the plot.

See: Culler 110.

⁵² See: Culler 115.

⁵³ See: Culler 112.

⁵⁴ Culler 113.

2.3.3. Absurdity in Literature: The Theatre of the Absurd

The most notable attempt to apply Camus' theory of absurdity to literature was made by writers, who are considered the inventors of the Theatre of the Absurd. The Theatre of the Absurd is a completely new type of drama, whose famous representatives are such authors as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco or Harold Pinter. In 1962 Martin Esslin published a book called *The Theatre of the Absurd*, in which he tried to define this literary movement and its most notable plays. The definition of the Theatre of the Absurd in this chapter will be based on the introduction to Esslin's book.

Even though *Catch-22* is a novel, the Theatre of the Absurd was undoubtedly an important source of inspiration for Heller. In an interview, Heller claimed that he even adopted *Catch-22* for stage once.⁵⁵ In a different interview Heller admitted that he considers Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka the most important writers, who strongly influenced his writing of *Catch-22*.⁵⁶ Therefore it is possible to argue that there are some shared features between the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd and Heller's novel.

Since *The Theatre of the Absurd* was published in 1962, it is a contemporary book to *Catch-22* which was published only a year earlier. This fact makes Esslin's views on the Theatre of the Absurd relevant to the circumstances in which *Catch-22* was being written.

In Esslin's attempt to define the Theatre of the Absurd, he claims that the Theatre of the Absurd is not "of concern only to a narrow circle of intellectuals. It may provide a new language, new ideas, new approaches, and a new, vitalized philosophy to transform the modes of thought and feeling of the public at large in a not too distant future."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Adam J. Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller* (Oxford, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1993) 130.

⁵⁶ Sorkin 91.

⁵⁷ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962) 7.

This quote demonstrates Esslin's belief that this new literary movement developed ideas which were commonly shared by the public in 1960s. Esslin comments on these shared attitudes mirrored in the Theatre of the Absurd: "The Theatre of the Absurd [...] can be seen as the reflection of what seems to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time."⁵⁸

The shared attitudes Esslin mentions are close to Camus' ideas on absurdity of the world. The Theatre of the Absurd tends to develop further the questions formulated by Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, mainly the central question of the necessity of suicide. The absurd drama takes Camus' definition of absurdity, originating in the harshness of the reality which disappoints people's expectations for it.

Esslin presents the traditional definition of absurdity by Camus, but he also adds a definition made by Ionesco: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. [...] Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."⁵⁹ The Theatre of the Absurd attempts a reflection on this mode of existence using a completely new and unprecedented dramatic form, although it is very important to note that the playwrights who represent the early stages of the Theatre of the Absurd had never formed any "self-proclaimed or self-conscious school or movement."⁶⁰

The Theatre of the Absurd followed the tradition of Camus and Sartre. There is, however, a vital difference between the style of Camus and the absurd playwrights. According to Esslin, Camus used a logical and rational approach to describe the situation of irrational and absurd human conditions, whereas the means of expression of the Theatre of the Absurd are described as follows:

⁵⁸ Esslin 16.

⁵⁹ Eugene Ionesco, "Dans les Armes de la Ville", *Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault*, Paris. No. 20, October 1957.

⁶⁰ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962) 15.

[T]he Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought. While Sartre or Camus express the new content in the old convention, the Theatre of the Absurd goes a step further in trying to achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed.⁶¹

The Theatre of the Absurd is an example of an attempt to convey the absurdity of the world via a new form of art. Esslin tries to identify some crucial features that are shared by all the representatives of the Theatre of the Absurd. He sees the connection between absurd and irrational content and the irrational and illogical form as the fundamental linking element of all the plays.

The presence of absurdity in both the content and the form differentiates the Theatre of the Absurd from preceding artistic works dealing with absurdity, mainly the literary works of Sartre or Camus. They were mainly philosophers, so they tried to describe the irrationality in a rational manner even in their plays or short stories. The representatives of the Theatre of the Absurd abandoned this method and created a completely new form which became one of the best-known literary movements of 20th century. The new irrational form of the Theatre of the Absurd tends to challenge the traditional views on language, whose role is for example questioned in many plays by Ionesco. The words of the characters are usually not in concord with their actions, so language loses its original purpose and becomes only a generator of empty phrases. Another typical element of the Theatre of the Absurd, which can be also noted in *Catch-22*, is the illogical repetitiveness of phrases and action.⁶²

Since Joseph Heller admitted that artists concerned with the theme of absurdity influenced his process of writing *Catch-22*, it is possible to trace features of the Theatre of the Absurd in his

⁶¹ Esslin 17.

⁶² Examples of that repetitiveness can be found in Václav Havel's play *Zahradní slavnost*, which is a famous representation of Czech absurd drama. [See: Václav Havel, *Zahradní slavnost* (Praha: Artur, 2015)].

best-known novel as well, especially the tendency to repeat certain situations in the novel, e.g. the missions the soldiers are sent on repeatedly.

3. Practical Part

3.1. Identity and Absurdity in *Catch-22*: Introduction to the Practical Part

Catch-22 is not a novel whose main focus is the historical background of World War II and its significance, but as Thomas Blues argues, the war serves for Heller mainly as a metaphor for the contemporary state of world which lost its morality. Blues claims:

[Heller] has diagnosed a society's illness; principally by transforming a historical event – World War II – into a metaphor of a world that has lost touch with its morality, hence with its humanity. With a brutal and unrelenting honesty *Catch-22* [...] describes the dehumanized creature man has become.⁶³

This quote implies that Heller's novel focuses mainly on society and its members; in other words, it is a book about individuals and the way they exist. The strong interest in humans and their being can also be seen in the way Heller structured the novel. Most of the chapters of *Catch-22* bear a name of one of the characters, which implies that it is not a book with only one central hero, but that it focuses on more people and their conditions.

In order to be able to focus on the characters of the novel, the world of the novel has to be defined first. The world of *Catch-22* is absurd. The main protagonists are supposed to exist in a world which is artificially created by the superior officers who lack any regard for other people's lives. It is very important to note that the world of *Catch-22* is not the only possible existing world. Since all the soldiers share certain experience of life before the war, it is obvious that the absurd world of the novel exists only in the contrast to the world which is not constructed by the powerful officers.

G. W. Davis describes in his essay the process in which the institutions of American army manage to “define a closed world whose ‘illusory depth’ becomes its inhabitants’ only

⁶³ Thomas Blues, “The Moral Structure of *Catch-22*,” *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (spring 1971) 64.

‘reality.’”⁶⁴ Davis shows that there is absurd logic created by the superiors which leads to a completely different understanding of even such terms as *dead*, *absence* or *presence*. The example of this difference in the meaning of the word *dead* in the illusionary world of *Catch-22* and the world, from which the reader is supposed to access the novel, can be the alleged death of Doc Daneeka, about whom everyone knows he is alive, but since he is officially declared dead, everyone acts as if he really was killed during his flight, simply because the absurd rules of the world imply he must be dead.

The aim of this part of the thesis is to demonstrate how three important characters in *Catch-22*, namely John Yossarian, Doc Daneeka and chaplain Tappman manage to exist in the absurd and cruel world of the war. The identity of each of the aforementioned characters and its development in the course of the novel will be discussed in the relationship to the absurdity of the world in which their identity is constructed. These three protagonists were chosen for the analysis because they do not represent the people who create the laws of the absurd world, but characters who have to adapt to the absurdity of the world. Joseph J. Waldmeir even claims that Yossarian, Daneeka and Tappman represent “normal” protagonists, even though he adds that only Yossarian manages not to get “caught up to some degree in the prevailing absurdity.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Gary W. Davis, “*Catch-22* and the Language of Discontinuity,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn, 1978) 70.

⁶⁵ Joseph J. Waldmeir, “Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey,” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Autumn, 1964) 194.

3.2. Yossarian

Yossarian is undoubtedly the most important and prominent character in the whole novel. Most of the action in *Catch-22* is recorded from Yossarian's point of view. The reason why Yossarian is a crucial character is not only the amount of space given to him, but more importantly the fact that he is the only character who clearly understands that the world of the novel is absurd and that it is only a construct of the superior officials. Yossarian also cares for his life much more than any other person in the squadron, which eventually leads to his desertion. In this chapter his rebellion against the absurdity of the world and his concern for his existence will be discussed.

The background of Yossarian is not clear and the readers do not know much about him. His surname sounds very exotic and the only thing the readers know about him is that he is Assyrian. There is also no physical description of Yossarian offered by Heller. Each reader is supposed to imagine Yossarian as he or she wishes. The absence of detailed description makes Yossarian a protagonist who is not to be perceived as a typical American citizen, but rather as an exotic stranger. It is almost at the very end of the novel when the readers are informed that his first name is John, which is, in contrast to "Yossarian", a traditional American name.⁶⁶ Walter James Miller and Bonnie E. Nelson argue that the details about Yossarian are missing so that the reader may imagine him as an everyman.⁶⁷ It also enables the readers to interpret Yossarian in any way they want to; he is not determined by his origin or social attributes, but exclusively by his actions in the course of the novel.⁶⁸

Yossarian's main goal is to stay alive. He is not a typical American patriot who wants to sacrifice his life in order to defeat Germany. His own survival is much more important and he

⁶⁶ See: Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 494.

⁶⁷ Walter James Miller and Bonnie E. Nelson, *Joseph Heller's Catch-22* (New York: Monarch Press, 1971) 85.

⁶⁸ See: Page 32-3.

is willing to do almost anything to stay alive. Heller describes Yossarian's attitudes towards the war as follows:

It was a vile and muddy war, and Yossarian could have lived without it – lived forever, perhaps. Only a fraction of his countrymen would give up their lives to win it, and it was not his ambition to be among them. To die or not to die, that was the question [...] History did not demand Yossarian's premature demise, justice could be satisfied without it, progress did not hinge upon it, victory did not depend on it.⁶⁹

Yossarian's identity in the context of Heideggerian terms is determined by the fact that he has to fight in a war, in which he does not want to fight, because he does not believe it to be necessary. Yossarian obviously experiences a crisis of his existence, because the essence of any *Da-sein's* being stems from its *Being-in-the-world*.⁷⁰ Since Yossarian finds the world corrupt and dangerous, he is forced to undergo a big change which leads to his decision to flee the army and escape to Sweden which he sees as a better world to live.

Yossarian is the only character who is able to understand the real nature of the world he has to exist in. He sees that the world of the novel is controlled by "the organized institution which in the name of reason, patriotism, and righteousness has seized control over man's life."⁷¹ Since he feels that the course of his life is defined by someone else than himself, he inevitably experiences the crisis of identity, because his being is not exclusively his anymore; his existence is usurped by the institution of the army.

Nurse Cramer confirms to Yossarian that he is not in control of his own life when she says to him: "It certainly is not your leg! [...] 'That leg belongs to the U.S. government. It's no different than a gear or a bedpan. The Army has invested a lot of money to make you an airplane pilot, and you've no right to disobey the doctor's orders.'"⁷² It implies that in the absurd world of the war Yossarian is transformed from a human being into a piece of

⁶⁹ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 77.

⁷⁰ See: Page 17.

⁷¹ Raymond M. Olderman, *Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 95.

⁷² Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 335-336.

machinery and thus he is deprived of his right to be a Da-sein (a human) and he is only a being. This reduction from a human into a thing must, according to Heidegger's philosophy, lead to a crisis of identity, because only Da-sein can exist, whereas other things do not care for their being.⁷³

Yossarian is one of the few characters who are capable of personal development in the novel. From the very beginning of the book he understands the nature of the world he is trapped in. This is why he is in the hospital when the book opens. The narrator comments on Yossarian in the first chapter: "[H]e had made up his mind to spend the rest of the war in the hospital."⁷⁴ This is only one of many different strategies Yossarian invents to be able to avoid the danger of the battle. The efficiency of Yossarian's attempts to stay in the safe zone is based on his understanding that the whole world depends on absurd and illogical bureaucracy created by his superiors. Raymond M. Olderman tries to explain how Yossarian perceives the structure of the world around him:

[It] is defined first by the illogical idiocies of the Military institution, which claims to exist in order to deal with the chaos of war, but seems totally incapable of recognizing what chaos is. The military commanders constantly lose sight of the simple fact that they are supposed to beat the enemy; instead they direct their inverted energies toward self-seeking and an assortment of myopic goals.⁷⁵

This definition accurately shows that Yossarian is able to recognize both types of absurdity which were discussed in chapters 2.1.3. and 2.2.3. Yossarian accepts the absurdity of the whole world as discussed by Camus and tries to defy it. Even more important for Yossarian is, however, his perception of absurdity in individual situations in human lives, when the absurdity ceases to be an inherent part of the whole world, but rather a product of our judgment.⁷⁶ Yossarian witnesses many instances which he finds absurd and thanks to his

⁷³ See: Page 15.

⁷⁴ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 8.

⁷⁵ Raymond M. Olderman, *Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 97.

⁷⁶ See: page 30.

understanding of absurd behaviour of his superiors, he manages to avoid the combat. This crucial ability to manipulate with the absurd minds of the superiors can be seen in chapter 12 of the novel, in which Yossarian moves a red line on the map, so everyone believes Bologna was captured and a dangerous mission is cancelled.⁷⁷

G.W. Davis analyses the same event in order to show the nature of the world Yossarian is facing. He claims that the world of the novel is a world created of the words of the superiors and the reality ceases to be transparently comprehensible. He argues:

The same logic lies behind Yossarian's attempt to capture the German artillery batteries at Bologna by simply going to the map and moving the red line that indicates the extent of the Allies' conquests. Once again symbolic forms and expressions have the privileged status usually accorded to "reality." In fact even the Air Corps is briefly convinced that Bologna has been captured.⁷⁸

Since Yossarian is able to understand the patterns by which his superiors govern the world, he is able to avoid many dangerous missions.

The absurdity of the world as a whole in the context of Camus' understanding of it is embodied in the document *Catch-22*. *Catch-22* cannot be deceived in the same manner as individual persons can be, and thus its existence leads to Yossarian's decision to desert the army. *Catch-22* is a document anybody can refer to, which, however, does not have any written form, as Yossarian eventually understands. The actual absence of any strict wording of *Catch-22* makes its effect even stronger, and there is no possible way for the soldiers to beat it, so *Catch-22* conducts their lives. A woman in Rome explains that because of *Catch-22* "[the superiors] have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing."⁷⁹ This is a very broad definition giving the Army power over all the soldiers' lives.

⁷⁷ See. Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 137.

⁷⁸ Gary W. Davis, "Catch-22 and the Language of Discontinuity," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn, 1978) 69.

⁷⁹ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 467.

When Yossarian refuses to fly any more missions after Nately's death and returns to Rome in order to save Nately's whore and her younger sister, his understanding of the whole system changes and his identity develops further. The progress of his identity is vital in order to understand the ending of *Catch-22*, because identity is always supposed to be apprehended as a dynamic development of one's personality, not a static set of values or attitudes.⁸⁰

In chapter 39 Yossarian wanders through Rome which "was in ruins"⁸¹. While walking down the streets of the city, Yossarian witnesses suffering of people living there, which Minna Doskow understands as an archetypal descent into the Underground, thanks to which Yossarian later reanalyses his situation and decides to desert.⁸² The most important change of Yossarian's personality is that he ceases to care exclusively for his own survival, but instead he wants to take care of Nately's whore and her sister and, furthermore, he reflects on the terrible impact of the war on Italian civilians. The manifestation of Yossarian's new conscience can be seen in his plead to Milo:

Yossarian hurried back to Milo and recanted. He said he was sorry and, knowing he was lying, promised to fly as many more missions as Colonel Cathcart wanted if Milo would only use all his influence in Rome to help him locate Nately's whore's kid sister.⁸³

During his wandering in "the Inferno of Rome" Yossarian understands that he is a part of the machinery which caused so much pain and trouble to innocent people in Rome and he starts to feel ashamed. He commences to understand that the evil does not come exclusively from the Germans, but that the Americans have the same dreadful effect. At one point Yossarian admits that he understands "how Christ must have felt as he walked through the world, like a psychiatrist through a ward full of nuts [...]"⁸⁴ A few pages later Yossarian feels shame again

⁸⁰ See: Page 24-5.

⁸¹ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 465.

⁸² Minna Doskow, "The Night Journey in *Catch-22*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Jan., 1967) 187.

⁸³ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 469.

⁸⁴ Heller 475.

because he could have helped an old woman who was chasing a younger one, who most probably had stolen something from her. Yossarian, however, does not help her.⁸⁵ According to Doskow, these are the passages in which Yossarian is transformed from a visitor of hell, who is only watching the people suffer, as he had done in the whole novel, blinded by his own selfish desire to survive, into a person who is able to identify himself with the victims of the war machinery. Doskow writes:

His failure to act identifies him more closely with the shade-like victims he has observed, and now he no longer observes the action from outside but from within it. This change in his role makes him flee not in dread this time but in shame since he recognizes his identity with those around him and shares their guilt.⁸⁶

When Yossarian is taken back to Pianosa for not being allowed to leave it, he understands that his only option is either to accept the offer to submit to the authority of Korn and Cathcart, or to become a deserter. G. W. Davis claims that Yossarian chooses only between two fictions, neither of which is better than the other, because both the ideas represent worlds where the reality is not clearly perceivable anymore.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, he forgets the moral dimension of Yossarian's decision, who thanks to his "moral awakening" can clearly judge what is right and what is wrong. Olderman, on the other hand, calls Yossarian's decision to leave the absurd and violent world of the army a "heroic departure."⁸⁸ The claim that Yossarian's identity was strongly changed and that he is able to understand the moral dilemma of his decision can be also supported by quoting his statement from the very last chapter of the novel: "I'm not running away from my responsibilities. I'm running to them."⁸⁹

John Yossarian is the central protagonist of *Catch-22*, who manages to see through the absurd rules the world of the novel is based on. He spends the majority of the book in his huge effort

⁸⁵ See: Heller 477.

⁸⁶ Minna Doskow, "The Night Journey in *Catch-22*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Jan. 1967) 190.

⁸⁷ See: Gary W. Davis, "*Catch-22* and the Language of Discontinuity," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn, 1978) 76.

⁸⁸ Raymond M. Olderman, *Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 97.

⁸⁹ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 516.

to do anything possible to stay alive and to become responsible for himself once again, instead of being the mere tool of the army. His identity is being developed in the course of the novel and at the end of it he becomes a responsible man ashamed of the impact of the American army on the free existence of other people. In order to protect the right of humans to exist as they wish, he decides to desert the army in a heroic act of departure.

3.3. Doc Daneeka

Doc Daneeka is the main physician in the squadron. The biggest power he possesses is that he can ground any soldier just by signing the necessary documents. He is a close friend of John Yossarian, whom he is continually refusing to ground for being mad⁹⁰. He is a very selfish man, whose primary concern is his well-being, which on one level resembles Yossarian's strong desire to stay alive, but in Daneeka's case it is more illogical, because he is not in danger of dying in the war; he is only angry that he earns less money in the war than in New York. On top of that, he unceasingly suffers from imagining that he would be sent from Europe to serve in the Pacific and also from strong hypochondria. He also experiences directly the absurdity of the world governed by *Catch-22* when even though everyone can see his physical presence, he is declared dead because of official documents not providing any other interpretation.

In contrast to Yossarian, the reader knows more about Doc Daneeka's background. It is explicitly stated that Daneeka comes from New York, where he had his own practice which had started earning him money before he was enlisted in the army. He also has a wife, Mrs. Daneeka, who is one of the characters in the novel; she appears after Daneeka's alleged death. The physical description of Doc Daneeka is present in the novel in contrast to Yossarian's, which is missing.⁹¹

Daneeka appears for the first time in the novel when Yossarian comes to him and asks him as a friend to be grounded by Daneeka, who says to Yossarian:

‘You think you've got troubles?’ Doc Daneeka rebuked [Yossarian] grievingly. ‘What about me? I lived on peanuts for eight years while I learned how to be a doctor. After the peanuts, I lived on chicken feed in my own office until I could build up a practice decent enough to even pay expenses. Then, just as the shop was finally starting to show a profit, they drafted me. I don't know what you're complaining about.’⁹²

⁹⁰ See: Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 32.

⁹¹ See: Heller 36.

⁹² Heller 32.

The choice of words he uses shows what kind of person Daneeka is. Instead of “practice” he uses the word “shop”. By doing this he demonstrates his understanding of medicine only as a good source of income. He uses the same approach to the whole world. He always manages to see how he could profit from certain situation, but he ignores the dangers or inconvenience the situation can pose on others. Miller and Nelson describe Doc Daneeka in a very similar manner saying: “Note that ‘Doc’ sees medicine not as a public service but as a means of self-enrichment, and that his hypochondria *symbolizes* this exclusive concern for himself.”⁹³

At the beginning of the novel Yossarian and Daneeka seem to resemble each other quite a lot, because they focus only on themselves and their lives. Yossarian wants to stay alive; Daneeka wants to return home and earn a lot of money. The biggest difference stems from the dangers each of them has to face. While Yossarian can die any day during the war, Daneeka’s life is not directly endangered. It is, however, true that both of them have to face the absurdity of the world.

It is Daneeka who explains to Yossarian that he could not be grounded because of the absurd document called Catch-22. He explains that everyone who is crazy must be grounded, if he asks to be grounded. However, if somebody asks to be grounded, he cannot be crazy, because the desire to be grounded is a proof that the person is not crazy.⁹⁴ The absurdity stems from the contradiction Catch-22 is based on; insane soldiers must be grounded if they ask for it, but they can never say that they are insane, so the document cannot help anyone. This creates a paradox, which is a term understood in literary theory as a source of absurdity in a text.⁹⁵

⁹³ Walter James Miller and Bonnie E. Nelson, *Joseph Heller’s Catch-22* (New York: Monarch Press, 1971) 69.

⁹⁴ See: Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 51.

⁹⁵ See: J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2013) 510.

It is worth noticing that Daneeka does not defy *Catch-22*; he even finds it “the best there is.”⁹⁶ This makes Daneeka, unlike Yossarian, a part of the machinery of the officers who are responsible for the absurdity and cruelty of the whole world of the novel. It is another paradox present in *Catch-22*, supposing Daneeka is a doctor, whose function should be to protect all people from any harm. Daneeka is thus an example of a person who is absolutely the opposite of what a doctor is expected to be like; he lacks any sense of ethics.

Later in the novel, Daneeka becomes a victim of Heller’s irony, when he is officially declared dead, even though he is obviously physically present in the squadron. Thomas Blues describes the situation of Daneeka as follows:

Doc Daneeka’s strange plight is a case in point. Declared dead because his name was on the passenger manifest of McWatt’s doomed plane, he protests to no effect that he was not actually on board. Bureaucratically dead, he is a walking corpse, not only on paper, but in the eyes of his fellow men.⁹⁷

The act of declaring Daneeka dead proves that in the absurd world of *Catch-22*, following official procedures is more important than people’s ability to judge. It can be therefore argued that all people including Daneeka lose their status of Da-sein because their judgment and understanding lose their traditional function to differentiate people from things.⁹⁸

The absurd logic is clearly visible in the passage when a soldier tries to explain to Daneeka that he is dead: “The records show that you went up in McWatt’s plane to collect some flight time. You didn’t come down in a parachute, so you must have been killed in the crash.”⁹⁹ At this point Daneeka accuses the soldier of being crazy, because Daneeka has obviously to be alive when he can talk to any another person. There is, nevertheless, not a big difference between the approach of the soldier who believes the official records rather than his own senses and Doc Daneeka himself who refuses to ground soldiers who are evidently not able to

⁹⁶ Heller 52.

⁹⁷ Thomas Blues, “The Moral Structure of *Catch-22*,” *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (spring 1971) 70.

⁹⁸ See: Page 14.

⁹⁹ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 392.

serve anymore, only because he follows the absurd logic of Catch-22. As Daneeka is declared dead, he eventually understands that the conviction of other people that he is dead is more important than his own certainty that he is alive.¹⁰⁰ This fact also contributes to the absurdity of the novel, because it challenges the notion of truth and reality in the novel; it cannot be clearly stated whether Daneeka is alive, because he knows it, or dead, because everybody else believes he had died.

Doc Daneeka is an example of a person who cares primarily for himself and not for the others. He feels that he suffers in the war, because he has to be in Italy and cannot earn a lot of money, which he wanted to do in New York. He is not capable of understanding that the soldiers face imminent danger of death, whereas he does not. Furthermore he suffers from hypochondria, so he always observes his symptoms instead of trying to be as helpful as possible. In his attempts to avoid any missions, he forces Yossarian to forge the records about his flying time, but he never does anything for Yossarian in return. Later he is officially declared dead, because according to the report he should have been on a plane that exploded. Since the written documents have more power than human judgment, everybody tries to convince him he is dead. He cannot continue his practice; he does not get any food rations and eventually he understands the absurdity of the world; the fact that he was declared dead is stronger than his objective presence among the living soldiers, so the notion of reality in the novel is challenged by the bureaucracy which can control even the distinction between life and death. Reality is thus absurdly reduced to mere property of the commanding officers.

¹⁰⁰ See: Heller 395.

3.4. Chaplain Tappman

Chaplain Tappman is probably Yossarian's best friend from all the people in the squadron. He can also be compared to Yossarian in many ways. Same as Yossarian, he is a person who undergoes certain development from a man who is trying to be helpful to other soldiers, but does not know how to approach them properly, because most soldiers feel anxious in his presence. Later in the novel he experiences strong doubts about his religion and faith under the pressure which the absurd world puts on him. At the end of the book he finds new strength and morality which is not rooted in his profession of a chaplain, but rather in his humanity and ability to judge what is right and what is wrong. As Miller and Nelson rightly argue, Tappman is the most developed character in the novel¹⁰¹, because he experiences the biggest progression of his identity in the course of the novel.

Unlike Yossarian, Tappman's history is at least a little known. He has a wife and children, whom he really misses very often, especially when he is experiencing the personal crisis which originates in his feeling that he rather hurts other people than helps them.

He is the very first character who appears in the book, together with Yossarian, who likes the chaplain from the very first moment they meet: "The first time Yossarian saw the chaplain he fell madly in love with him."¹⁰²

In the opening of the book the chaplain comes to see Yossarian in the hospital, because as a representative of religion, he is supposed to bring some comfort to soldiers who are hospitalized. Yossarian sees chaplain's insecurity and he decides that "[he] wanted to help [the chaplain]."¹⁰³ They change their roles, because Yossarian sees that it is the chaplain who needs help more than Yossarian does. The act of changing roles also implies absurdity,

¹⁰¹ Walter James Miller and Bonnie E. Nelson, *Joseph Heller's Catch-22* (New York: Monarch Press, 1971) 66.

¹⁰² Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 7.

¹⁰³ Heller 14.

because the traditional position of the characters is altered and thus their purpose is strongly questioned.

Since Tappman is not able to help anybody and people are trying to avoid him, especially his superiors like Cathcart or Korn, who even banish him from the officers' club, he begins to get depressed and insecure, which is soon noticed by other people as well. For example Major Major wants to speak to Tappman about his problems, but "the chaplain seemed so overburdened with miseries of his own that Major Major shrank from adding to his troubles."¹⁰⁴

The situation of the chaplain is getting only worse after he realizes that most of the officers hate and despise him and they would like to get rid of him if it were possible. The hatred of the people who created the absurd world of the novel makes him see the cruelty and absurdity of it, mainly the lack of any rationality¹⁰⁵. The hatred of the officers, which Tappman notices, is absurd, because Cathcart and others hate people who fight on their side. Since the officers dislike their subordinates instead of trying to protect them from the enemy, they occupy the position which should traditionally belong to the Germans as the enemies who hate the American soldiers. This is another paradox of *Catch-22*, which the chaplain recognizes.

Thomas Blues describes the chaplain as follows:

The chaplain [...] is one of those whose capacity to believe the evidence of his senses has been obliterated by the lack of rational order in them. A gentle man, the chaplain believes the important issues of life center on kindness and good manners, but he is ceaselessly thrown up against situations that are not only cruel, but downright irrational.¹⁰⁶

Later in the book Tappman tries to see Colonel Cathcart because he wants to tell him about the terrible state of Yossarian's mind and about the cruelty of Cathcart, who always raises the number of missions the soldiers have to fly before they can be sent home, so nobody can

¹⁰⁴ Heller 105.

¹⁰⁵ For example Cathcart hates the chaplain simply because of his being a chaplain. (see: Heller 220)

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Blues, "The Moral Structure of *Catch-22*," *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (spring 1971) 71.

really leave the army. Cathcart, however, gives a tomato to the chaplain and tells him that Yossarian should “trust in God.”¹⁰⁷ After this unsuccessful attempt, the chaplain feels he is a coward and he begins to experience a terrible crisis of identity. He believed that he had some purpose in the army, but he begins to realize that he has no rational position in the world. He cannot Be-in-the-world, because he cannot find any logical relationship between the absurd world of the novel and his position in it, so his existence is reduced to mere physical occurrence. It cannot be said that the being of the chaplain is his own anymore in Heideggerian terms¹⁰⁸, which happens to Yossarian as well, as was discussed above.¹⁰⁹

The chaplain does not only suffer because he feels he cannot help anyone in the absurd world, but also because he experiences so many irrational situations that he cannot differentiate the reality from imagination¹¹⁰, which leads consequently to his doubts about the nature of his faith as well:

Doubts of such kind gnawed at the chaplain’s lean, suffering frame insatiably. *Was* there a single true faith, or a life after death? How many angels *could* dance on the head of a pin, and with what matters *did* God occupy himself in all the infinite aeons before the Creation?¹¹¹

The situation culminates when the chaplain is arrested and questioned by the officers after Nately’s death. The questioning is obviously totally absurd, because they are just trying to find chaplain guilty, although they do not know what he should be found guilty of; the only purpose is to get rid of him.¹¹² During the questioning the chaplain cannot stand the absurdity of the situation anymore, so he represses his fear and shouts: ““Oh, this is ridiculous!””¹¹³ In this instance he decides to face his superiors, to whom he lies for the first time about

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 227.

¹⁰⁸ See: Page 16.

¹⁰⁹ See: Page 41-2.

¹¹⁰ For example he cannot understand that when he saw a naked man on a tree it was true. He believes it to be only a vision. This also shows the complicated nature of reality in *Catch-22*. [see: Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 313]

¹¹¹ Heller 308.

¹¹² See: Heller 435.

¹¹³ Heller 438.

Yossarian's innocence. The absurdity of the world is such a great pressure that the chaplain is transformed into a new person who starts to believe in his own senses and judgment, instead of obeying the bureaucratic system of the army.

The transformation of chaplain Tappman is finalized in the last chapter of the novel, which is also set in the hospital, where Yossarian is lying, so that the setting strongly resembles the first chapter. Yossarian and Tappman are however at this point completely different people when compared to their depiction from the beginning.

Yossarian awakens his moral conscience and tells Tappman that he decided to desert instead of becoming a friend of Cathcart and Korn. Since Yossarian begins to see hope and decides to flee to Sweden, Tappman realizes as well that he has strength inside of him and he declares: "I'm going to persevere. Yes, I'm going to persevere."¹¹⁴ At this point the transformation of the chaplain from a character that is driven by the law and faith into a person who is driven primarily by his conscience and judgment is finished. The world of the novel remodels his identity completely. Miller and Nelson comment on this development as follows: "[T]he chaplain rediscovers an ancient *religious truth*: conscience is a Higher Law than the State's law. It is in this higher sense that he becomes a Christ-figure who takes on himself the 'sins' of others."¹¹⁵

Chaplain Tappman is another example of a literary character, whose identity, same as Yossarian's, is being created dynamically in the course of the novel by the effect of the absurd world on him.¹¹⁶ Throughout the novel he manages to understand that the approach he chooses at first is a wrong one which leads to his experience of personal crisis. He, however, manages to overcome this crisis under the pressure of the absurd world. Eventually, he

¹¹⁴ Heller 514.

¹¹⁵ Walter James Miller and Bonnie E. Nelson, *Joseph Heller's Catch-22* (New York: Monarch Press, 1971) 67.

¹¹⁶ See: Page 32-3.

develops stronger conscience and trust in his own judgment and abilities and manages to persevere.

4. Conclusion

Catch-22 is a novel whose central interest is, undoubtedly, human beings. The whole novel focuses on the clash between bureaucratic superiors, who all resemble Colonel Cathcart in their inability to understand, what they want; Cathcart says at one point: ““Oh, I don’t know what I wanted””¹¹⁷. On the other hand of the conflict stand the soldiers who are controlled by these idiotic superior officers, who are more interested in their own possibility of promotion than in the effort to win the war and secure peace. This tension between two groups of people that hate each other is the main source for the absurdity of the novel, because there is discrepancy between two groups which are supposed to cooperate, especially under such extreme circumstances as a military conflict. The superiors create an absurd world, in which the soldiers have to learn to survive or they would die, whereas the superior officers focus only on their personal profit instead of demonstrating any concern for the lives of the soldiers. This is the reason why it can be said that *Catch-22* is an absurd novel.

Joseph J. Waldmeir claims in his essay “The Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey” that these two authors are the very first writers who managed to introduce an American absurd novel. Waldmeir argues:

Only twice since the Second World War, in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, have serious American novelists made a conscious effort to transport the novel into the realm of the absurd - up to now the realm occupied principally by European dramatists and novelists (such as Genet and Kafka) and by Albee and Kopit in the United States. ¹¹⁸

In Heller’s case it can be proved that he attempted to transform the European tradition of the Absurd into the realm of American fiction. Heller admitted in an interview that Kafka was one of the most important sources for writing *Catch-22*, saying: “Kafka did influence *Catch-*

¹¹⁷ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage Books, 2004) 159.

¹¹⁸ Joseph J. Waldmeir, “Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey,” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Autumn, 1964) 192.

22 [...]”¹¹⁹. He also admitted that Becket was very important for his career as well.¹²⁰ In addition to this Heller even made a part of *Catch-22* into a piece of absurd drama¹²¹ and later he also wrote a whole play *We Bombed in New Haven*, which shows how close he was to the theatre. Some passages of the novel strongly resemble the technique of the Theatre of the Absurd, mainly illogical repetition of phrases which lose their original meaning.¹²²

The thesis has shown the problems of being of three important protagonists of the novel. Yossarian is a character, whose main pursuit is to stay alive in the world of the absurdity. He definitely cares for his being, even though the superiors try to usurp his being from him. This approach can be applied to Tappman in the same manner, because he faces the same situation as Yossarian. It is important that both Yossarian and Tappman manage to find their own strength and thus they remain in possession of their own being, which is the primary condition of our existence as humans, according to Heidegger.¹²³ Daneeka represents the opposite experience with the being and facing the world of the absurd, when he becomes its victim and is bureaucratically dead.

Since the strong influence of the philosophy of the absurd, represented mainly by Camus and then developed in the form of art by the Theatre of the Absurd, is clearly visible in *Catch-22*, it can be rightfully claimed that the existence of an individual is the central theme of the novel. In the story of Yossarian and Tappman Heller pays great attention to the development of their identity; they are not described as static characters with certain attributes, but rather as individuals who keep reflecting on their situation and who care for their being. This strong emphasis on the effort to maintain the control of our own being, combined with the clear inspiration by the Theatre of the Absurd prove, in my opinion, that Heller must have been

¹¹⁹ Adam J. Sorkin, *Conversations with Joseph Heller* (Oxford, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1993) 91.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ See: Sorkin 130.

¹²² See: Page 36.

¹²³ See: Page 15.

influenced directly by the philosophy of existence and its interest. There is no evidence that it was precisely Heidegger's philosophy that Heller read, but it is clear from the novel and Heller's comments that the knowledge of the philosophy of existence is very important for the interpretation of *Catch-22* and its message about humanity.

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