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Catch-22, *Life is Beautiful*, *The Zookeeper's Wife*: three works of fiction and nonfiction from WWII that, while they have similar timelines, show very different themes. After reading and watching these films, it was clear that the themes in these works might counteract each other. For example, *Catch-22* showed that suffering can occur, and yet, friendships can blossom or strengthen. In *The Zookeeper's Wife*, even after cruel Nazis destroyed the beautiful Warsaw Zoo, a different species of mammals survived inside of the lion cages or the pheasant house: escaping Jews. Even *Life is Beautiful* had this theme opposition. Guido, the gentle Jewish waiter, showed that war's brutality would not spread to his heart while his fellow citizens praised Hitler's works. All in all, each of these works showed the brutality of war and the unnecessary and inevitable goodness that came from it.

Catch-22: a thrilling tale that whispers of the horrors of war, the truth behind the Army commercial billboards that read, "There are all only battles *won*," and perhaps unpurposefully, it betrays the absolute absurdity of the battles that made up World War II. Joseph Heller's own experiences helped inspire the chilling war story that is unlike any other Holocaust novel. Yossarian, a lead bombardier, and his fellow friends all suffer from the tyranny of the officers that command over them, who are constantly upping the number of combat missions that have to fly before they can be grounded (sent home). The law, *catch-22*, says that any man that requests

to be grounded is sane for not wanting to fly the dangerous combat missions, but any man that does not request to be grounded is insane for the same reason. However, a man cannot be grounded without asking their officer. The whole system is simply a loop of giving men the impression that they have control over their continued service in the army. The affect catch-22 has on some men is brutal, changing each differently, as shown in the following analysis.

Major Major Major. The name sounds silly, but, as revealed in *Catch-22*, the recipient of this name was the bearer of a cruel joke played by his own father. Major never fit in, due to his clumsiness and total awkwardness. After becoming sergeant commander by a split-second judgement from a higher official, Major was actively shunned, disrupting the lives of others when he tried to fit in. This newfound leadership prompted the other men to classify him as one of the other crude officers.

As this loneliness developed, Major wrote fictional names on the censoring letters addressed out of the army (Washington Irving, Irving Washington when the former grew boring, John Milton, and even Milton John). Major's unpopularity might have caused a different person to appeal to Major. When addressed by a C.I.D. (Criminal Investigation Department) officer, Major directed him to a different C.I.D. officer, until the two officers were chasing each other in an endless pursuit of justice and ambition. The whole scenario may have been ridiculous, if not for the somber recollection that the cage-like trappings of war may have prompted this absurd scene. It shows that while some of the soldiers fall victim to the catch-22 system, others fall victim to the affect catch-22 has on other men.

In addition to these occasions, many were forced to find their own way out of combat missions in war, simply to stay alive. One such scenario was with an ex-Private-First-Class

(P.F.C.) named Wintergreen: “Each time he went AWOL, he was caught and sentence to dig and fill up holes six feet deep... ‘It’s not a bad life,’ he would observe philosophically.” Would it not, one might muse, be more beneficial to simply ground the men and save the whole cycle of digging and filling in deep trenches? Or, one might argue, would it not be more beneficial to simply work out an agreement instead of fighting and fighting again, only to resolve the conflict in the end? Of course, this is the devil’s advocate claim to war. Heller forces this observation on the reader by his truthful paragraphs detailing Wintergreen’s strategy that--surprisingly--works very well.

In the middle of *Catch-22*, spoken by a slimy, old man, is a truth that proves the absolute and total foolishness of war. “You see, Italy is really a very poor and weak country, and that’s what makes us so strong!” The old man chirped cheerfully to the angry face of an American soldier. His logic was simple - the frail win even when the strong prevail. Is it that the strong expend all of their resources to win the war? Is it that, as the man says later: “victory gave us such insane delusions of grandeur that we helped start a world war we hadn’t a chance of winning”? Reading this man’s words, one could imagine that this theory is directly against Social Darwinism, where the strong reside over the weak in the natural scheme of things. When losing a war does not raise or lower the country’s expectations, does not kill or make its soldiers thrive, losing is quite a good side in war. Even so, the man pretends to root for the winning side, in a way where a football fan might cheer for the other team when the score is higher on the winning team but switches when it falters. When war is comparable to a football team, is war really beneficial to the welfare of the people?

“Catch-22”: it is a phrase that works for everything. And yet, in a rare moment of absolute clarity, Dunbar, Yossarian’s friend, speaks the ultimate truth. “‘You [a Doctor] can’t ground anyone,’ Dunbar reminded. ‘Don’t you know the orders [Catch-22]?’” Catch-22 is the silent force that prevents a man to return home, and Dunbar has captured this perfectly in the above quote. In fact, it is revealed at the end of the book after the phrase “catch-22” has been used more than several times for various excuses, that catch-22 means nothing! Google details that catch-22 means “a dilemma or difficult circumstance from which there is no escape because of mutually conflicting or dependent conditions”. The key words in the phrase are “from which there is no escape”. Simply put, catch-22 is the silent confirmation that the men need to show them that there is no escape. Some in the novel choose to escape war in ways different than escaping the area. Some, like Yossarian or Dunbar, live in the hospital with continuous, mysterious symptoms that resurface with a new combat mission assignment. Some, like Wintergreen, find their escape by evading the officials and abusing the system to commit simpler tasks that give them a false sense of control.

Catch-22 ultimately prompted the reader to realize the absurdity of war, while displaying that war can cause death and suffering, but also friendships and love. Joseph Heller’s classic uses humor and comic relief to lessen the sorrow and death that WWII brought to these men.

The Zookeeper’s Wife focuses on war-torn Poland in WWII, exposing the horrific Warsaw Ghetto and many other lives. Diane Ackerman pieces together Antonina Zabinski’s life, from her own memoirs to others whose lives were saved by her hands. Jan Zabinski, the zookeeper of the Warsaw Zoo, had housed a number of animals, from the twelfth elephant born

in captivity to baby lynx twins. However, Jan largely dealt with the outside world of zoology and managing the zoo. Antonina, as many others described, had a mystical “sixth sense” with animals, coexisting and interacting with the various exotic animals even under the same roof. Antonia was a pure person, simply put. She helped others even when a Nazi and an ex-close friend hosted a shooting party with fellow Nazis throughout the zoo, murdering all of the zoo’s occupants that weren’t already killed by the bombings in Warsaw. After the vivacious zoo quieted, blanketed by death and sorrow, Antonia and Zan worked to help people escape from the Warsaw Ghettos. Some ghettos thrived with contained life with little suffering, but the Warsaw Ghetto was not one of these. This ghetto made young men stooped, made people’s eyes lose colors, made women become ill with grief. Despite the risks of working with the Underground, Antonia remained a savior to the thousands of people she saved. It is not a surprise Antonia once intoned: “I don’t understand all the fuss. If any creature is in danger, you save it. Human or animal.” *The Zookeeper’s Wife* displays many of the behind-the-scene, inspiring (and sometimes depressing) stories of men and women who were inevitably affected by WWII. This fascination non fiction book revealed the beauty that sprung from the war - like a blossoming flower after an earthquake. While this beauty revelation did exist, there was also the recognition of an old, normal, Polish couple that saved countless lives in one way or another.

The beginning of *Life is Beautiful* is ridiculous, stringing together a pre-WWII life with Dora, a beautiful school teacher, and Guido, a Jewish waiter who skips through life with a goofy smile that hides a cunning and clever intelligence. The watcher follows the two as they have a “happily ever after” romance, which results in a young boy, Joshua. As the movie progresses,

more anti-Semitic signs appear, which Guido, as his character, dismisses off or even makes fun of - much to the amusement of his son. Even when the family is sent off to a concentration/labor camp, Guido plays it as a game - where the prize is a tank, and the Germans are just mean players. The movie ends as all Holocaust movies end, devastating. However, lanced in between the sorrow and humor, the movie confesses an unnatural brutality that was also seen in *The Zookeeper's Wife* and *Catch-22*. The following instances describe these scenarios.

In *Life is Beautiful*, a woman sits around a table, clearly agitated. The watcher is concerned and immediately expects a horrific event when she emphasizes over the unfairness of this unknown event. Then, she remarks that lunatics and the crippled cost the state a lot of money; the woman elaborates that children have to solve a problem to see how much the state would save if these crippled or insane children were simply killed. Immediately, the reader sympathizes, understanding her distress over the immoral situation. Instead, she continues with "they need at least some algebra to do those equations." Her fellow diners nod emphatically, save for one of the characters who later marries a Jewish waiter. She seems to be the only person who recognizes the cruel statement that would later spawn into the Nazi's Aryan race ideology. This portion shows how war was not simply engaged by the soldiers or roaring tanks, but by the citizens themselves, in some instances.

Another cruel scene happened earlier in the movie. An inspector from Rome was supposed to come to an Italian classroom to teach children about how their race (Aryan) was superior. By a mishap the main character, Guido, arrived instead, understanding the immorality of the situation and making light of it by showing the fascinated classmates his "superior" belly button or earlobe unique to the superior race. While Guido could downplay these situations, it

was more difficult to do so when his uncle's horse was painted green, with "Jewish horse" painted in white. Even so, Guido, like many others, failed to understand the severity of this situation and how a minor crime would result in the semitism and brutality that was the Holocaust.

Catch-22, The Zookeeper's Wife, Life is Beautiful: While these pieces of literature or film have different characters, different plot lines, and different endings, their message is all clear. There is a clear brutality and lack of common sense in war. And while some people (*The Zookeeper's Life*) strived to make a difference, others supported the war - perhaps even encouraged Hitler spread his Nazism and Aryan race beliefs (*Life is Beautiful*). *Catch-22*, like *Life is Beautiful*, showed that war was often absurd, and this book and movie required very little to show the reader this theme. Finally, all of these works, perhaps unintentionally, showed that there could be beauty and friendships that blossomed out of war, despite the horrors of war. In between the history textbooks and the articles, there are memoirs and memorials, diaries and forgotten belongings, eyewitnesses and stories passed down from generation to generation. In order for one to truly understand history, one must only observe.