Women’s Role In Catch 22

Catch 22 by Joseph Heller takes place in world war II through a third person point of view that focuses on Yossarian and other men going through the frustrating hardships of war, Heller very distinctly elaborates on the role that women play in the plot and the little importance that they play in the novel.

Men are the main point of the novel on their ongoing struggle of not wanting to fly missions and their creative ways to escape them , Heller utilizes women to break the cycle the men are going through throughout the story and act as an outlet for them to get relief from, apart from that reason women have no real part in the war other than the sexual pleasure that they provide the men. Through the story the men make several trips to Rome to with the goal to find women, the only women that they find are hookers that are easily obtainable. This gives the reader a shift in the thought of war time and gives them a gateway to just see the women as a break from the war and not giving a real image and just act as a place holder in a way. Nately, a huge protagonist and a character that is talked about in a great amount, develops a loving relationship with a women he met in Rome who is also like the majority of the few women that appear in the novel, a Hooker. Nately expresses the love he has for this woman a number of times to his comrades but the audience never learns her name, she is just referred to as “Nately’s Whore” for the entirety of the book. One would think that a love interest of a huge character of the novel will be named but rather, Heller does not just give her a name but refers to her as the whore of a character acting as if she were property and belonged to Nately, as she also has a whole chapter named after her where it goes into further detail of her life and how she was used to her naked body as she would walk around rooms naked in between “clients” (Heller 356).

In another occasion where this view for women can be seen is in Lieutenant Scheisskopf’s wife.

She is described in the novel as a woman that requires attention that she is not getting from her husband, that then leads her to seek the attention of the men in Scheisskopf’s squadron for sexual desires (Heller 73). Once again showing how women are not contributing to anything but for the sex appeal.

Though this may be looked down upon, Heller does describe the uprising of prostitution during the Second World War. Once the war broke out men got pulled away from their family and were away fighting the war, women had to step up and be a source of income to keep food on the table but also be a housewife. This put women in a difficult situation having to manage both roles for the children. The average prostitute worked on her own and would work for money or for other goods, they also worked at brothels or for a pimp, “with little to no choice the women had to continue to do so to be able to provide for their family in the tough times of war” (Fronc). Another reason that perhaps shows this side of women is to show the desperation of the men in the front lines. Women were not fighting in the war in the same numbers that men were, resulting in just men living their lives every day for months with nothing but other males by their side that were tired of working hard and training intensely leading them to crave the affection of their wives of just women contact in general, though some men respected their wives most

could not handle being away from women for a long period of time that lead them to seek other women that they would be able to get with ease. There exposing the true problem of prostitution in the world and in the war.

Continuing with how Heller uses them as just object for the men in the battle field, giving them no value or name. Heller uses Yossarian to describe how he and another soldier assaulted a nurse but excludes the word “rape” and rather makes it seem like she did not care and it was nothing of serious matter as having her only “complain” about it. This part is slightly brushed to the side to later have the same nurse fall in love with Yossarian as the story progresses, once again weakening the view on women. In the novel a more vulgar scene is presented near the end, it describes how Yossarian travels to Rome and finds a good friend of his in hiding after he has raped and killed a maid that worked in the facility he was staying at, they get caught and instead Yossarian gets arrested for being in Rome without a pass and Aarfy gets an apology and is left to roam with his freedom, with this Heller shows the corruption and how a man can rape and murder an innocent woman and be let off with no problems while a man gets put in hand cuffs and carried away for not having a travel pass. Through all of that Heller makes an exception from all the women that are mentioned and we are introduced to Luciana, Yossarians first love interest and unlike the others does not want to sleep with him. Luciana seems like the one for him and everything seems to be able to fall into place but because of a “catch 22” their relationship fails continue further than it has therefor it coming to an end. This works as another example that Heller uses to use women as a place holder in the plot to derive from the main point and consume time from the mens life and entertain them. Every woman that is mentioned in the novel has no major role and is only there temporarily to later be replaced by another, showing how easily woman can be obtained and seemed as an easy target to the men in the military to be able to change for another, once again diminishing the value that they are carrying.

By giving women no dialogue and such a small insight of their perspective Heller gives his view on woman in war, making them useless with no real value in relation to the war effort. He is able to show that the only reason they are included is to please the men and show them as an inferior object that in a way that they don’t feel like real characters rather just a toy. Heller’s goal in this novel is to explain the crazy life of the men at war and wants to centralize his story on them and not give any light to them women that may steal the spot light, by treating every women in the novel with no respect and little to no dialogue he successfully achieves this. The men are very dependable on each other, rejecting women and having men the the center of his world and to run the show which ultimately takes a turn for the worst. “Because the men are able only to form homosocial bonds they cannot be happy; because Yossarian and the other males can form relationships solely with other men” (Homosociality and Community). Though women have no great role and serve no purpose in this novel through the eyes of Heller, they could have been the key to happiness to the men’s falling lives that continued to go down rather than up as the book progresses to its end. Heller’s characterization of women raised controversy but was able to craft a great novel with the adventures of the men in the very center of it and with the women to help add to the passage and act as a gateway to further expand the story small amounts in different directions, also giving us a better understanding of the men by the way they treat the woman and the interactions that they have with them, making every character different because of Heller’s characterization of Women/.