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## **Postmodernism Art-Theory: Satire, Irony and Grotesque in Anti-War Novel "Catch-22"**

### **Abstract**

*This abstract is a study of Catch-22 (1961), a specific early document of American postmodern literature. In particular, this one is going to present the critical argument on this novel as parallel to the wider concept of the postmodernism. My claim is that, this novel is going to be treated in accordance with postmodern thought to paradox, irony, black humor, which is a line between fantasy and reality and readers of the novel are unsure about the point at which realism fades into fantasy and a collapsed literary possibility, traditional techniques in literature, for these literary issues in fact have come out many interpretations. So to attain best this argument is an approach to Catch-22 of Joseph Heller.*

*In attempt to, firstly, demonstrate how critics have reduced the potential meaning of the novel in imposing its own notions of a literary-historical circle and secondly, how readings of Heller's characters in the novel can reveal an untapped possibility for further exploration of the broadest definitions and interpretations of the project of postmodernism. Through this work will be obviously explained some of the most essential and basic postmodernist devices especially through the art of writing and language used.*

*Not only marginalized, lateral characters will be on the spotlight of observation and analyses but also the major and protagonist ones will characterize the typical features of postmodern notion.*

**Keywords:** *Postmodernism; Satire; Paradox; Black Humor; Catch-22*

## 1- Introduction

The sphere of postmodern literary criticism, an arena very much accomplished to the idea of “collapsing the traditional literacy conventions,” is ideally equipped to challenge the authority of any contrary ideology putting pressure on this movement being without basic foundations and thanks to this, it has been constantly on the verge of anxiety, being criticized of stemming from its own lack of authority.

Many theoretical practices that coexist under that umbrella of postmodernism, the above quotation from Linda Hutcheon should ensure some relief. Here Hutcheon suggests that the influential theories of Michel Foucault (a French philosopher and a historian of ideas), Jacques Derrida (a French philosopher whose work is known as a post-structuralism related with postmodern philosophy), and Karl Marx (a German philosopher focus on the economic structure) stick in despite the paradox that they are “implicated in that notion of center they attempt to subvert” and they are so implicated deeply and consciously. Hutcheon’s idea of persistence in the face of paradox indicates the sense of humility and sense of fortitude that underlined all discourse on the postmodern. Participants in this discourse writers, critics, and readers, must accept the instability and obscurity of meaning that refer to the project of decent ring epistemological authority; but on the other hand, they must also be courageous enough to produce meaning from such unstable basis.

At the center of this paper lies an American novel *Catch-22* about World War II that is typically included in this discourse of postmodernism. It seems to obtain or produce meaning where none seems to exist. I have to admit how difficult assignment was for all critics to deal with postmodern paradox, satire, irony with all its inverted structure in their work.

In the literary critical approach in this novel, is exactly the difficulty the critics should highlight during their work. This kind of discussion has been utterly controversial particularly at war novels, including here even Kurt Vonnegut with his masterpiece. It is quite interconnected the way how this novel *Catch-22* can help us to fully understand the concept of postmodernism and how postmodernism can help us better understand this novel, too. More specifically, I hope to establish the following five positions that are critical to my understanding of each novel and its context in postmodern literary discourse:

Firstly, postmodern literary criticism is naturally teleological. Despite the encouraging of postmodernism, critical texts tend to be inserted within the wider context of a literary historical tradition with a specified streamline. A paralytic situation is critics’ ability to fit the paradoxes, black humor of postmodernism, which tends to set linear narratives upon its subjects. Such impositions are inevitable and can be productive, but need to be known and comprehended.

Secondly, Linda Hutcheon suggests postmodernists accept their implicit roles in postmodern paradoxes fundamentally: they are so visible to each of us. Certain writers of literature and criticism may back up postmodern paradoxes on purpose, they stop having control on interpretations of their texts when they are already

public. That is what makes postmodernism so chaotic where collapsed paradoxes are mostly present there in our reading of this novel.

Thirdly, literary criticism conveys that postmodern literature with its innovative qualities results in an incomplete apprehension of how the paradox of postmodernism is itself the insistence of an old paradox.

Fourth point, the efforts to establish a proper definition of this literary trend, all these ones lead to the idea that postmodernism movement tries to resist to all these major cultural narratives, even though a notable scale of this grand narrative is in the 20th century.

Fifth point, postmodern texts like *Catch22* particularly resist impositions of linear, unidirectional critical narratives. One such narrative accepts that postmodernism can provide nothing but frustration, complacency, and meaninglessness: that postmodernism is ethically worthless. However, *Catch22*, and specifically Yossarian's reaction to Orr's successful escape, show frustration and anger coexists with optimism.

Sixth point, the massive instructions that permeated American understanding of the Second World War and, as a consequence, the Cold War are crucial and meaningful American Grand narratives of the postmodern epoch. One distinguished trait of postmodernist literature, different from modernist literature, is its ability to offer alternative narratives that allow cultures to make sense of their history with the least guilt and most pride.

## **2- What Is Postmodernism and What Are Its Ethics?**

Although there is not any fixed definition of postmodernism, most critics agree that, for their anti-war messages, *Catch22* (1961) by Joseph Heller represent something like the first wave of American literary postmodernism. Too many critics and philosophers have been engaged to the postmodern studying, they have deeply analyzed the shift from modernism to post modernity. Some of them are Ihab Hasan, Linda Hutchon, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, mentioning the father of postmodernism Umberto Eco and so many other trying to highlight the differences between these movements but also trying to bring into our reading a common sense to our understanding and clarify our aesthetic characteristics. It is important to demonstrate here an intrinsic problem in observing and analyzing any postmodern material: critic's postmodern expectations to be read into the literature, rather than anything inherent to the novel dictating its classification. Postmodern dimension in its classification context is particularly self-fulfilling critical because of the extremely arbitrary and subjective criteria that distinguish it. Although it still very important to come into a stable agreement for the term.

According to the Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism proposes, "postmodernism highlights the multiplication of voices, questions, and conflicts that shattered what once seemed to be the placid unanimity of the great tradition and of the West that gloried in it" (McGowan 587). This citation gives recognition to the many dynamic ongoing debates about the definition of the term "postmodernism,"

which include questions of whether it is even a useful term at all. McGowan also refers expository to the frequently stated the differences between postmodernism and previous early movements; this business of disrupting unanimity is nothing new, he admits. "Multiplication of voices" is just as often referred as traditionally negative connotations such as "instability" and "meaninglessness." Even this pretended "least" disputed definition of postmodernism is controversial. Not being able to agree on a unifying definition for postmodern literature, critics often handle with the inductive practice of examining how a single aspect and unit of the body of literature considered postmodern functions. The idea behind such an approach is that taking on a narrower part of postmodernism can diminish confusing variables and contradictions. In short, it is the postmodern critic who reconstructs postmodern criteria from a state of deconstruction. Too few critics practically allow for the contradictions they tend to embrace in theory. Yet, this process is a useful starting point for understanding how critics view postmodern literature today. Thus, it is made use of various ethical approaches to postmodern literature to demonstrate both uses and misuses specific to readings of *Catch22*.

As literary criticism is, after all, an attempt to assess and reconstruct meaning, any critical approach to postmodernism must first come to terms with the lack of a dominant, authoritative source for meaning. Thomas Docherty succinctly articulates the baseline anxiety stemming from the destabilizing force of postmodernism: "No single satisfactory mode of epistemological legitimization is available". In this environment, each textual expression can be analyzed as an attempt to qualify the features of this contextual trend. Critics of different eras claimed that postmodernism has no central basis of authority in ethical matters; without such an internal basis, how can one approach the ethics of postmodernism? Again, Linda Hutcheon's notion of persistence despite paradox provides a useful way out of this conundrum in answering the question of how any theorizing can avoid being bogged down in its attempts to establish an internal logic center.

Postmodern ethics are ethics that self-admittedly do not make use of a singular claim to authority, but persist anyway. With this in mind, one can expect postmodern ethics to involve a "multiplication of voices" with a multiplicity of answers; rather than sharing a common center, postmodern ethics share the knowledge of this lack of authority, as Hutcheon makes clear. With this in mind, one way to approach the ethics of the postmodern novel appears to be through observing the ethics of novels that both reflect the sensitivity posited by McGowan in his attempt to broadly define postmodernism and persist despite their lack of authority. Such novels would "shatter what once seemed to be the placid unanimity of the great tradition and of the West that gloried in it". The "unanimity of the great tradition," problematic as it is, is easily renoun as a trope repeated in the dozen of attempts made to define postmodernism, most notably in the writing of Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard has defined postmodernism as "incredulity toward meta narratives." Similarly, he refers to the necessity of turning down "grand narratives". Instead, he proposes, "value and morality may be established within local communities so that daily questions of living may be addressed from a local center" (Davis 27). Lyotard's definition of the project of postmodernism seems to agree with Hutcheon's idea of persistence

in the face of paradox; postmodern ethical centers only apply locally, because to universalize them would harm their own self-awareness of the necessary limits of their authority resulting from their artificiality, as Hutcheon indicates. It follows that one common ethical act made by postmodern novels is to disrupt the “placid unanimity” of grand narratives; such novels signal their postmodern sensitivity through this disruption.

Specifically, it is highly interested in how *Catch22* disrupt the “mood of war,” referred to by Fussell, that allowed the United States’ actions in the war to pass largely without scrutiny from many Americans. But is this really sufficient for a novel to qualify as ethically postmodern? Regarding this, the temptation is to put another obstacle in front of the postmodern novel to distinguish it clearly from the modern novel. Essentially, inserting criteria like Brian McHale’s narrows the definition of the postmodern novel to include a more selected group of novels representing innovation beyond the style of the modernists. McHale’s *Postmodernist Fiction* establishes a particularly useful set of postmodern literary criteria because it attempts to combine the formulations of postmodern poetics made by others. In this respect, McHale’s method is more deductive, as he looks to locate and describe a level on which other lists of postmodern criteria concur. A poetic work is a structured system, a systematically ordered in a way of a hierarchy of artistic devices. McHale sees an opportunity for a higher order of grouped or classification that might rise above the barriers of the many postmodern contradictions, some of are introduced above. He chooses to locate the dominant for postmodernism at the level of philosophical inquiry. He describes his argument simply: Postmodernist fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological being issues differ from one dominated by epistemological (theory of knowledge) issues. McHale acknowledges that, as any philosopher would point out, epistemological and ontological concerns always exist together because one can always lead to the other. However, he insists that one set of questions must precede the other; the preceding set of questions is the dominant set. And in postmodernist fiction, McHale argues that inquiries into the nature of knowledge and truth are always secondary to inquiries into the nature of being and existence. My readings, specifically that of *Catch22*, will challenge the strict unidirectional relationship McHale assumes between ontological and epistemological questions, but for now, McHale’s reasoning represents quite well the way critics describe the innovations expected of postmodern literature.

### **3- Conclusion**

McHale’s specific postmodern intention builds a relationship between ontological and epistemological issues. This relation raises a question of whether postmodern literature’s dis-unitification of grand narratives needs necessarily to occur through the new narrative’s own counterexample, or whether this destruction can take place if a narrative simply resists an existing grand narrative. What I mean here is that McHale implies that postmodernist literature must show a different underlying structure, or dominant, in its execution and in its art of style. However, such an implication creates a false distinction. Rejecting an existing grand narrative is creating a stylistically innovative narrative, and the way around.

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