

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.