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## Yossarian at Fifty

[Jesse Walker](#) | August 10, 2011

Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, a libertarian favorite, turns 50 this year, so our friends at the Cato Institute have posted an conversation Heller had with Cato's *Inquiry* magazine in 1979. The occasion for the interview was the publication of Heller's third novel, the enjoyable satire *Good as Gold*, but the conversation covers his other books as well. Here's an excerpt:

Q: Another thing that interested me was the effect that writing about the Vietnam War had upon you. It seemed apparent in *Something Happened* that you felt a sense of moral outrage over our role in the war, and in this one Gold seems to boil in rage at some aspect of it. Was it difficult to write about an issue that is so enraging and draining?

HELLER: No, and this is true of *Catch-22* as well. When I'm writing, I am only interested in writing. Now when I'm not writing, I confess I can hear something that will make me boil over. A phrase that really gets to me, for instance, would be one of those neoconservative references to Vietnam as a national tragedy, but only because we lost. That thought fills me with ire. To begin with, the person who says it is typically untouched by tragedy; like me, he has not lost a son or a job. In addition, the implication is that if we had won, the war would have been somehow less tragic. People with that mentality, I have to admit, impress me as being the scum of the earth.

Read the whole thing [here](#).