THEMATIC UNITY IN THE EARLY VONNEGUT FICTION: PLAYER PIANO (1952) TO SLAPSTICK (1976)

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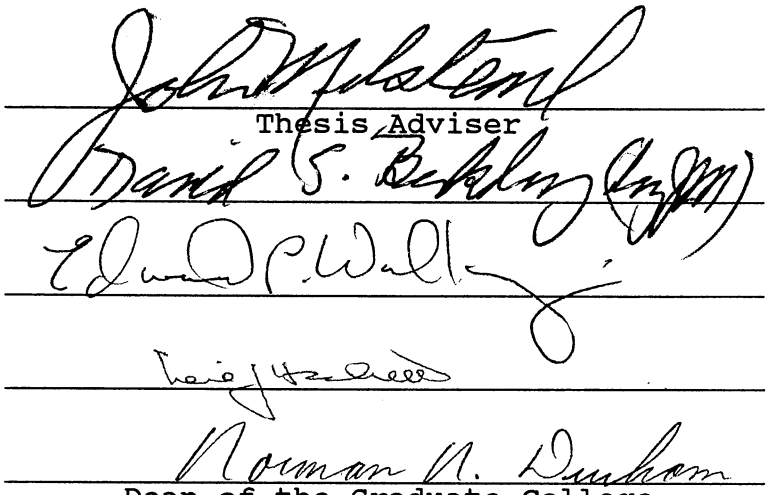

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PREFACE

I am tempted to begin this Preface with something similar to what Kurt Vonnegut says about Slaughterhouse-Five: "I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and time" (2). But it sounds rude and self-pitying; I would rather dwell on the brighter side a bit and show my gratitude to those it is due.

My disseration is about thematic unity, and themes in Vonnegut are synonymous with morals. My thanks therefore are to those that helped and influenced me both intellectually and morally.

First, I am grateful to a man called (in Telugu, my mother tongue) Yesu Cristhu, in whose path of love and non-violence lies, I believe, the only source of hope and joy for me and mankind in general. Second, I thank for their humanity such "closet Christians" as Kurt Vonnegut, Mahatma Gandhi, the later Malcolm X, my (Hindu) family, my friend Marinelle Ringer, and millions of other "liberals," who are better followers of Jesus than many that bear his name in vain. Finally, I am grateful to Dr. John Milstead, my advisor, and Drs. Edward Walkiewicz, David Berkeley, and Neil Hackett, whose knowledge and wisdom have not only guided this dissertation but influenced my life. Perhaps they deserved a better student than I am.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	"CHARACTER" IN PLAYER PIANO (1952), THE SIRENS OF TITAN (1959), AND MOTHER NIGHT (1962)	7
III.	RATIONALITY IN CAT'S CRADLE (1963), GOD BLESS YOU, MR. ROSEWATER (1965), AND WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE (1968)	72
IV.	DETERMINISTIC REALITY IN SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE (1969), BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS (1973), AND SLAPSTICK (1976)	147
V.	CONCLUSION	213
WORKS CITED		218

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

David Goldsmith writes, "it would be foolhardy to construct a cogent, organized philosophical system from Vonnegut's writing; it simply is not there" (28-29). In this dissertation, I attempt what Goldsmith considers "foolhardy," because unifying Vonnegut's works and philosophy is not impossible once we realize that it is a matter of establishing the unity of his moral vision. Moreover, if we recognize the vital connection in Vonnegut between "morals" and themes, finding a thematic unity in his texts concurrently accomplishes a moral and philosophical unity for them.

As the "Works Cited" section in this dissertation would demonstrate, there have been several attempts to unify Kurt Vonnegut's fictions, both as individual texts and as a body of work. These attempts seem to fall into two broad categories: genre criticism and thematic criticism. Let us examine briefly these two categories and see where this dissertation fits in and how its existence is justifiable in terms of the validity and originality of its approach.

Genre criticism is a legitimate means of unifying an author's works by "pigeon-holing" them into a genre. In Vonnegut's case, however, it is disabled by his employing, deliberately, the characteristics of several genres in his texts. Thus, Max F. Shulz's label of "black humor," Karen and Charles Wood's "science fiction," Robert Hipkiss's "absurdist literature," and the general labels that mention "humanism" in one way or another, all involve a deliberate, myopic, ignoring of each other's validity. Vonnegut belongs to all those categories, and to claim that he is the exclusive property of any one of those genres is to do him, and truth, an injustice. This wisdom has made me avoid genre criticism in this dissertation.

Thematic criticism of Vonnegut's works, of one text or many, is also available in abundance. Journal articles such as Charles Harris's "Time, Uncertainty, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: A Reading of Slaughterhouse-Five" often restrict themselves to a few themes in one or two Vonnegut texts and handle their task ably. On the other hand, book-length studies such as those of Stanley Schatt, Jerome Klinkowitz, and James Lundquist seem to be "hotchpotches" of themes, biographical insights, and mostly autonomous studies of individual texts. The originality of this dissertation is based, therefore, on combining the "good" qualities of these two kinds of thematic criticism, their intensive and extensive coverages of Vonnegut's works. It achieves this result through thematically unifying the

early Vonnegut fiction at at least three levels. First, a subject is shown to unify each text and a triad of texts to which it belongs. Second, the entire body of the early Vonnegut fiction (nine works) is "reduced" to a network of three philosphical subjects. Third and last, although not demonstrated in this dissertation, it is implied that these three subjects individually unify any Vonnegut text. Thus, this dissertation combines for its sense of originality the two strategies, philosophical reductivism and application to a large number of texts. Besides originality, this dissertation is also meant to manifest structural unity in its scope and organization.

The scope of this dissertation, in terms of its inclusions and omissions, is suggested in its title, THEMATIC UNITY IN THE EARLY VONNEGUT FICTION: PLAYER PIANO (1952) TO SLAPSTICK (1976). This dissertation thus covers nine fictional works of Kurt Vonnegut--eight novels and one collection of short stories. Two of these works, Welcome to the Monkey House and Slapstick, are included under the umbrella of Vonnegut's thematic unity, although I do not draw as much detail from them as from the others. In their lack of thematic development, these two texts, I have to agree with many of their critics, are of "inferior" quality. Raymond C. Palmer, for instance, condemns Welcome to the Monkey House for its "sentimentality, slickness, and cleverness" (3), and James Lundquist rightly points out that Slapstick is "a work that seems much more an

afterthought than an important novel" (62). However, since the complete exclusion of these two fictional works from this study seems unwarranted, I include them, although to a limited extent.

Also, I have included the Vonnegut theme of the adult as a mental child as part of the discussion of wisdom in the third chapter, although the connection between this theme and wisdom is not very clear in the Vonnegut texts. This theme nevertheless does not seem to belong anywhere else.

I have omitted Vonnegut's non-fiction and later works from this study. The early non-fiction--the play, Happy Birthday, Wanda June and the collection of essays, Wampeters, Foma, and Granfalloons--is excluded for the purpose of a non-biographical and purely "fictional" focus. This study is also limited to the early Vonnegut not only due to the contingencies of space but also due to the fact that the later Vonnegut's cynical disrespect for craft and technique complicates matters of thematic unity. My choice of Slapstick (1976) as a "cut-off point" for the early Vonnegut fiction, moreover, is guided by the belief that these complications start primarily with Jailbird (1979), although the tendencies are partly the reason for the decay of Vonnegut's storyteller's "technique" in Slapstick.

The dissertation is organized on the basis of triads of fictional works. These triads or groupings, incidentally, are common among critical studies of

Vonnegut. We find them in full-length studies such as Stanley Schatt's Kurt Vonnegut (1976) and journal articles such as John R. May's "Vonnegut's Humor and the Limits of Hope" (26). The idea behind my using them, however, is to demonstrate the applicability of the three subjects, "character," rationality, and deterministic reality, to any early Vonnegut text and not just to the texts that a given subject is related to in a given chapter of the dissertation. The device of triads is intended to promote the randomness of applicability. It would have been easier, perhaps, to find other groupings such as the "extra-terrestrials" (The Sirens of Titan and Slaughterhouse-Five) and the "internationals" (Mother Night and Cat's Cradle). The dissertation, however, does not group fictional works together on the basis of ease of finding unities, but pursues randomness within the limits of chronological order and arrangement in triads. Avoiding the constraints of even those limits nevertheless seems brazen and unnecessary.

Besides the Introduction and the Conclusion, the study has three chapters. The chapter entitled, "'Character' in Player Piano (1952), The Sirens of Titan (1959), and Mother Night (1962)" contends that the Vonnegut universe is a deterministic one that robs the characters of their identities. The next chapter, "Rationality in Cat's Cradle (1963), God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965), and Welcome to the Monkey House" investigates the theme of rationality in

its three connotations of reasoning, sanity, and wisdom. Vonnegut seems to undercut the concept of rationality through all its three connotations. The third major chapter, "Deterministic Reality in Slaughterhouse-Five (1969), Breakfast of Champions (1973), and Slapstick (1976)," presents the Vonnegut reality as a deterministic construct, for both Vonnegut's determinism and his characters' responses to determinism are systematicaly designed entities. This dissertation thus develops not only an extensive approach that unifies several texts but also an intensive approach that leaves few details in the text thematically unaccounted for.

CHAPTER II

"CHARACTER" IN PLAYER PIANO (1952), THE SIRENS OF TITAN (1959), AND MOTHER NIGHT (1961)

In his 1966 Introduction to Mother Night, Kurt Vonnegut writes,

> This is the only story of mine whose moral I know. I don't think it's a marvelous moral; I simply happen to know what it is: We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be. (v)

A few pages later, he adds,

> There's another clear moral to this tale, now that I think about it: When you're dead you're dead.
>
> And yet another moral occurs to me now: Make love when you can. It's good for you. (vii)

This addition of two more morals to his earlier one raises doubts concerning his first statement. Moreover, elsewhere he calls himself "a total pessimist" (Wampeters 159), and if we take this last statement seriously, we do not see how a "total pessimist" can use any of the morals above. Thus, Vonnegut the self-critic is of no help at all to critics

who look for a message to, what Kathryn Hume would call, Vonnegut's "fluctuating and coruscating" cosmos ("Heraclitean" 209, 221). Deliberately or not, Vonnegut misleads, confounds, and quite often forces one to refuse, in a quasi-New Critical manner, any authorial help in understanding his works.

Not surprisingly then, critics have a variety of responses to the questions, "Is there a moral to Vonnegut's fiction?" and "If there is, what is it?" However, except for J. M. Crichton and Max F. Schulz, who view the world of Vonnegut's novels as having no heroes, no villains, and no morals (Crichton 35) and as "illogical" (Schulz, "Unconfirmed" 5), most other critics seem to assume that Vonnegut's works do have an author-intended moral but disagree on whether the moral is negative--that is, pessimistic--or positive and if positive, what that positive moral specifically is.

This belief in the intentional teaching of a moral, positive or negative, implies a didactic rhetoric and ignores the possibility of a non-didactic rhetoric, the many examples of which Wayne C. Booth discusses in The Rhetoric of Fiction (v). Vonnegut's non-didactic rhetoric, however, has two postulates: since the author is only known to us as a persona in his novels, we can not assume any "intentional" morals; and there is no single "conclusive" moral to any of Vonnegut's novels. Moreover, Vonnegut's works have neither a single "negative" (or, satirical)

moral, nor a single "positive" moral. One can, of course, verify these postulates by examining critical views on both sides of this "moral" fence.

Critics that emphasize the pessimistic tendencies of Vonnegut's fiction seem to base their views mostly on The Sirens of Titan. In this novel, Vonnegut debunks "man's attempt to find an objective meaning to life" (Lawler 68) through several means. For instance, Malachi Constant compares the universe to a "junk yard, with everything in it overpriced" (Sirens 290), and the Tralfamadoreans prove his point by failing to find any purpose to existence (274). Moreover, Salo, Constant, Rumfoord, and all the other "earthlings" are used for insignificant (and sometimes even frivolous) purposes. But the fact that Salo, Constant, Beatrice, and many other Vonnegut characters find some redemption in the "cheerful acceptance of the universal lot" (Lucretius 24) is often ignored by the "pessimistic" school of critics. This onesidedness thus leads Richard Giannone to suggest that Vonnegut's world has nothing to look forward to except destruction and "smoldering decomposition" ("Violence" 59). Similarly, Kingsley Amis analyzes Player Piano as a "withering attack on belongingness and togetherness" (129).

Critics who approach Vonnegut as a satirist primarily can also perhaps be included in the "pessimistic" school, for their view ignores his "optimistic" side very much the same way. Thomas L. Wymer thus declares that Vonnegut's

pessimistic emphasis on the negative is due to his "tendency to focus more on expressing the folly of others' solutions than on offering . . . [one's] own [solutions]" (245) in the manner of Swiftian satire, the description of which, incidentally, matches that of Northop Frye's Menippean satire (Anatomy 310). Much similar to Wymer's approach is Conrad Festa's attempt to demonstrate that satire in Vonnegut's work is "dominant, central, and sustained" (133). However, C. D. B. Bryan considers Vonnegut to be an inferior satirist, because Vonnegut prefers irony to "the anger and impatience which great satire demands" (21). In his interview with Robert Scholes, Vonnegut himself nevertheless agrees with Scholes that he is not a bitter satirist a la Jonathan Swift, Ambrose Bierce, or the later Mark Twain, but more of a compassionately angry one, like Aristophanes (99). But the occasional use of satirical devices does not make a writer a satirist, nor his works satire, and neither Festa nor Wymer satisfactorily demonstrates that Vonnegut's use of satirical devices is consistent, pervasive, and specifically targeted. Moreover, the critics who postulate Vonnegut's pessimism, in or out of the context of satire, fail to explain the other side of the Vonnegut paradox, his equal emphasis on humanistic love.

Like Howard W. Campbell, the protagonist in Mother Night, who admires "things with a beginning, a middle, an end--and, whenever possible, a moral, too" (136), quite a

few critics are easy prey to the simplistic, "positive" morals or pseudo-morals that saturate Vonnegut's novels. Of course, these morals are not always as easy to detect as in the case of the Moral Rearmament Movement in Mother Night, based on "absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love" (108) or, in the same novel, the sign in Dr. Jones' basement that reads, "Get plenty of education. Lead your class in all things. Keep your body clean and strong. Keep your opinions to yourself" (130). But the other "positive" morals would seem equally "tongue in cheek" unless one believes that there is no single, conclusive moral in Vonnegut's parables.

Among the "positive" morals, the most popular one with the Vonnegut critics is the duty of "loving whatever is around to be loved" (Sirens 313). Donald L. Lawler, for instance, finds much evidence for this "moral" in The Sirens of Titan:

> All the sympathetic characters in the novel seem to exemplify this [loving] quality in varying degrees. Boaz adopts the Harmoniums, while Beatrice and Constant achieve at last a mature love relationship . . . Even Salo, the Tralfamadorean robot, becomes the benefactor, first of Rumfoord and later of Constant. Most specifically, this ethical imperative applies to Chrono, who leaves his delinquent past behind and

> becomes the leader of the bluebirds of Titan--an apotheosis indeed. (68)

But Lawler fails to realize that these love relationships have as little ultimate morality and nobility as does Gulliver's love for the Houyhnhnms. Thus, G. K. Wolfe rightly points out that "Boaz's simple love for . . . [the Harmoniums] leads to their death" (968) and is typical of the way Vonnegut's characters find love "insufficient in an unpredictable universe" (968). Even Howard Campbell, who wants Helga and himself "to be to each other, body and soul, sufficient reasons for living" (Mother Night 99), uses that relationship "to hide from responsibility of his actions" (Hume, "Heraclitean" 218) and tells Resi that he no longer believes "that love is the only thing to live for" (Mother Night 160).

Even other such pseudo-morals of Vonnegut's as his insistence on "human dignity for all human beings--even those who seem to least deserve it" (Klinkowitz, "America" 31) and "basic humanism" (Pauly 69), and "our essential humanity" that Vonnegut "recovers through technique" (Veeder 98) all exaggerate the subtlety of Vonnegut's rhetoric and predictably fail to account for his alleged pessimism. If Vonnegut's novels are indeed guided by these few conclusive morals, we would have to agree with Richard Todd that Vonnegut has nothing new to say (24). But the finespun quality of Vonnegut's non-didactic moralism is based on the multiplicity of his morals, which also act as

themes in his novels. Thematic unity in Vonnegut is thus the same as the unity of his morals. These morals are unified through themes such as identity, rationality, and reality as a construct.

Vonnegut's moralism nevertheless cannot be treated as a full-fledged rhetoric, because rhetoric as an "author's means of controlling his reader" (Booth v) presupposes linguistic devices more emphatically than it does the thematic subtleties that are Vonnegut's forte. Thus, although I am aware that rhetoric can be stretched to cover "all the techniques by which a writer establishes rapport with the reader" (Backman vii), I opt not to apply that term to Vonnegut's moralism. Vonnegut's moral approach, furthermore, can only be studied as a reaction to his deterministic Weltanschauung.

Choosing an elaborate explication of "moral" themes, a complex treatise instead of a simple sermon, also fits in well with Vonnegut's concept of the role of an artist as that of a canary in a coal mine whose supersensitive reactions alert its companions to the presence of poisonous gases (Wampeters 92). The implications of this analogy are that the poisonous gases (and the corresponding "morals") are not one but many and that the coal mine is a controlled world with its own system of routes and rules. Given a deterministic and identity-threatening world much like this coal mine, Vonnegut's characters seem to function the same way as his artist does. They often find themselves to be

the "canaries" whose identities are constantly undercut by myriad "poisonous gases," and in opting to portray the loss and gain of their identities, Vonnegut picks what Christine Brooke-Rose would consider, aptly, the most exigent job for a rhetorician of this century (3).

Ronald Sukenick's statement that "characters as 'irreducible individual' psyches are not possible" in the "contemporary post-realistic novel" (41) is very much true with all of Kurt Vonnegut's characters, the protagonists as well as the minor ones, who find themselves "trapped" (Slaughterhouse 77) in a deterministic setup. The "reduction" or loss of their literary sense of "character," however, eventually leads to the partial recovery of their identities. But this loss and regaining of identity does not match, as Kathryn Hume asserts in her "Kurt Vonnegut and the Myth and Symbols of Meaning," any mythical typologies such as the hero monomyth, although the loss and regaining of identity, we have to agree with Northop Frye, is "the framework of all literature" (Educated Imagination 65). Vonnegut's fiction does not, however, conform to the hero monomyth for three reasons: one, the loss and regaining of identity happens not just to the protagonist in the Vonnegut novel but to the minor characters as well; two, the regaining of identity is only partial in Vonnegut's characters; and three, Vonnegut's novels lack the clear "moral opposite" or villain that the hero monomyth requires, where he and the hero are to act "like

black and white pieces in a chess game" (Frye, Anatomy 195). Therefore, Vonnegut's use of characters does not fit easily into any given mold and should be analyzed on its own. Except for occasional comments such as that of Howard P. Segal which refers to Vonnegut's characters resenting the loss of their "personal identity and social purpose" (163), Vonnegut's concern with "character" has not received much attention.

The purpose of this chapter thus is to examine in-depth the loss and partial regaining of identity in the characters of Kurt Vonnegut's first three novels, Player Piano (1952), The Sirens of Titan (1959), and Mother Night (1961). I believe the argument is valid even in the case of the rest of his novels, but I will not attempt to prove it owing to the exigencies of space.

The identity of the characters in Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, and Mother Night is rhetorically undercut both from without and from within, that is, both systemically and epistemologically. Let us explore the systemic element first because in Vonnegut's fiction it is the societal system that informs the epistemology of the individual and not vice versa.

The systemic identity of the characters is derived from and warped by a societal system which, whether it be national as in Player Piano or international as in Mother Night or even inter-planetary as in The Sirens of Titan, invariably has these three features: a segregated and

class-conscious infrastructure, a deterministic and cyclical management of power where a person can be at once the agent and the victim of the system, and a ritualistic functioning process.

In The Sirens of Titan, Winston Niles Rumfoord says that "the triumph of anything is a matter of organization" (165). The societal system not only of The Sirens of Titan but also of Player Piano and Mother Night is well-organized, if by organization we mean segregation and classification of people. In these novels, society is divided on the bases of geography, class or, as is frequently the case, both. Consider the first three paragraphs of Player Piano:

> ILIUM, NEW YORK, IS DIVIDED INTO THREE PARTS.
>
> In the northwest are the managers and engineers and civil servants and a few professional people; in the northeast are the machines; and in the south, across the Iroquois River, is the area known locally as Homestead, where almost all of the people live.
>
> If the bridge across the Iroquois were dynamited, few daily routines would be disturbed. Not many people on either side have reasons other than curiosity for crossing. (9)

The first sentence, which is emphasized through capitalization and which incidentally parodies the first sentence of Caesar's Gallic Wars, stresses the division and

segregation of the city of Ilium. The second sentence (and paragraph), after describing the divisions, culminates in the significant phrase, "Homestead, where almost all of the people live." The phrase is significant, because it implies that managers, engineers, civil servants, and other professionals are not "people," and thereby establishes the bias of the third person omniscient narrator. The narrative bias sanctions and thus heightens the segregation. The third paragraph widens the gap between the divisions even further by the metaphoric uselessness of the bridge between them.

The world of The Sirens of Titan is no less segregated, for Vonnegut exploits its inter-planetary distances to accentuate the emotional segregation between earthlings, Martians, and Tralfamadoreans. Even the tragedy of Howard Campbell in Mother Night in a way stems from his disobeying the rules of the segregation between World War II Germany and America and his making enemies of Israel and the Soviet Union in the process.

But Vonnegut intensifies this sense of segregation even more by sub-dividing these divisions. In other words, he creates a second level of segregation. For instance, the civic managers in Player Piano live "on the same side of the river as the managers and engineers of the Ilium Works, but the contact between the two groups was little more than perfunctory and, traditionally, suspicious" (84). Similarly, the fortunate few in Homestead who have jobs and

have not "been displaced by machines . . . . lived among those who . . . [have] been displaced, but . . . [are] aloof and overbearing with the mass" (33). Even women within the elite group have a separate camp "across the river from the Meadows, the island where the men [are staying]" (138). Furthermore, corporate rituals such as games and parties constantly separate the men from the women (179).

In The Sirens of Titan, we are told that "Winston Niles Rumfoord [is] . . . a member of the one true American class" (26) and in general, along with Beatrice, Malachi Constant, Ransom Fern, and a few other rich people, is for ever alienated from the masses of the earth. The Martians themselves are divided into native Martians and immigrant Martians, and among the immigrants, the real commanders, though they go undercover among the regular soldiers as regular soldiers, have secret meetings and continually control the soldiers through the antennae in the latter's heads. Even on the planet Tralfamadore, the live and robotic beings are so divided in their outlook on existence that the live ones, because of their need for and lack of a purpose for existing, let themselves be slain by the robotic ones (274-5).

The second level of segregation in Mother Night, however, is more internal and psychological than it is in Player Piano and The Sirens of Titan and is woven into the major theme of false identity in that novel. By pretending

to be someone that they are not, the major characters of Mother Night create in themselves an inner, schizophrenic distance between their true and false (lied-about) identities. Vonnegut's implication in Mother Night seems to be that societal segregation creates a corresponding second-level segregation inside the individual. Thus, Howard Campbell pretends to be a Nazi and is in fact an American spy; George Kraft in reality is Iona Potapov, a Russian agent; Resi Noth is also revealed to be a Russian agent despite her pretending to be her own sister Helga Noth; and Heinz Schildknecht is a Jew and not the Nazi that he pretends to be (188).

Is this segregation then untrespassable? It is not, but the individuals that trespass across the "established lines of demarkation" (Player 94) seldom succeed in their attempt to rescue their identities from the oppressive mold. Instead, they have their loyalties questioned in the "class war" (94), find themselves without a country (for instance, Campbell in Mother Night and Rumfoord in Sirens), have no friends (Constant and Salo in Sirens), or "muddy their thinking with exceptions" (Player 91).

The world of Vonnegut's novels, moreover, is divided not only horizontally but also vertically, the segregation going hand-in-hand with a hierarchy, as it usually does in any societal system. The societal divisions in Vonnegut's fictions are often based on a value system which gives rise to a hierarchy of classes. Moreover, Vonnegut's characters

are often inspired by and sometimes rebel against this hierarchy. Thus, Mark Hillegas' description of the society of Player Piano as "a pyramid topped by an elite, with the great mass of people faceless and nameless" (161) applies also to the societies of The Sirens of Titan and Mother Night.

The elite in these novels are like the athletic team in the photograph in Player Piano, who have an "attitude of a secret order, above and apart from society by virtue of participating in important and moving rites the laity could only guess about--and guess wrong" (15). This hierarchy, which Paul Proteus finds inescapable in any profession he could choose within that society (Player 143), is promoted by the system through the cultivation of a false self-esteem. Thus, in The Sirens of Titan, Unk is programmed to believe that he is "the best soldier in the best squad in the best platoon in the best company in the best battalion in the best regiment in the best division in the best army" (101), and the wives at the Mainland are encouraged by the sign to be "THE BEST WIFE FOR THE BEST MAN FOR THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD" (Player 235). This encouragement is condescending and false, because it asks one to take pride in simply being the lowest rung on the ladder and not climb up. For instance, when the elite in Player Piano ask a woman to be the best wife, the alternatives given to a woman in that world are either to be a "non-best" wife or to be a secretary who is "more a symbol of rank than a real

help," because "only the brass--plant managers and bigger--had secretaries" (10). Social hierarchy in Vonnegut's novels, therefore, is as reactionary as it is functional, the underdog of the past remaining the underdog of the future. Even in the distant future of The Sirens of Titan, one encounters the hackneyed past: "Constant was a male and Mrs. Rumfoord was a female, and Constant imagined that he had the means of demonstrating, if given the opportunity, his unquestionable superiority" (21).

Gender, however, is not the only basis of the social hierarchies in these three novels. In Player Piano, the basis is mostly intelligence. Anita reminds Paul that "if someone has brains . . . he can still get to the top" (177); Lasher observes that "the smarter you are the better you are [in this society]" (94). "Bloodlines" (50) are also considered important: Kroner assures Paul that "with the blood you've got in your veins, you've got more than what it'll take to do the job--whatever it is" (186); and Paul and Tom Berringer are allowed to remain in their jobs and even be promoted due to their fathers' past glory. The belief in blue blood nevertheless seems to be founded on the assumption that intelligence is hereditary. Similar is the case with the system's respect for machines and for the professions of managers and engineers. Machines like EPICAC "devaluate human thinking" because they can "think" better than human beings (22). Machines even make human beings seem like "second-rate machines themselves" (274)

when they are measured against men (88) in terms of intelligence. Even managers and engineers, who top the hierarchy of professionals (14), are respected because they have "special kinds of brain power" (95).

The hierarchy in The Sirens of Titan is definitely money-based. Almost all the major characters except for Salo and Boaz are introduced to the reader in terms of their money power. Thus, at the beginning of the novel, Malachi Constant, "the richest American" (11), who is worth three billion dollars (17), pays a visit to Mrs. Winston Niles Rumfoord, who has "seventeen million dollars" (12). We learn that Ransom K. Fern is "the highest-paid executive in the country" with "a salary of a flat million dollars a year--plus stock-option plans and cost-of-living adjustments" (967) and that Rumfoord's calluses are "perfectly even, made by the thousand labors of an active leisure class" (21). Moreover, there is even more evidence in the novel for a money-based class consciousness:

> The Constant family fortune is made without any hard work or particular skill on the part of either Noel or his son. . . . Similarly, Winston Niles Rumfoord exhibits the class consciousness of the wealthy; at one point, he can tell his wife "that was a pretty scene to play before a servant" (55). His army that is destined for almost total destruction is composed almost entirely of the

> poor and the oppressed, yet he deems his goal well worth the sacrifice. (Schatt 41)

The characters' need for a sense of superiority, however, seems even deeper than their reliance on money. Thus, Constant (20), Rumfoord (23), and Fern (69) all express, at one time or another, their fixation with superiority, implying that their being superior to someone else makes their existence justifiable. Furthermore, this hierarchical frame of mind compulsively ranks everything in sight, even planets. Thus, Titan is called the "greatest" among the nine moons of Saturn (265), and Rumfoord praises it for its having the "most pleasant climate imaginable" and the "most beautiful" women (36).

Since a war, World War II, provides the historical ambience for Mother Night, we should not be surprised to find neither intelligence nor money but heroism at the top of its systemic hierarchy of values. When offering Howard Campbell a chance to be an American spy among Nazis, Frank Wirtanen uses as a bait the prospect of Campbell's becoming "an authentic hero, about a hundred times braver than any ordinary man" (40). He trusts this bait to work, because he knows, from his acquaintance with Campbell's plays, that Campbell admires "pure hearts and heroes" and believes in romance (41). Later on, even The White Christian Minuteman pays tribute to Campbell's heroism when it describes him as "one of the most fearless patriots in American History" (56).

We nevertheless should not ignore the theatrical element of Campbell's heroism. Thus, Wirtanen and the Minuteman rightly associate, through romance and history respectively, Campbell's kind of heroism with public attention. Even Campbell admits that "the best reason" for his becoming a spy is that he is "a ham. As a spy . . . I [Campbell] would have an opportunity for some pretty grand acting. I would fool everyone with my brilliant interpretation of a Nazi, inside and out" (41). His sense of theatrical heroism, however, is not obsessively hierarchical. Similarly, even Arnold Marx, who considers Tiglath-Pileser the Third "the most remarkable man the Assyrians ever produced" (19), is not quick to construct an absurd hierarchy, such as the ones we find in the Ilium Works of Player Piano or in The Sirens of Titan:

> Unk's divisional commander was now talking to Unk's regimental commander. Unk's regimental commander spoke to Unk's battalion commander. Unk's battalion commander spoke to Unk's company commander. Unk's company commander spoke to Unk's platoon leader, who was Sergeant Brackman. (103)

The obvious result of this ironic "Great Chain of Being" is that communication and general interaction between individuals can occur only if they are adjacent to each other in the hierarchy.

Thus, the societal infrastructure of the three novels, being one of segregation and hierarchy, attempts to restrict the individual to its rigid mold. Let us now go on to the other two features of the societal system, its deterministic management of power and its ritualistic functioning process.

That "the age-old question of free will" (and hence determinism) is "at the very center of Vonnegut's fiction" (Schatt 9) is evident when we consider the basic plot of the novels in its four stages: the system controls the individual; the individual's will clashes with the will of the system; the system defeats the individual; and the individual is resigned to his fate, with or without regret for having rebelled. Vonnegut's major characters are all therefore victims of a deterministic system that denies them the right to make their "own decisions" for their "own reasons" (Sirens 285). Thus, Paul, Finnerty, and Lasher are defeated in the end by Ilium Works in Player Piano; Rumfoord, Constant, Beatrice, and Salo realize that they have been used for "disgustingly paltry ends" (64) in The Sirens of Titan; and Campbell, Resi, and Kraft, in Mother Night, pretend to be people that they are not and break the system's morality code in the process.

Free will in such a system is deemed to be erratic behavior, especially when it opposes the system. Even machines, such as the Lathe group three (Player 25), the rusty pistol (30), Paul's old car (30), and Finnerty's old

car (40) are misfits "in the slick, streamlined setup, where there . . . [is] no place for erratic behavior" (25). Sometimes the "slick, streamlined setup" might seem to be "a frightful botch, but . . . such a logical, intelligently arrived-at botch that . . . [one] couldn't see how history could possibly have led anywhere else" (Player 114).

The key to success in this deterministic setup is twofold: resigning oneself to the inevitable manipulation by the system and working with the system to enjoy the benefits of being its agent (besides being its inevitable victim). Quite a few of the major characters in our three novels go through these two phases.

As Rumfoord says, "nobody likes to think he's being used" and will understandably "put off admitting it to himself until the last possible instant" (Sirens 285), but Vonnegut's characters do want, as does Paul, "to stop being the instrument," (Player 114) and not to be manipulated against their wills by the system. Constant declares,

> if anybody ever expects to use me again in some tremendous scheme of his . . . [,] he is in for one big disappointment. He will be a lot better off trying to get a rise out of one of these statues. (Sirens 290)

Campbell even compares his own fate to that of a pig in the Chicago Stockyards:

> That's how I feel right now . . . like a pig that's been taken apart, who's had experts find a

> use for every part. By God--I think they even found a use for my squeal! The part of me that wanted to tell the truth got turned into an expert liar! (Mother Night 150)

But in the case of some characters, this posture of protest invariably turns to one of quiet resignation. Paul, Finnerty, and Lasher surrender to the authorities, contented with the "to the record" statement of their rebellion (Player 320). Even the once-arrogant Beatrice comes to the conclusion that "the worst thing that could possibly happen to anybody . . . would be to not be used for anything by anybody" (Sirens 310). Similarly, Boaz resigns himself to his fate by saying, "all I can do is be friendly and keep calm and try and have a nice time till it's over" (202). Furthermore, Salo decides to uphold "the honor of fools by completing the [fool's] errand" (313). Lastly, Campbell also admits defeat and decides to hang himself, after finding the prospect of freedom, or perhaps its illusion, "nauseating" (Mother Night 192). The other characters become either "easily manipulated playthings" (190) such as the majority of the minor characters or pathetic, whining victims such as Rumfoord.

Becoming an agent of the system is the other solution, since Vonnegut's universe is atheistic and is dependent on a series of victim-agents who act as gods in their own spheres of action. Without going into Vonnegut's atheism, we can see in his novels the overall absence of God, except

for the tongue-in-cheek hope of the narrator in the foreword to Player Piano that "God will help them [managers and engineers] to help us all stay alive and free" (7), the absurd god of the fundamentalist love crusaders (Sirens 31-34), and the ineffectual god of the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent who, the Reverend C. Horner Redwine tells Constant, "doesn't care what happens to you. He didn't go to any trouble to get you here safe and sound, any more than He would go to the trouble to kill you" (226).

In the absence of God, the agents of the system play the roles of very functional and patronizing gods, but eventually realize their own victimization by the system. Winston Niles Rumfoord plays this role to perfection. Living mostly in a chrono-synclastic infundibulum, where the past, present, and future co-exist, he can predict the future for his fellow-earthlings. Among other things, he predicts the Martian marriage of Constant and Beatrice (26), their having a child (38), and the exact words that Unk, the space-travelling alter ego of Constant, would utter upon his return from Mercury (228). Being "in actual command of everything on Mars" (129), he is "responsible for everything on Mars" (139). Moreover, on earth he "stages" a theatrical religion (176), the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent. As the "head of this religion, [he] can work miracles . . . [as] the head of no other religion can" (180).

Although Rumfoord occasionally admits that his apparent omnipotence has its limitations, in that the end of the Solar System is a mystery to him (52) and that he cannot radically alter the things in the deterministic system (55), it is only toward the end that he realizes that he is "one of the principal victims" (284) of the system. Then he learns that

> everything that every Earthling has ever done has been warped by creatures on a planet one-hundred-and-fifty thousand light years away. The name of the planet is Tralfamadore. (297)

Christine Brooke-Rose thinks that Tralfamadore itself "too obviously represents pointless Providence, that is, both God and Satan" (261). "Too obviously" or not, Tralfamadore plays a mischievous god not only to Rumfoord and other earthlings, who behave "at all times as though there were a big eye in the sky--as though that big eye were ravenous for entertainment" (Player 276), but also to its own Salo. An awareness of these levels of exploitation in The Sirens of Titan perhaps leads Robert A. Hipkiss to conclude that Sirens "contends with the religious paradox of Gods as omniscient, omnipotent, and beneficient" (44), but one wonders what the paradox is.

Hipkiss also points out that in Mother Night, "the master spy Wirtanen would be as much a manipulator of human beings for the sake of his own God-like satisfactions as [is] . . . Winston Niles Rumfoord" in The Sirens of Titan

(47). Frank Wirtanen, whom Howard Campbell calls his "Blue Fairy Godmother" (Mother Night 45), verbally directs Campbell's future in a grotesque parody of God speaking to Moses, Abraham, Noah, and other Old Testament characters:

> To do your job right . . . you'll have to commit high treason, have to serve the enemy well. You won't ever be forgiven for that, because there isn't any legal device by which you can be forgiven.
>
> The most that will be done for you . . . is that your neck will be saved. But there will be no magic time when you will be cleared . . . (45)

No wonder he causes the sacrificial deaths of seven women and does not feel the least remorseful about them (137). Wirtanen nevertheless later on expresses human compassion for Campbell's war criminal status and tries to rescue him at the risk of committing treason (192).

In another socio-political realm, Campbell also becomes a god. For instance, he creates and nurtures several human elements on both sides of the Atlantic: the Free American Corps in Germany--its uniforms, insignia, and creed (77); the shooting target with the caricature of "a cigar-smoking Jew" (116), his radio broadcasts, and other things that "inspire" the Nazis; and American right-wing extremists such as Vice-Bundesfuehrer Krapptaur, who builds a short-wave receiver in prison in his eagerness to listen to Campbell's broadcasts and dies carrying the suitcases of

Campbell's "wife" (71-73). A photographer even tries to make Campbell "look like a Maxfield Parrish Jesus" with a halo (122). Campbell, however, hangs himself "for crimes against himself" (192), having realized that he is as much his own victim as he is the system's.

The world of Player Piano has even more gods, where machines define and classify men (18), and EPICAC XIV in particular

> would decide for the coming years how many engineers and managers and research men and civil servants, and of what skills, would be needed in order to deliver the goods; and what I.Q. and aptitude levels would separate the useful men from the useless ones, and how many Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps men and how many soldiers could be supported at what pay level and where, and . . . . [ellipsis author's] (117)

The Shah of Bratpuhr, in fact, tests EPICAC to see if it were "a great, all-wise god" (121). The Shah, of course, has godly authority over his own people, who are divided into the elite and the slave-class Takaru (29).

Kroner exercizes a similar influence over Paul. We are told that Paul, in Kroner's presence, "in spite of himself, felt docile, and loving, and childlike" (48) and "struggled resentfully against the urge to pour his heart out to this merciful, wise, gentle father" (128). Moreover, their encounter has the mystical "quality of a

seance, with Kroner as the medium" (128). Even Finnerty has "an air of mysteriousness about him, an implication that he knew of worlds unsuspected by anyone else--a man of unexplained absences and shadowy friends" (84). The list of the "gods" of Player Piano, however, would not be complete without the protagonist Paul Proteus, who attempts "to become the new Messiah" (114). Nevertheless Paul, as a manipulated messiah, "not only satirizes the rewards of the Protestant Work Ethic but also the forms of old religions and the failure of new ones (like the Ghost Shirt Society) to replace them" (Mayo 14).

Almost all these agents of the system are eventually led to a state of quiet resignation through the awareness of their own victimhood. This resignation is reflected in their uncomplaining participation in societal ritual.

The narrator of Player Piano tells us that, to Doctor Lawson Shepherd,

> life seemed to be laid out like a golf course, with a series of beginnings, hazards, and ends, and with a definite summing up--for comparison with others' scores--after each hole. (54)

This is indeed the way the societies of Vonnegut's novels function. Thus, besides the segregation and hierarchy of its infrastructure and the deterministic nature of its power management, the societal system of Vonnegut's novels is also characterized by a ritualistic functioning process that reduces "individual action . . . to sham

theatricality--to gestures without ultimate significance" (Uphaus 168).

"A vestigal [sic] sort of ritual" (Player 127) pervades the world of Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, and Mother Night. The protagonist of Player Piano, Paul Proteus, who is accused by his best friend Finnerty of being "convention-ridden" (140), becomes an observer and participant of the myriad corporate rituals of Ilium Works. At Kroner's dinner party, for instance, "there was little talk, and much pantomimed savoring and beaming to show the hostess that everything tasted first rate" (52). In the corporate world of Player Piano, even a simple telephone conversation involves "the ceremony of official telephone etiquette--time-consuming pomp and circumstance lovingly preserved by the rank-happy champions of efficiency":

> "Is Doctor Proteus on?" said Kroner's secretary. "Doctor Kroner is in."
>
> "Just a moment," said Katharine. "Doctor Proteus, Doctor Kroner is in and will speak to you."
>
> "All right, I'm on."
>
> "Doctor Proteus is on the line," said Katharine.
>
> "Doctor Kroner, Doctor Proteus is on the line."
>
> "Tell him to go ahead," said Kroner.

> "Tell Doctor Proteus to go ahead," said Kroner's secretary.
>
> "Doctor Proteus, please go ahead," said Katharine.
>
> "This is Paul Proteus, Doctor Kroner, I'm returning your call." (108)

One should note here that the obsession with hierarchic distinctions--in the form of "Doctor," "secretary," and so on--is integral to the ritual. The hierarchy and protocol of various professions are outlined, in a quasi-religious way, in a manual (147, 231). This element of ritual in Player Piano seeps into even intimate relationships: "every exchange between Dr and Mrs Proteus is climaxed with the mechanical 'I love you, Paul' and 'I love you, too, Anita'" (Klinkowitz, Kurt Vonnegut 39).

The Sirens of Titan also has plenty of ritual, although its ritual is less satirically exaggerated and is thus less noticed by critics. From the chant of Rev. Bobby Denton and his Love Crusaders (34) to the cries of the sleeper of fraugh, braugh, sup-foe, and floof (318), a sense of cumulative repetition characterizes most of the public communication in the novel. Ritual especially accompanies Rumfoord's career no matter what planet he happens to inhabit. His materializations on Earth and his Martian snare drum with its "rented a tent" songs all culminate in the ritual-ridden religion of the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent. The Church promotes the

selling and buying of the Malachi dolls, the reading of Rumfoord's Authorized Revised Bible and other books, and several routine processions and speeches. This religion of Rumfoord's is, as David H. Goldsmith points out, "spurious; the three people most intimately involved in its inception, Malachi, his wife Beatrice, and son Chrono, are not believers" (2). Even the others' commitment to this movement seems to be based more on peer pressure and an atavistic need for ritual than on any personal beliefs.

Ritual in Mother Night is often associated with the formalism of the Nazis and other right-wing extremists. Thus, the meeting of Vice-Bundesfuehrer August Krapptauer's Iron Guard of the White Sons of the American Constitution is attended by such ceremonial giants as Dr. Lionel J. D. Jones, D.D.S., D.D., the editor of The White Christian Minuteman; Robert Sterling Wilson, the Black Fuehrer of Harlem; and the "unfrocked Paulist" Father Patrick Keeley, the ex-chaplain of a Detroit gun club (63). Aside from these and the twenty guardsmen, who are all blond and over six feet tall (129), the meeting is a mixture of conventional and unconventional rites. Campbell describes an "unconventional touch" that he has "never heard of before, even in Germany" (130):

> The Black Fuehrer stood over a kettledrum in the back of the room. The drum was muffled--muffled, as it happened, by the simulated leopard skin I [Campbell] had worn earlier for a bathrobe. At

> the end of each sentence to the prayer, the Black Fuehrer gave the muffled drum a thump. (131)

Even earlier, Jones and his friends, when going up Campbell's stairs, devise a "curious" and "very strange" chant (63). The Nazi world is so ritualized that even a dog's death seems to be a "ceremony of some nobility" (84), and Nazis such as Werner Noth die a representational death:

> The slave laborers who hanged Noth had no clear idea who he was, beyond the fact that he was somebody important. They hanged him for the satisfaction of hanging somebody important. (87)

If a ritual is elaborate enough, it requires the performers of the ritual to assume certain roles. The Vonnegut universe, in its ritualism, demands of the individual an absolute loyalty to his given role in the system, though not all characters heed its demands. Choice in such a system is therefore limited; one can be a "prisoner" (Reed 208) or a fugitive. Let us examine hence the dynamics of role-play in Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, and Mother Night, for "role playing [occupational or not] and what the role does to one's moral judgment" (Hipkiss 46) constitute a major part of the ritualism of these novels.

Paul's colleague and sympathizer, Edmond Harrison, compares the roles people could play in his society to "one-way streets with cliffs on both sides," where there are "not many crossroads left" (Player 264). Individuals

can either feel comfortable with the "one-way streets" or feel uncomfortable and try to step outside the boundaries of the role. Such uncomplaining characters as Campbell's father, of whom Campbell says, "the man was the job and the job was the man" (Mother Night 31), abound in the system. The Vonnegut character of this category is "little more than his station in life" and, if he is sensitive enough, feels "disembodied" to the point of becoming "an insubstantial wisp, [a] nothingness" (Player 134). He learns to like the "nonsense and posturing" (144); otherwise he has to go through "the big trouble" of "finding something to believe in" (140) and hence does not or cannot question the status quo.

Vonnegut's fictional societies have many straw men. For example, Anita Proteus's "methodical nature" (155) has "the mechanics of marriage down pat, even to the subtlest conventions" (25) and whom "any variation from any norm pained . . . terribly" (246). Baer is even described to be "remarkably machine-like in that the only problems he interested himself in were those brought to him" (187). Other such role-imprisoned characters are Mom Kroner, Kroner's ever-maternal wife-hostess; the Ilium real estate manager, Doctor Pond--the "pipsqueak of a man in a pipsqueak job" with "pipsqueak standards he was willing to lay his pipsqueak life down for" (148); the Reverend C. Horner Redwine and the others of the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent who accepts "handicaps [of weights on

ankles, wrists, chest, and back] gladly" and wears "them proudly everywhere" (Sirens 221); the figurehead Presidents of the United States in Player Piano (119) and in The Sirens of Titan (59); "the nominal commander of the entire army" of Mars, Borders M. Pulsifer (Sirens 116-7); and, as Robert Hipkiss would assert, even Werner Noth, Adolf Eichmann, and some other Nazis in Mother Night (Hipkiss 48). But Hipkiss also thinks that "success in . . . [these] roles . . . leads to overplaying, going beyond the boundaries of the role, as the actor is corrupted by a sense of power" (47).

A transitional character between the two categories of prisoners and fugitives is Doctor Ewing J. Halyard of the state department. He plays the obedient role of the "utterly perfect host" (Player 229) to the Shah of Bratpuhr throughout the novel. However, Halyard privately thinks that "the President of the United States of America, Jonathan Lynn" (117), is a "gorgeous dummy" (119). Later on, stripped of his doctoral, master's, and bachelor's degrees because the computers think that his "physical-education requirements" at the bachelor's level have not been fully met (200), Halyard hates the system but does not rebel.

The list of the fugitives from the system is also fairly long, but these volunteer outsiders, however many they are, are bound to fail against a deterministic system, even when they all band together as in the Ghost Shirt

Movement of Player Piano. Paul, Finnerty, Calhoun, Lasher, and other "Ghost Shirts" of Player Piano, Beatrice, Constant, Chrono, and Salo of The Sirens of Titan, and Campbell, Resi, Kraft, and Wirtanen of Mother Night all capitulate to the system, but only after rebelling. These characters refuse to indulge in what David Y. Hughes calls "spontaneous standardized regressive role-playing" (110) that we see even in the unconventional conduct of conventional people: for instance, in the presence of the Jewish Dr. Epstein, "the two antique fascists" Jones and Keeley are "childishly respectful and dependent" (Mother Night 72), switching quickly from the role of anti-Semites to that of attentive friends of the patient.

Furthermore, Jones and Keeley might jump from one role to another, but they do not have the higher consciousness of knowing the arbitrary nature of all roles that many of the "fugitives" have. Howard Campbell, the protagonist of Mother Night, is of all the Vonnegut rebels the most vocal advocate of this need to see beyond all roles. He draws "in the dust of three window-panes . . . a swastika, a hammer and sickle, and the Stars and Stripes" and gives "a hearty cheer for each symbol, demonstrating to Kraft the meaning of patriotism to, respectively, a Nazi, a Communist, and an American" (69) and, when asked which symbol he likes best, says that he has "no political opinions at all" (75). Even in Campbell's choice of spying as a vocation we can see, as does Jerome Klinkowitz, the

philosophical relativism of roles and other group-identities:

> Unlike the arbitrary associations of peoples and groups that have taken upon themselves the absolute and assumedly God-given identity of nations, those who spy can never forget that all is relative, everything is made up, and nothing means more or less than one decides it to mean. (Kurt Vonnegut 47)

However, whether he is playing a playwright, a spy, an unknowing radio messenger (34, 136), a piece of war surplus surrounded by other war surplus (46), a war criminal on trial in Israel, or "a citizen of nowhere" (119), Campbell still "has a bad conscience about what he did in the war" (24). But when they accuse Campbell of avoiding moral responsibility, critics such as Stanley Schatt are so preoccupied with Campbell's war criminal phase that they mistake Campbell's role-relativism for the "smug amusement" of moral relativism. Schatt declares that

> Campbell seeks escape [from reality] by creating his own world--one in which he can watch his actions as a Nazi with detachment and even with smug amusement, secure in the knowledge that he is actually only acting. (47)

Schatt goes on to accuse Campbell of "pragmatically . . . [easing] his pain by assuming the role of spectator and by observing his two identities, representing evil and

goodness, perform in a morality play" (49). In mistaking Campbell's role-relativism for moral relativism, Schatt ignores that Campbell in particular and similar Vonnegut fugitives in general are good people with a conscience who, in trying to beat an oppressive and arbitrary role-system, commit illegal and immoral acts and live to repent them.

Instead of mocking the arbitrary role-system by playing several mutually-contradictory roles with abandon and a flourish, Campbell of course could have stayed completely out of the system, as Alfy Tucci of Player Piano does: "He isn't anybody's and never will be. He never joined anything" because "it's all he can do to figure out what he represents without trying to represent a thousand other people besides" (281). But Luke Lubbock, "who can be what his clothes are" (112), seems to believe, as does Campbell, that the only way one can belong to no group is by joining several randomly. This belief seems to guide Luke's exchange of a pageant performer's uniform for that of a busboy (189) and later on, for that of the Ghost Shirts (277).

Vonnegut uses uniforms--and clothing in general--as a metaphor to separate the role-relativists from the role-absolutists among his characters. Unlike role-absolutists, who wear their uniforms to remind themselves of what they "think and stand for" (Player 97), role-relativists don theirs fully conscious of the separation between the self and the uniform. Sometimes, as in the case of the Ghost

Shirts of Player Piano, they do it for a purpose, although uniforms are "childish--like Hitler's Brown Shirts, like Mussolini's Black Shirts." But they've "got to be a little childish . . . to get the big following" (274) they need. Thus, Paul puts on denim overalls (166) or "removes his engineer's coat for an old leather one" to symbolically reject "the values of his own society" (Schatt 21), and Rumfoord wears his Parachute Ski Marine uniform, although

> he was not actually a practicing Parachute Ski Marine. But he was free to wear any uniform that caught his fancy, regardless of how much hell anybody else had to go through for the privilege. (Sirens 159)

Even Malachi Constant goes from "the dashing uniform of a lieutenant-colonel in the Assault Infantry" of Mars (159) to "a clinking breechclout made of wrenches and copper wire" (217) to a Rumfoord-designed "one piece, lemon-yellow, rubberized,. . . and ideally skin-tight" suit of clothes with "orange question marks a foot high" on the front and back that signify "that the Space Wanderer would not know who he was" (218). Campbell of course epitomizes the role-relativist disdain for formal clothing when he prefers "a blue serge suit and a moth-eaten coat with a fur collar" to a blue and gold uniform (Mother Night 33), and later on Resi even accuses him of putting on his Free American Corps uniform "just for killing the dog" (83).

The arbitrariness of the clothes of these role-relativists is to be contradistinguished from the clothes of the role-absolutists such as Kroner, who attempts to become informal by replacing "his double-breasted suit coat with a single-breasted one of a slightly lighter shade and with suede patches at the elbows" (Player 123), and Gelhorne, whose "single concession to the Meadows' tradition of informality was an unbuttoned collar and the sliding of his necktie knot a fraction of an inch below where it should have been" (217). Even in group situations, we can see the difference between "the flamboyantly and enigmatically costumed marchers" (98) of the Homestead processions, the Ghost Shirts (217), and the Magic Shirts (273) and the corporate executives of the Meadows with their fanatical identification with the colors of their teams' shirts.

The systemic identity of the Vonnegut character is thus a product of the infrastructure, power management, and functioning process of the society around the individual. We can now go on to investigate how this stultifying system affects the epistemological makeup of the individual characters in our triad of novels.

The characters of Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, and Mother Night have three major epistemological limitations: one, their identity is overshadowed by their fathers and/or father-figures; two, they are corrosively surrounded by untruth of various forms and origins; and

three, perhaps due to the preceding limitations and the systemic ones discussed above, they are often unable to feel and know reality.

In the anti-Freudian Vonnegut universe, men owe the shape of their psyches preponderantly to their fathers and very little to their mothers. Some find their fathers, as does Paul, "enervating and emasculating" (Player 48), and others acknowledge them as a definitive influence on their lives, as do Malachi Constant and, to a lesser extent, Howard Campbell. As I mentioned earlier in my discussion of the hierarchy in the society of Player Piano, Paul's father had "a lot to do with Paul's getting to be manager of Ilium" (66). Morever, most of Paul's relationships are conditioned by the others' image of Paul's father and their view of Paul as an eventual replacement of his father. Thus, Anita has a picture of Paul's father enlarged, framed, and displayed prominently "where he [Paul] could see it the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night" (66). We are also told that, aside from Anita, "Kroner, too, kept alive the notion that Paul could be expected to follow in his father's footsteps" (66).

Besides feeling "sheepish, like a charlatan" when he thinks about the nepotism involved, Paul is also "troubled by the image of the father" (Lundquist 25) in his constant measuring of himself against his father. He even finds himself lacking his father's capacity to take charge of the situation (Player 38) and "to really give a damn" (67).

Later on accused of hating and wanting to "destroy" his own father, Paul admits, understandably, to the "unpleasant business" between him and the memory of his father (298-9).

For a "guy [who] was hardly ever home" (85), Paul's father becomes a major influence in Paul's life not only as a memory but also as the model of his father-figures such as Kroner and Finnerty. Thus, Kroner tells Paul, "now that your father's gone, I feel it's sort of up to me to watch out for you" (126), and Finnerty uses his mysterious influence (84) over Paul to manipulate him into rebelling against the system and, symbolically, against his own father. In his pathological need for father-figures, Paul tries to convert even Thomas Edison into "the old man" (slang for father); he invokes Edison's name often (14-16, 20, 86) and at one point even wishes that "Edison could be with him to see" the last welding-machine group, because "the old man would have been enchanted" (16).

Some of the other characters of Player Piano are also warped by their fathers and father-figures in that Berringer (50), Haycox (151-2), and even the barber (195) present themselves as dynastic extensions of their fathers, and Kroner, Baer, and other such "gods" patronize the whole system as father-figures.

Malachi Constant, though much less oppressed by his father and his father's memory than is Paul by his, has an equally derivative identity. Malachi, Noel's son by his chambermaid Florence Whitehill, does not meet his father

until he is twenty-one, but five years from then his life is instantly transformed by his father's money and money-making formula (Sirens 80-83). "Ignorant, vulgar, and brash" like his father, Malachi also has his father's "dumb luck" (69) and thus goes on to make more money until he attracts Rumfoord's attention. From then on, Rumfoord as his father-figure directs the course of his life. Rumfoord, like Kroner to the employees of Ilium Works in Player Piano, also plays father-figure to at least three planets.

Howard Campbell of Mother Night is less father-dependent than either Paul Proteus or Malachi Constant. But his German connection, and through the German connection perhaps most of his eventful life, is a product of his father's decision to move to Germany (32). He also shares his (symbolic?) tone-deafness with his father and obviously not his "musical mother" (192). Moreover, when proposing his mechanical theory of the totalitarian mind (162), Campbell pays tribute even to his father's indirect influence on him:

> for me to attempt such a mechanical explanation is perhaps a reflection of the father whose son I was. Am. When I pause to think about it, which is rarely, I am, after all, the son of an engineer. (163)

Although during Campbell's childhood, his father is "seldom home" (32) as is Paul's, the comparison ends there. Not

his father, but his father-figures in the form of Frank Wirtanen and the two vying fatherlands Germany and America coordinate and decide the rest of his life for him. Thus, the basic plot of Mother Night can be read as Howard Campbell's futile attempt to throw off his paternal yoke. Incidentally, the fact that the protagonists of these three novels have either no children or at least none that, as in the case of Malachi Constant and his son Chrono, acknowledge their fatherhood might seem to imply that the paternal eclipse of identity ends its cycle with the protagonists, but given the role history plays in these novels, that conclusion would be venturesome.

In a larger philosophical sense, history plays father-figure to the Vonnegut characters. In seeming to repeat itself, history reminds the characters of their unoriginality. Thus, Paul examines the history of Ilium and finds no essential improvement in things:

> Here, in the basin of the river bend, the Mohawks had overpowered the Algonquins, the Dutch the Mohawks, the British the Dutch, the Americans the British. Now, over bones and rotten palings and cannon balls and arrowheads, there lay a triangle of steel and masonry buildings, a half-mile on each side--the Ilium Works. Where men had once howled and hacked at one another, and fought nip-and-tuck with nature as well, the machines hummed and whirred and clicked, and made parts for baby

> carriages and bottle caps, motorcycles and refrigerators, television sets and tricycles--the fruits of peace. (Player 11)

The modern peace that produces such fruits is no better than the violence of the past and is in fact a mutation of it, for motorcycles, refrigerators, television sets, and so on are definitely not symbols of peace. Another Vonnegut protagonist, Howard Campbell, traces his crimes to an even more ancient time:

> I am surrounded by ancient history. Though the jail in which I rot is new, some of the stones in it, I'm told, were cut in the time of King Solomon.
>
> And sometimes, when I look out through my cell window at the gay and brassy youth of the infant Republic of Israel, I feel that I and my war crimes are as ancient as Solomon's old gray stones. (Mother Night 18)

Given such non-progressive historical determinism, individual endeavor, good or bad, is destined to be futile and unoriginal. It seems to be just some more "old, old stuff" (Player 21). Thus, the "cruel world" to which Campbell says "goodbye" and "auf wiedersehen" (Mother Night 192) is cruel partly because it employs fathers and father-figures to discourage their sons from developing a personal knowledge of reality.

A direct consequence of this alienation from reality is the characters' finding a haven in untruth. Howard Campbell seems to be an apt example of this addiction to untruth. Thus, in his editor's note to Mother Night, Kurt Vonnegut tries to establish Howard Campbell as an unreliable narrator:

> To say that he [Campbell] was a writer is to say that the demands of art alone were enough to make him lie, and to lie without seeing any harm in it. To say that he was a playwright is to offer an even harsher warning to the reader, for no one is a better liar than a man who has warped lives and passions onto something as grotesquesly artificial as a stage. (ix)

However, if we agree with Vonnegut and critics such as William Veeder in their assumption that Howard Campbell is "potentially unreliable" "because all artists are liars" (Veeder 111), we mistake fiction for lying and entertainment for deception. Furthermore, we would ignore the literary imperative to find the narrator unreliable on the basis of his recurrent self-contradiction and deviation from verifiable truth and not on the basis of his profession. These reasons, together with the fact that Campbell lies to the other characters and to himself, but not to the reader, give the reader no cause to suspect Campbell's reliability vis-a-vis the reader. This is not to underestimate the significance of the lies that Campbell

and the other Vonnegut characters indulge in, which they do repeatedly; they even surround themselves with untruth. But the effect of this untruth is "inner-directed" and thus more "terrifying" (Hughes 108) than mere unreliability. Before we analyze the epistemological consequences of untruth, however, let us examine the nature of untruth in Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, and Mother Night.

If we define truth as that which accords with the actuality inside the novel, untruth in these novels takes two major forms: the characters' incidental lies and their assuming one or more false identities with the confidence that they have the "gift" to "be many things at once--all sincerely" (Mother Night 144). Since our standard is the actuality inside the novel, we consider to be true Vonnegut's made-up concepts such as chrono-synclastic infundibula (Sirens 14), fictitious languages such as the Shah of Bratpuhr's (Player 26), and pseudo-documentation such as the book Christ Was Not a Jew (Mother Night 60) or the periodical White Christian Minuteman (55). We moreover restrict our examination of the characters' lies to verbal ones and exclude non-verbal ones such as Paul's pretense of sharing Finnerty's thoughts (Player 85-6), of drunkenness (216), and of being asleep (240), Wanda Hagstrohm's pretending to adjust the non-existent dials of the range (162), and Bernard Mengel's playing dead to escape death (Mother Night 24).

The protagonists of these three novels have no qualms about incidental "white lies." The otherwise-honest Paul Proteus lies with ease and to several people. He tells Kroner's wife that he has had a "swell" time with Kroner and his guns (Player 131), Doctor Pond that the farm would be Paul's hobby and "a plaything" (148), Garth that Kroner just told him it is good to have him there (186), and the Homestead prostitute that he is his own "half-brother" (246). The other two characters of Player Piano that are said to have lied--Lasher about the fictitious death of his fictitious son (90) and Khashdrahr in his polite translation of the Shaw's lewd statement (228)--do it only once and with the same acute self-consciousness that characterizes Paul's lies. Perhaps they, unlike Rumfoord of The Sirens of Titan and Eichmann of Mother Night, have not "anesthetized themselves from any form of moral sensitivity" (Prioli 45) toward untruth.

Although the narrator of The Sirens of Titan tells us that the "cock-and-bull story told to Beatrice is one of the few known instances of Winston Niles Rumfoord's having told a lie" (58), not only does Rumfoord refrain from telling and admitting the whole truth throughout the novel, but he even admires the "thumping good fraud" (50) created by the "charming liar" Martin Koradubian (49). Rumfoord's lying (and that of Rev. Denton who damns modern scientists by comparing them to the builders of the Tower of Babel) is seldom self-conscious as is, for instance, Ransom Fern's

when he makes up United Hotcakes Preferred as "a favorite joke of his" (70).

Of all the Vonnegut characters that lie, Howard Campbell is the only one to make a distinction between lying "without noticing it" (Mother Night 124) and lying "a coward's lie" (160). He says,

> I always know when I tell a lie, am capable of imagining the cruel consequences of anybody's believing my lies, know cruelty is wrong. I could no more lie without noticing it than I could unknowingly pass a kidney stone. (124)

In his lying to Helga (43), Kraft (52), Heinz (92), Resi (160), and his prospective employer (54), Campbell is certainly self-conscious--he admits on each occasion that he lied--and on a moral level, his lies can be seen as distinct from those of "classic totalitarian" minds (162) such as Krapptauer, Jones, and Eichmann. Thus, when Krapptauer declares that the Pope is a Jew (63) and when Jones compliments Campbell as an ex-Nazi "for having the courage to tell the truth . . . when everybody else was telling lies" (70), they believe in their own ludicrous lies. Campbell draws our attention to this moral and epistemological disorder when analyzing Eichmann's claim that he was "simply a soldier . . . taking orders from higher-ups":

> Eichmann cannot distinguish between right and wrong--. . . not only right and wrong, but truth

> and falsehood, hope and despair, beauty and ugliness, kindness and cruelty, comedy and tragedy, are all processed by Eichmann's mind indiscriminately, like birdshot through a bugle. (123-4)

Campbell thinks that he is morally worse off than Eichmann and company because in his case it could not be said, "Forgive him--he knows not what he does" (124). Whether morally better or worse, his indulgence in untruth is the same epistemological disease that Eichmann's is; the disease in both cases results in the weakening of Campbell's and Eichmann's grasp of reality.

Vonnegut's warning that "we are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (Mother Night 5) aptly covers those of his characters who lie about their true identities for a long period of time and not those that briefly assume a false identity. Thus, Paul briefly "becomes" a grocery store owner (Player 74) and his own half-brother (246), the millionaire Noel Constant "a trader in stamps" (Sirens 75), and his son Malachi the imaginary Jonah K. Rowley (45) with a false beard (11). Even the two male Martians on one occasion pretend to be a man and a woman (92): George M. Helmholtz, "a former bandmaster" and Roberta Wiley, "a former teacher of algebra" (86). But these guises do not affect them as do the long-term "grand acting" (Mother Night 41) roles of Howard Campbell as a Nazi and a New Yorker under an assumed

name (34), the Jewish Heinz Schildknecht as a Nazi (188), the Jewish Arpad Kovacs as an SS man (22), Resi Noth as Helga Noth (103), Harold J. Sparrow as Frank Wirtanen (192), Iona Potapov as George Kraft (48), Earl Moncrief the Prime Minister of Earthling Affairs as Earl Moncrief the butler (Sirens 172), and Chrono Constant as a bluebird (306).

This tyranny of the long-term make-believe has an aftermath that is varied and ruinous. Campbell, whose real identity only "three people in all the world" (Mother Night 138) know, does "fool everybody" (41), including those three (138), into thinking that he is a Nazi, thanks to his "brilliant interpretation of a Nazi, inside and out." But he complains that no one knows his honest self that he "hid so deep inside" (41) and decides to hang himself "for crimes against himself" (192). In ignoring the epistemological fact that his identity or self-knowledge is incomplete without the Other's knowledge of him, Campbell plays a deadly game with his own mind, the stakes of which are not only schizophrenia (Mother Night 133, Schatt 45-6) and multiple personalities but an identity that is gradually being eaten away by a sense of unreality. Kraft quite appropriately calls him Don Quixote. Kraft is also justified in calling Resi Dulcinea del Toboso and himself Sancho Panza (127), because even they are guilty of the same crime as Campbell's. It is no wonder that Kraft is still thought of as Kraft by Campbell even after knowing

his real identity as Potapov (48), and Resi insists on being Helga (105). However, Resi does eventually come to terms with her real self (106).

Although Paul lies about his true identity only for a brief period of time, even he runs into the inflexible wall of the Other when playing an unwilling double agent between the establishment and the Ghost Shirts. Thus,

> the managers and engineers still believed he was their man; the Ghost Shirt Society was just as convinced that he belonged to them, and both had demonstrated that there was no middle ground for him. (Player 288-9)

As a consequence of his playing these two false roles, Paul finds that his identity is subverted by both the camps: when he quits Ilium Works, he does not have "the satisfaction of telling someone he'd quit, [and] of being believed" (227), and he is reduced to a figurehead among the Ghost Shirts with no meaningful duties, not even getting to sign his own signature (286). At the conclusion of the novel, he regains only part of his lost identity; in his copycat imitation of Lasher's "to the record" remark he even seems as artificial as the false teeth that we encounter in The Sirens of Titan (43) and Mother Night (58).

But it is just as possible for an individual to weaken his identity by underestimating the Other as it is by overestimating the Other through a preoccupation with what

others think of him. Vonnegut, however, does not employ the latter technique except in Anita Proteus, who is, for instance, more concerned about her husband being seen in the company of prostitutes than she is about his being with them (Player 113). She is nevertheless not as enslaved by untruth as are the characters we have discussed above, either through telling an incidental lie or through living a long-term lie. Incidentally, these characters' addiction to unreality is obviously not just "a continual contest" "between the inner space of imagination [as a means of self-actualization] and the outer space of history," as Robert W. Uphaus believes (166).

The Vonnegut character is thus subjected to the following influences: he is pigeonholed into a hierarchy; he is robbed of his free will; he is subsumed by his ritualistic role; he is invalidated by his father and/or father-figures; and he is made unreal to the extent of his immersion in untruth. These influences have an epistemological consequence in the characters' desensitization to reality.

Clinton S. Burhans, Jr. tells us that Vonnegut's world is absurd "beyond knowing" (174). Stanley Schatt blames pluralism for this unknowability when he asserts that "as is the case with all of Vonnegut's protagonists Campbell lives in a pluralistic universe in which it is impossible to determine just what is real" (49). Quoting from T. S. Chang's Epistemological Pluralism that the "external world

is relatively, though not absolutely, unknowable" (Chang 25, Schatt 50), Schatt even declares that

> the very form of Mother Night suggests that reality is unknowable since the novel's narrative structure leads the reader through the complex maze of Campbell's mind and deposits him, on the final page, in a corner facing a blank wall. (50)

Schatt is wrong for two reasons: pluralism allows for several equally real truths and does not, as Schatt claims, make it "impossible to determine just what is real"; and Chang deduces from pluralism that reality is only partially knowable--not entirely unknowable as Schatt stretches it to be. Even the structure of Mother Night implies not the unknowability of reality but the difficulty involved in "trying to separate the real from the fake" (53), especially when the protagonist pretends to be something he is not (v) and, like some other solipsistic characters of Vonnegut, "wastes all his energies on games with himself" (Player 140). Lastly, Schatt commits another fallacy when he misreads experiential unreality as the a priori impossibility of absolute knowledge. This experiential unreality is the consequence of all the systemic and epistemological limitations that we have examined so far and thus constitutes the thesis of Vonnegut's rhetoric of identity. Very little of this sense of unreality, unlike that of Jean Paul Sartre's Nausea and Albert Camus' L'Etranger, is due to the existentialist obsession with

"finding something to believe in" (Player 140) and "to belong" somewhere (293), which obsession Vonnegut in fact lampoons in the mass suicide of the Tralfamadoreans (Sirens 274-5).

The experiential unreality in Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, and Mother Night is presented through the supernatural nuances of the characters' perceptions, their inability to feel certain emotions, their difficulty in "knowing" the things around them, and their general feelings of non-existence. The supernatural tinge to the perceptions of the Vonnegut characters is a reaction to or a dialectical product of their environment: in Player Piano, it is a reaction to the drab reality of machines and machine-like people; in The Sirens of Titan, it is the magical dimension of the ultra-rational Space Age; and in Mother Night, it is the personal romance element of Campbell's international crimes. In Player Piano, the "enigmatically costumed marchers" (98) of the processions, the Ghost Shirts (217), and the Magic Shirts (273) all involve the magical recreations of Arabs and/or American Indians against the backdrop of the inane technology and bureaucracy of Ilium Works, and we find a transcendental rebel against the system in Luke Lubbock with

> his features sour with the tragic stoicism of a dispossessed redskin . . . wearing a white shirt fringed in an imitation of a buckskin shirt, and decorated with thunderbird and stylized buffalo

> worked into the fabric with brightly insulated bits of wire. (274)

Here the intermingling of the "insulated bits of wire" with the more ancient elements and the fact that the buckskin shirt is only an imitation may symbolize that Luke even in his hybrid identity is stamped with the drab decadence of the technological present.

The supernatural nuances of The Sirens of Titan are the "metaphysic derived from the new [post-Einsteinian] physics" (Nadeau 45) with its endless possibilities. Thus, a crowd gathers outside the Rumfoord mansion in Newport, Rhode Island,

> because there was to be a materialization. A man and his dog were going to materialize, were going to appear out of thin air--wispily at first, becoming, finally, as substantial as any man and dog alive. (Sirens 8)

Besides the "mysteries" (9) of Rumfoord's materializations and dematerializations, the world of The Sirens of Titan also has a good deal of lyrical, non-technical space travel between planets and between galaxies and many an "enchanting accident" (225) such as the visual effect of a step backward "transforming" Beatrice into "a frightened, lonely woman in a tremendous house" and that of Constant "becoming" "the bottommost point in a whirlpool of fate" on "crossing the bright zodiac on the foyer floor" (42).

However, it is not the supernatural itself but the way the characters use it that loosens their grasp on reality and undercuts their identity. The Ghost Shirts of Player Piano use it in their futile attempt to reincarnate their lost identity into an American Indian scenario, and Rumfoord and company of The Sirens of Titan, through their ultra-scientific ambience that unites science with the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent and its rituals, employ it to give themselves a sense of false security against the almighty deterministic system. Thus, we find Alice in Wonderland aptly invoked in the contexts of the Ghost Shirt meetings (Player 274) and the entrance to the Rumfoord estate (Sirens 10). The supernatural in Mother Night, though present much less than in the other two novels, helps Campbell evade, through "romance" (41), not only the fact of his wife's death (53) but also the accountability of the non-literary real world.

Another symptom of the experiential unreality in these novels is the characters' incapacity to feel certain emotions. Thus, we find the fictitious author Crowther Gomburg's description of Magnum Opus, Inc. as "a product of a complex of inabilities to love" (Sirens 81) applicable to the world of The Sirens of Titan itself, where Rumfoord never learns to love and the few others--Constant, Beatrice, and Boaz--that delight in giving and sharing do so only toward the end. Campbell goes even further; he teaches himself "never to feel guilt," "to covet nothing,"

"to do without love," and "never to expect anything from" God (Mother Night 167). When tempted to take morphine to "feel happy," Campbell realizes that he already has an effective narcotic in his "ability to let . . .[his] emotions be stirred by only one thing--[his]. . . love for Helga" (47). We learn that he is fond of Heinz only "to the extent that . . . [he is] capable of being fond of anybody" (92). Campbell cannot feel any patriotism either because "those imaginary lines [that separate nations] are as unreal to [him] . . . as elves and pixies" (103). Even Resi points out, before she commits suicide, that Campbell "is so used up that he can't love any more. There is nothing left of him but curiosity and a pair of eyes" (166). This emotional amputation is evident even in Bernard Mengel, who, "like almost everybody else who came through that war," "couldn't feel anything" while preparing Rudolf Hoess for execution (25).

Paul Proteus and some of the others of Player Piano do feel a range of emotions, but quite often the emotions seem automatic, much like the "automatic" environment Paul is in to which he responds symbolically (in a sentence that is possibly Vonnegut's worst):

> He looked helplessly at the automatic ticket vendor, the automatic nylon vendor, the automatic coffee vendor, the automatic gum vendor, the automatic book vendor, the automatic newspaper vendor, the automatic toothbrush vendor, the

> automatic Coke vendor, the automatic shoeshine machine, the automatic photo studio, and walked into the deserted streets on the Homestead side of the river.

Paul then proceeds to visit a prostitute (automatic relationship perhaps?) next door to "the Automagic Market" (Player 245). Earlier, Paul feels "somehow inadequate, bumbling, in the presence of her [Anita's] beautiful assurance," but it annoys him "that the feeling should be automatic" (38). We find the same machine-like responses in Paul not only in his "automatic reply . . . 'And I love you, Anita,'" (246) but also in his "docile" reactions to Kroner's presence (47-8, 128). Occasionally this emotional automatonism even seems to be a societal characteristic as when Paul notices that the clone-filled "crowd [at the Meadows] had miraculously become a sort of homogenized pudding" of emotions so much that "it was impossible to tell where one ego left off and the next began" (191). Of course, the title Player Piano itself suggests a system in which "the keys move, and a ghost seems to play" (Hughes 111) symbolizing the individual's inability to connect with his own feelings with some degree of immediacy.

An individual's sense of unreality can also deepen when he finds it difficult to "know" the things around him. The Vonnegut character, with all the limitations imposed on his knowledge-acquisition processes, goes around like Paul's car with one of its headlights "busted" (73), being

able to perceive only part of reality. Paul, for instance, finds the approach of even a crisis unreal and resigns himself to a shaky sense of optimism when "lacking a decisive plan for meeting it [the crisis], he forced a false tranquility on himself--a vague notion that everything would come out all right in the end, the way it always had for him" (179).

Unk is even more blatantly allegorical in his representation of the mentally-controlled in the Vonnegut universe. His memory as Malachi Constant is erased at the base hospital where thinking is treated as a "mental illness." He "wouldn't have even known his own name was Unk, wouldn't even have known he was a soldier, if they hadn't told him so when they discharged him from the hospital" (101). As he acquires each scrap of knowledge he incorporates it into a letter that he is writing to himself (Sirens 124-132), and he is delighted when he knows something "for sure" (208). Through his letter, he becomes his own teacher when his memory is erased again, and although he resumes his thinking, like a child, with "another glimpse of the world around him" (103), every time he thinks an unauthorized thought "the antenna in his head brought him to attention . . . and his mind went blank" (102-3). In this condition of "blanks and glimpses" (103), he is forced to kill his own best friend (104) whom he does not recognize and spends the rest of his life looking for him and feeling "a hopeless wish to understand" (225).

Moreover, Boaz's dictum, "Don't truth me, and I won't truth you" (202) seems to indicate the general atmosphere of unshared knowledge in the world of Sirens; thus, in a seemingly knowledge-based society, "nobody knows why it [the only city on Mars] is called Phoebe" (127) and "no one knew for certain how the first [Tralfamadorean] machine had come into being" (274).

In contrast to Unk, Howard Campbell does not suffer from any sense of unreality so far as his sensory knowledge is concerned. He tells us, "Anything I see or hear or feel or taste or smell is real to me. I am so much a credulous plaything of my senses that nothing is unreal to me" (Mother Night 154). But elsewhere he says,

> Persons I never saw gave me my instructions, told me in which sentences of a broadcast the mannerisms were to appear. I do not know to this day what information went out through me. (34)

Some of that information, he learns later on, is "the coded announcement" of his wife's disappearance, and he "broadcast it without even knowing what . . . [he] was doing." Thus, he informs us, "One part of me told the world of the tragedy in code. The rest of me did not even know that the announcement was being made" (136). It is this division of the epistemological Self that makes Campbell apply for a job "simply to demonstrate to . . . [himself] that there really was such a person as . . . [he]" (54).

The last symptom that we find of experiential unreality in these three novels is the characters' general feelings of non-existence. Thus, Finnerty rightly accuses Paul of being "afraid to live" (Player 140), and the Shah's message to the Hagstrohms is "Live!" (163), for living itself is not just a biological fact but the individualized expression of free will in knowing and enriching reality, even in a universe such as that of The Sirens of Titan where the word existence acquires new meanings in characters such as Rumfoord--who exists as a part-wave part-human phenomenon--and Salo--a robot with human feelings. Stranded in a space ship on Mercury, Unk expresses a similar thought when he says to Boaz, "I've never been alive that I can remember, . . . I thought I was finally going to get some living done" (Sirens 194). We find that even his father, Noel Constant, has experienced this living death:

> If I wasn't a very good father or a very good anything that was because I was as good as dead for a long time before I died. Nobody loved me and I wasn't very good at anything and I couldn't find any hobbies I liked and I was sick and tired of selling pots and pans and watching television so I was as good as dead and I was too far gone to ever come back. (90-91)

Even Campbell calls himself a dead man (Mother Night 53).

However, it is important to note here that these characters' feelings of being already dead are neither a sentimental death wish nor an existentialist lack of the will to live but an experiential distance between the mind and the body wherein one fails to grasp the concreteness of one's reality. We can also safely surmise that this experiential counterpart of Cartesian skepticism regarding one's own existence is due to either lack of free will as in Paul of Player Piano and the soldiers in the Martian army--Unk has "the eerie feeling that he and Boaz . . . [are] the only real people" there (Sirens 112)--or a solipsistic privacy as in Campbell, who asserts, "everything about me's private" (Mother Night 76) and whose real identity only three people in the world know (138) and Frank Wirtanen, of whom Campbell says, "Nobody believes in him but me" (41) and who has to declare, "I exist. I can be seen, heard, and touched almost any day" (192). Perhaps this doubt about one's realness necessarily co-exists with doubts about the realness of everything else. Understandably, a few of these characters earnestly try to distinguish between reality and dreams (Sirens 207, Mother Night 189), hallucinations (Sirens 46), and illusions (Mother Night 47).

So far we have examined the systemic and epistemological ways through which the characters in Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, and Mother Night lose their identities. The individuals thus face not only the

external pressure of the societal system through segregation, determinism, and stultifying ritual, but also their internal subversion by fathers and father-figures, by untruth, and by their inability to "know" reality. The identity thus lost, however, is only partially regained by the character.

Edward Grossman states that typically "the Vonnegut hero" "tries to redeem himself by dropping out" (41). True, but the Vonnegut protagonist (and some of the other major characters) can never truly redeem himself because he can never truly drop out. Paul's "feeling of [a] fresh, strong identity growing within him" (Player 102), for example, is modified at the end to the resignation of a shrug when he realizes that the people of Ilium are "already eager to recreate the same old nightmare" (320). Thus, the characters' regaining of identity can at most only be partial, for in Vonnegut's universe the individual's free will never wins against the deterministic system, leaving him with the alternatives of either regaining part of his identity through a brief rebellion and eventual surrender to the system or committing suicide.

Paul also tells Anita that "it'd be easy enough to stick with the system, and keep going right on up" but "it's getting out that takes nerve" (176). Not surprisingly then, few individuals in our three novels opt to commit "career suicide" (226), as do Paul, Finnerty, Garth (252), and Harrison (226), thinking that it is

"better to be nothing than a blind doorman at the head of civilization's parade" (227). Thus, the majority of even the Ghost Shirt Society, ostensibly composed of noble rebels, does not essentially leave the system because it still clings to the old feelings of hate:

> The Ghost Shirt Society, then, was simply a convenient and dramatic title for a businesslike group, a title whose historical roots were of interest principally to Lasher and his disciple Finnerty . . . . For the rest, simple commentaries, special personal resentments, were reasons enough for joining anything that promised a change for the better. (278)

The true "fugitives" therefore are limited to Paul, Finnerty, Harrison, Lasher, and a few others in Player Piano, Constant, Beatrice, Boaz, and Salo in The Sirens of Titan, and Campbell and Resi in Mother Night, although the psychological benefits of rebellion are different in each case.

Through this "completely new perspective" (169), Paul finds "each new inconvenience" irresistible (147), feels "a generalized love--particularly for the little people" (102) and a sense of being "at one . . . with all humanity and the universe" (101) and, even though his rebellion does not amount to much socially, becomes a "somebody" (320). Likewise, Finnerty exclaims, "At last I'm finding myself" (139), and Harrison is "powerfully . . . compelled to love

and help others" (265); but only Lasher, unlike Paul and others, remains in "touch with reality" and does not get carried away with the partial regaining of his identity:

> He, alone of the four leaders, seemed unshocked by the course of events, undisturbed by them, even, inexplicably, at peace. Paul, perhaps, has been the one most out of touch, having had little time for reflection, having been so eager to join a large, confident organization with seeming answers to the problems that had made him sorry to be alive. (314)

Lasher seems to comprehend the deterministic nature of the system, and we also find the same wisdom in Constant, Beatrice (Sirens 310), Boaz (202), and Salo (313). Rumfoord, however, does not come to terms with his inevitable victimization by the system, despite the vantage point of his "alien perspective" and despite his occasional wisdom, as when he admits to Beatrice that Constant would make her "a far better husband than " he would. He also tells her to "look forward to having nothing but the dignity and intelligence and tenderness that God gave" her (63), but he himself does not follow his advice and expects the system to pamper him at the expense of the others.

Campbell and Resi, too, become fugitives from the system through their intense love for each other. Campbell, who believes that "uncritical love is the only real treasure . . .[one] can look for" and that nothing

makes "sense but love" (Mother Night 44), tries to construct a solipsistic "privacy for two" (76) but fails due to Helga's death and the realization that Resi could never be Helga. His respect for interpersonal love as a redeeming feature of life is, however, so high that he is happy to find out that even the totalitarian Jones "really loved his [wife] Hattie" (58). In a similar way, Resi pretends to be Helga to gain Campbell's love, asserts that "all I have is love for one man," and "dies for love" when she fails to get Campbell to love her (166). Of course, neither she nor Campbell decide to take Lasher's alternative of eventually yielding to the system, but instead they both commit suicide, he by hanging (192) and she by a cyanide capsule (166).

These instances of rebellion, in which the characters gain "a completely new perspective" (Player 169) by stepping outside the circle of systemic control, can be seen as a general dimension of a specific rhetorical device of Vonnegut's, i. e. "alien perspective," which involves using "aliens" such as the Shah of Bratpuhr (Player), the Martians, the Tralfamadoreans, and the Harmoniums (Sirens), foreign countries such as Germany, Israel, and Soviet Union (Mother Night), and planets such as Mars, Mercury, and Titan (Sirens), all for the purpose of, as Vonnegut tells us, employing them "like a clown in a Shakespeare play," because "every so often an audience needs a breather, a fresh view" (Wolf 1). This device can perhaps also cover

Vonnegut's conceptual inventions such as the chrono-synclastic infundibulum which, as David Myers asserts, "gives Vonnegut the narrative perspective of eternity" so that "from this viewpoint he can more readily ridicule worldly vanity" (54) and, we might add, lend his characters some help in regaining their (partial) identity through the realization that there are things outside the system.

If after this rebellion the character refuses to surrender to the system, "he becomes a candidate for suicide" (Hipkiss 49). Thus, besides the attempted suicide of Finnerty (Player 85) and the resurrected one of Salo (Sirens 301, 313), we find, in our three novels, several other suicides, including those of the Martian Army (164), Campbell (Mother Night 192), Resi (166), and Lazlo (113).

To sum up, in Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, and Mother Night, we find that Kurt Vonnegut's use of "character" unifies several "morals," from the quiet acceptance of determinism to the dangers of lying. It also demonstrates how Vonnegut's moral approach is more intricate than a straight moral satire, in that it involves closely examining the systemic and epistemological forces that govern the loss and partial regaining of the characters' identities. In the next chapter, we will see how another theme, that of rationality, unifies the moral clusters in the triad of Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Welcome to the Monkey House.

CHAPTER III

RATIONALITY IN CAT'S CRADLE (1963), GOD BLESS YOU, MR. ROSEWATER (1965), AND WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE (1968)

The unsigned review of Welcome to the Monkey House in Times Literary Supplement (July 17, 1969) considers "Mr. Vonnegut" to be an immature novelist, because he "has yet to transmute his personal variety of moral fervour into . . . major, telling satire" (769). In the same vein, David Bosworth writes,

> to read his [Vonnegut's] fiction is to meet a cast of characters who are uniformly pathetic, helpless victims of a random, incoherent, meaningless existence, and whose suffering, unmitigated by any true higher purpose, is distinguished only by the self-delusions embraced to relieve it. (14)

Bosworth also believes that "it is precisely this unrelievedly debased view of man that cripples Vonnegut's fiction and undermines his effectiveness as a moral critic" (15). Perhaps we should deal with the question of Vonnegut's "effectiveness as a moral critic" before we go

on to see how the theme of rationality unifies Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Welcome to the Monkey House, for this question seems to concern especially critics of these works. Moreover, having dealt with, in the introduction to the previous chapter, the issue of what moral or morals, if any, Vonnegut's writings have, this is the next logical step for us: to see how he packages those morals, to see if he is indeed "a simple moralist" as Ihab Hassan calls him (PARACRITICISMS 114) or just "so much sweetness" that "dissipates chances of more light" (Karl 169) or an able handler, as I contend in this dissertation, of subtle and complex moral themes that underlie and unify his fiction.

Frederick R. Karl, an even more scathing critic of Vonnegut's than Bosworth, says of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, that "the problem with the novel, as with so much of Vonnegut's didacticism, is obviousness" (345). This "obviousness," according to Karl, is part of Vonnegut's general lack of novelistic technique:

> With others doing the real work, Vonnegut can continue to publish his fictions under the protective mantle of the novel without really writing anything but "prose fictions." He is, then, free to come into the novelistic tent and cash in on the proceeds without contributing to the game. (344)

One can perhaps find an inviting pulpit for authorial sermonizing in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater with its third person omniscient narrator and characters such as Kilgore Trout, who, Karl declares, "represents what is generally true of Vonnegut and his work: Lovely sentiments are sufficient" (346). But Karl finds "obvious didacticism" and "parable atmosphere" (169) even in the first person narrative of Cat's Cradle.

Perhaps one way of answering Karl's charge is to compare his comment with that of J. M. Crichton that Vonnegut's novels have no heroes, no villains, and no morals (35) and hope that the extreme charges of didacticism and amorality would point one toward a more logical middle ground. Another way might be to point out that Vonnegut's novels do not have "a specific . . . message" (Mangum 11) as didactic texts usually do and therefore are not "more parables than stories" (Ranley 208), although, it might seem to the reader of Vonnegut's fiction that

> a number of very serious, but common, issues are immediately obvious. Vonnegut is against war, he is against man's inhumanity to man, he is against a science and a technology and a society which dehumanizes man. (208)

One wonders if any fiction can, and if it can, should, avoid having certain immediate moral concerns, no matter

how bright or bleak, in or out of God, the author's hope for mankind is. As Ivor Winters asserts,

> the fundamental concepts of morality are common to intelligent men regardless of theological orientation, except in so far as morality may be simply denied or ignored . . . (27)

These moral concerns in Vonnegut, however, are not as obvious as Frederick Karl thinks they are, for Vonnegut seems to follow a fairly complicated method of moral exposition, a method that Thomas L. Wymer in his "Machines and the Meaning of Human in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr." calls "the thesis-antithesis pattern":

> Vonnegut first sets up a relatively obvious evil and attacks it--this first attack is the thesis; but having established the reader's sympathy for the thesis and the character or characters that are its spokesmen, Vonnegut then more subtly attacks the thesis, revealing in this attack--the antithesis--serious weaknesses in the supposed answer to the problem. (67)

Wymer's "thesis-antithesis pattern" thus applies to the way each of Vonnegut's morals functions rather than to the general unity of all those morals. These morals are unified in a theme, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. I believe Wymer's model and my theory of thematic unity as "moral" unity together answer most of the critics'

doubts regarding Vonnegut's able handling of the moral concerns of his works.

One might feel strongly tempted to agree with Frederick Karl, however, that Vonnegut's didactic intent is more obvious in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater than in Welcome to the Monkey House and Cat's Cradle. But this "obviousness" does not explain why the critics are so divided in their opinions of this novel and its protagonist Eliot Rosewater, who is perhaps the most controversial character of Vonnegut's works. John R. May considers God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater "Kurt Vonnegut's finest novel to date [1972]" and says,

> I base this appraisal principally on what I consider to be the artistic integration of materials, and not simply on my judgment that it is his most positive and humane work. (26)

Other critics who liked this novel have called it "Vonnegut's richest and most complex" (Schatt 69) and "unquestionably . . . [his] best" (Goldsmith 20), and based in good part on this novel, Vonnegut is also called "the volunteer fireman, unselfishly and innocently rushing to put out the random blazes of civilization" (Nicol 123).

Those who think that God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater is "one of his [Vonnegut's] least attractive books" (Klinkowitz, Kurt Vonnegut 58), however, seem to tread dangerously close to biographical criticism. They ignore the distinction between Vonnegut-the-persona and Vonnegut-

the-person. For instance, The New Yorker review of God Bless You that Vonnegut himself defensively refers to, in his Preface to Welcome to the Monkey House, calls God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater "a series of narcissistic giggles" (xi). Similarly, L. J. Clancy thinks that the Rosewater novel "illustrates the peculiar truth that the easiest way for a good writer to trap himself is to write about 'important' themes" (43). All these critics, whether for or against God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, seem to have in common the belief that this work is about how a cruel capitalist system defeats

> Eliot Rosewater, a millionaire who suddenly develops a social conscience, abandons New York, and establishes the Rosewater, Indiana, where he attempts to dispense unlimited amounts of love and limited sums of money to anyone who will come to his office. (Schatt 69)

Given this failed economic experiment as a postulate, we can see how one can quickly take sides on the social issue and ignore the more important question of Eliot's sanity in the novel. Most critics, as we will see later in this chapter, assume Eliot Rosewater to be insane. In other words, they are so preoccupied with the issue of charity in a capitalist system that they miss how sanity as a concept--and rationality in general--is dealt with by God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater. Rationality is a definitive attribute of human beings, and Vonnegut, both in and out of his

books, is a humanist. It is not surprising then that this novel redefines and, in some cases, undermines, rationality in its three connotations: reasoning, sanity, and wisdom. Rationality is not only a pressing concern of the novel but it also unifies all its other "morals."

Rationality unifies the many morals of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater as well it does those of Cat's Cradle and Welcome to the Monkey House, and in Welcome to the Monkey House rationality is in fact the only means of cohesion among a collection of short stories that, at the first glance, seem to be randomly assembled. However, we have to analyze rationality into its three connotations, reasoning, sanity, and wisdom to see how it acts as a nexus for the seemingly chaotic morals and themes of the three texts. The last connotation, wisdom, seems to become prominent only through Vonnegut's frequent comparison of adults to unwise children.

Before we go on to the three connotations of rationality, let us examine how rationality in general is a preeminent theme in our three texts. I include Welcome to the Monkey House in the triad because it exemplifies the theme of rationality well, although one can draw comparatively fewer examples from it than from the other two works because of the limitations in skill and complexity that Welcome to the Monkey House, as short fiction written for popular magazines, suffers from (Palmer 3, Clancy 38).

In Cat's Cradle, referring to the super-intelligent creator of the atomic bomb, Felix Hoenikker, Marvin Breed asks John, the narrator, how one could

> say [that] a man had a good mind [my emphasis] when he couldn't even bother to do anything when the best-hearted, most beautiful woman in the world, his own wife, was dying for lack of love and understanding. (53)

In this passage, as he does occasionally throughout his fiction, Vonnegut tries to stretch the word mind--and the infrastructural concept of rationality--to cover not only its connotation of reasoning, but also the more unusual connotations of sanity and wisdom. However, the word mind, its rational synonym head, and their various disfunctioning attributes usually testify more to the general preeminence of the theme of rationality than its specific connotations in Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Welcome to the Monkey House.

The minds of Vonnegut's characters are often found in various deformed states. The mind-controlled Hazel Bergeron, in "Harrison Bergeron" (7-13), says to her equally-abused husband George, "It's all kind of mixed up in my mind" (Welcome to the Monkey House 13). The characters' minds are often "numbed," too, as in Fred Bockman's reference to "the mind-numbing business" (191) of the euphoriaphone in "The Euphio Question" (177-192) and in David Potter's mind becoming "more and more numbed" (218)

in response to the corporate atmosphere of Ilium Works in "Deer in the Works" (207-221). At the very least, minds are made "fuzzy," as when Colonel Kelly, the protagonist of "All the King's Horses" (84-103), "tries "to bring his mind . . . back into focus" (94) in Pi Ying's deadly Chess game "with live men" (102), which in Pi's twisted thinking "is an excellent way of bringing together the Eastern and Western minds" (91). Finally, "Unready to Wear" (237-251) has for its protagonist Dr. Ellis Konigswasser, whose obsession with the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body and bias for the mind seem to make his mind unhealthy. We are told that

> Konigswasser was a mathematician, and he did all his living with his mind. The body he had to haul around with that wonderful mind was as much use to him as a flatcar of scrap iron.

He also believes that "the mind is the only thing about human beings that's worth anything" (240). In himself, he thus becomes a reductio ad absurdum of rationalism.

The characters' "heads," however, seem to fare much better than their "minds." When the societal system finds something wrong with their "heads," it is often the system that has the real problem, not the individual or his head. Thus, in the short story "Welcome to the Monkey House," being a "nothinghead" (44-45) is to be saner than being a "somethinghead" (35). Moreover, the "muddle-headed" (73) Susanna and the "soreheaded" (77) Corporal Norman Fuller of

"Miss Temptation" and the "soft-headed liberals" and the "bubble-headed liberals" of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (25) have nothing really wrong with their heads.

Our three texts are also saturated with references to the various attributes, which are mostly disfunctioning, of "minds" and "heads." Cat's Cradle, being "an obvious reaction to the twentieth century's worship of science," "mocks people who believe they can understand, . . . control everything, and survive the world's mysteries" (Faris 48). Much of this debunking is directed against Felix Hoenikker, the Nobel Prize-winning "father of the atom bomb" (92) and the apocalyptic ice-nine. Felix Hoenikker is not only absent-minded but also idiotic when handling basic human activities. He tips his wife after breakfast, fails "to remember anything about her" (19) after her death, and does not seem to know the meanings of the words God, love (44), and sin (21). Even the other scientists in Cat's Cradle are certainly not geniuses in their handling of quotidian life. Felix Hoenikker's son Frank writes the following infantile epitaph for his mother's grave:

> You are not dead,
> But only sleeping,
> We should smile,
> And stop our weeping. (49)

Similarly, "Dr. Asa Breed, Vice-President in charge of the Research Laboratory of the General Forge and Foundry

Company" (23) forgets some of his basic administrative duties (34).

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, as we will see later in this chapter, is a fictional treatise on the subject of insanity and as such is filled with allusions to disfunctional rationality. Besides investigating the question of Eliot Rosewater's sanity--the Hamletian "noble mind . . . o'erthrown" (47)--and sanity in general, this novel also covers the seeming lack of intelligence on the part of the poor, the "idiocy" (39) of the "morons" (40) who are loved by Eliot and snubbed by the elite of Rosewater County. Furthermore, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, both in its "developing Eliot Rosewater as a twentieth-century Hamlet" (Godshalk 38) and otherwise, is a tale about truth and the question of rationally knowing it. Eliot therefore sets out to "find out what the truth is" and, like Hamlet, is accused of irrationality.

The collection of short stories Welcome to the Monkey House, as I pointed out earlier, owes its unity as a text to the theme of rationality; it also frequently addresses issues related to the general disfunctioning of minds and heads. The disfunctioning here, unlike in the case of the other two works, is not a matter of social conditioning, but is mostly synthetic, in that it is mechanically-generated. "Harrison Bergeron" thus portrays a synthetic forgetfulness (12) that is produced by mind-control devices, similar to those used on Unk in The Sirens of

Titan, and "The Euphio Question" has a machine, the euphio, that numbs the characters' minds. In "Unready to Wear," Dr. Ellis Konigswasser

> [would] forget meals, and go out into the cold or wet without enough clothes on, and he would never notice sickness until it almost killed him. He was [the narrator tells us] what we used to call absent-minded. Looking back now, of course, we say he was starting to be amphibious. (240)

Here, although Konigswasser is absent-minded due to the perfectly natural cause of old age, his absent-mindedness is interpreted by the narrator as "starting to be amphibious," that is, learning through psycho-scientific powers to live without the body. This alienation of the mind from the body seems unnatural, although the narrator tries to convince us that it is not.

Rationality in general is thus a conspicuous concern of Vonnegut's in our three texts. These works also show that rationality in its three connotations of reasoning, sanity, and wisdom unites their otherwise-chaotic body of moral concerns and themes. Let us examine these three aspects of rationality.

Julian Castle, a follower of the religion of Bokononism, tells us that "man makes nothing worth making, knows nothing worth knowing" (Cat's Cradle 116). Castle and the other Bokononists, including Kurt Vonnegut, seem to believe that since man as a rational creature uses his

humanly limited reasoning powers to make sense out of the reality around him, any truth that man can thus conjure up will still be human and might have little to do with the purely objective, extra-human truth. Vonnegut the philosopher of science seems to postulate that absolute truth, the Kantian noumena, is "unknowable" (43). Thus science and the scientific method for him can never go beyond the phenomena; neither can any other tool of investigation. It is no wonder that the narrator of Cat's Cradle tells us right at the beginning of the novel that all that he plans to do "is to examine all strong hints as to what on Earth we, collectively, have been up to" (13).

If reality is but a collection of "strong hints," reasoning then is a vain endeavor. However, one of Bokonon's poems proposes a naturalistic explanation for man's need to reason:

> Tiger got to hunt,
> Bird got to fly; Man got to sit and wonder,
> "why, why, why?"
> Tiger got to sleep,
> Bird got to land,
> Man got to tell himself he understand. (124)

But to base a body of learning on this naturalistic need to reason and to set unrealistic goals for that body of learning to accomplish is the folly of follies for Vonnegut. This naturalistic theory of reasoning, incidentally, seems to provide the only plausible

explanation for Dr. Asa Breed's view of Felix Hoenikker as "a force of nature no mortal could possibly control" (23).

Brief comments about Vonnegut's satirizing "excessive rationality" in his fiction (Hassan, Contemporary 45) are not uncommon among his critics. But satirizing excessive rationality is not only too trite but also too simplistic to be applicable to Vonnegut's writings. Our author of course derides excessive rationality; nevertheless more fundamentally, he mocks the vanity of reasoning itself. Reasoning, in Vonnegut's works and especially in Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Welcome to the Monkey House, is a folly, "the folly of pretending to discover . . . [and] to understand" (Cat's Cradle 13) reality. With this basic mistrust of reasoning as a postulate, we could interpret and correlate, in our three texts, Vonnegut's approach to science and technology and his use of the irrational as a dialectical mirror for the vanity and the "irrationality" of reasoning.

In a philosophical context such as this, both science and technology would seem equally invalid. However, technology, in chancing upon a tangible invention that it can neither fully explain nor control, seems more valid and more dangerous than science, although technology is inextricably linked with science. Perhaps this fallacy explains why almost every Vonnegut critic refers to the evils of technology and ignores those of science, even in the light of Vonnegut's repeated references to science.

But it is equally fallacious to think that science has any greater access to truth than technology. In Cat's Cradle, Dr. Asa Breed (delusion of breeding truth?) commits that error when he tells John,

> It [pure research] isn't looking for a better cigarette filter or a softer face tissue or a longer-lasting house paint, God help us. Everybody talks about research and practically nobody in this country's doing it. We're one of the few companies that actually hires men to do pure research. When most other companies brag about their research, they're talking about industrial hack technicians who wear white coats, work out of cookbooks, and dream up an improved windshield wiper for next year's Oldsmobile. (35)

Dr. Breed also tells John that in his company "men are paid to increase knowledge" because "new knowledge is the most valuable commodity on earth. The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become." John responds to these words by thinking that had he been a Bokononist, "that statement [of Dr. Breed's] would have made me howl" (36), for the only truth that the Bokononists seem to believe in is that life is "as short and brutish and mean as ever" (119). In restricting their view of truth to this empirical reality, they rule out both the need for and the validity of science.

An analysis of Vonnegut's treatment of science in the books chosen for this chapter will require that examining in-depth the three major aspects of his approach toward science: his ideology of truth, his parody of science through the metaphors of religion and science fiction, and his ridicule of the human effort to document truth.

The conviction that truth is unknowable except in its painful, experiential form is the foundation of not just Bokononism but to all of Vonnegut's works and especially to the rest of Cat's Cradle. Thus we encounter a Bokononist in the elevator operator at Dr. Breed's company, Lyman Enders Knowles, who has never heard of Bokonon but reflects, in lampooning "re-search," Bokonon's ideology of truth:

> Re-search means look again [emphasis author's], don't it? Means they're looking for something they found once and it got away somehow, and now they got to re-search for it? How come they got to build a building like this, with mayonnaise elevators and all, and fill it will all these crazy people? What is it they're trying to find again? Who lost what? (47)

The name Lyman Enders Knowles is obviously significant, if we were to discern the authorial bias toward him. (Our purpose in trying to discern the authorial bias is to fall for the traps of neither biographical criticism nor anti-formalist primacy of author's intentions, but to have an

index point to unify the author's many fictions, an index point which is constructed from the author's fictions rather than from his autobiographical criticism. Especially in Vonnegut's case, the author's conscious efforts to help his critics understand his works can be very misleading. Now let us get back to the name, Lyman Enders Knowles.) If Knowles is knowledge and Enders Knowles is the end of all knowledge or enters knowledge, then Lyman Enders Knowles means the end of all knowledge is a lying man or a lying man enters knowledge. Looked at either way, knowledge is a matter of lies. This brings us to a very misunderstood topic in Cat's Cradle, that of lies or untruths.

The epigraph of Cat's Cradle reads,

> Nothing in this book is true.
> "Live by the foma* that makes you brave
> and kind and healthy and happy."
> --The Books of Bokonon, 1:5
>
> *Harmless untruths [author's emphases] (4)

Since objective truth is essentially unknowable, all that man can know is untruth. But not all untruths are foma, harmless untruths; science, although untrue, is not harmless. In fact, Felix Hoenikker, through his invention of the atom bomb and the world-ending ice-nine, and the Hoenikker children, through their mishandling of ice-nine, have proven the ultimately harmful nature of science.

The Bokononist religion does not resemble, as Stanley Schatt says it does (66), Christianity so much as it

exposes "our absurd worship of scientific truth, regardless of how harmful" (Palmer 6). Like science, Bokononism has its extensive lingo and definitions. If, as Descartes believes, clarity is "the test of truth" (Walter 57), Bokononism is certainly not true. Mimicking the language of scientific reports, Bokonon tells us that "a wampeter is the pivot of a karass. No karass is without a wampeter" (42). Then he adds, in a satirical crescendo, "at any given time a karass actually has two wampeters--one waxing in importance, one waning" (43). Frederick Karl's objection that "those charming Bokonon terms represent nothing more than concepts that can be expressed without any special language" (107), therefore, ignores the vital function of these "religious" terms as parodies of scientific ones.

If Cat's Cradle compares science with religion in order to undermine science's claim to truth, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater does it by juxtaposing the science of psychiatry with science fiction. Dr. Ed Brown's scientific paper thus has a satiric counterpart in Eliot Rosewater's unfinished novel. In his novel, Eliot first traces to the nations of the twentieth century, with quasi-scientific zeal, the reincarnations of "Kublai Khan, Napoleon, Julius Caeser and King Richard the Lion Hearted" (80). Then he goes on to describe the dynamics of heaven's traffic:

> Heaven is the bore of bores . . . so most wraiths queue up to be reborn--and they live and love and

> fail and die, and they queue up to be reborn again. They take pot luck, as the saying goes. They don't gibber and squeak to be one race or another, one sex or another, one class or another. What they want and what they get are three dimensions--and comprehensible little packets of time--and enclosures making possible the crucial distinction between inside and outside. (80-81)

After proposing this theory of rebirth, Eliot proceeds to describe, in scientific detail, the architecture of heaven, as if he were discussing the structure of an atom or explaining the more mystical parts of the Theory of Relativity, such as the finiteness of Space:

> There is no inside here [heaven]. There is no outside here. To pass through the gates in either direction is to go from nowhere to nowhere and from everywhere to everywhere. Imagine a billiard table as long and broad as the Milky Way. Do not omit the detail of its being a flawless slate slab to which green felt has been glued. Imagine a gate at dead center on the slab. Anyone imagining that much will have comprehended all there is to know about Paradise--and will have sympathized with those becoming ravenous for the distinction between inside and outside. (81)

These passages, and others, in Eliot's fiction, are strewn with scientific words and phrases such as dimensions, enclosures, crucial distinction, either direction, flawless slate slab, and so on, and they parody the arrogance of certainty that science embodies, the certainty that Eliot mocks (45) and fails to find in his own life. Kilgore Trout's science fiction, on the other hand, is more futuristic and glances at some future "glories" of science. 2BRO2B (a bad pun on "To Be or Not to Be), for example, portrays an overpopulated America of the future where people are encouraged, by the Ethical Suicide Parlors, to voluntarily commit suicide to solve the problem of overpopulation. There "almost all the work was done by machines, and the only people who could get work had three or more Ph.D's" (20). Through the metaphor of science fiction, Vonnegut thus proposes the idea that science itself is a fiction and a dangerous one at that.

The narrator of Cat's Cradle tells us that he records certain facts in his book, fully knowing that they might not be worth anything, for, being a Bokononist, he knows "how futile it is to write or read histories" (159). Thus, if the scientific belief in the knowability of truth is vain, perhaps even more vain would be the effort to document truth, since documenting an untruth does not make it a truth. Therefore, Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and to a much lesser extent, Welcome to the

Monkey House all parody "scientific" documentation with all its systematization and rules.

The narrator of Cat's Cradle, John, sets out to write an ambitious work called The Day the World Ended, which "was to be an account of what important Americans had done on the day when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima" (12). Instead he writes Cat's Cradle, which is a book about how the world actually ended with the unleashing of ice-nine. Although accused by the scientist Dr. Asa Breed of not trying to write "a fair . . . [and] objective" (35) book, John manages to write a book that has many of the trappings of an "objective" work: elaborate table of contents, complex chapter divisions, and numerous "truthful" acknowledgements of borrowed ideas by the narrator. Incorporated into Cat's Cradle is the sacred book of Bokononism, The Books of Bokonon, which offers as facts many quasi-scientific observations, such as this one that relates a duprass to death: "members of a duprass always die within a week of each other" (65). Besides The Books of Bokonon, the narrative also draws a fair amount of quotations from another supposedly objective work, San Lorenzo: The Land, the History, the People (73).

This practice of incorporating supposedly full-length pseudo-documentary works into a novel seems to accomplish for the author not only a sense of realism and enhanced attention to the novel's "fictionhood," but more importantly, a sense of "scientific" obsession with

documented truth. It is this obsession that Dr. Breed expresses when he thinks that "somebody ought to do a book about" George Minor Moakley, the man who murdered twenty-six people (28). Even the narrator is not free from this obsession. He goes through life looking for the material for his book and wondering if "the old man's tombstone in all that sleet might photograph pretty well, [if it] might even make a good picture for the jacket" of his book (48). Consequently, he seems more concerned about documenting truth than about experiencing it.

In God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, Dr. Ed Brown makes up a new disease called Samaritrophia (basically, pangs of a social conscience) and writes a psychiatric research paper about Mr. and Mrs. Z, who in truth are Eliot and Sylvia (41). Toward the end of his over-systematized dissection of the simple conscience of the Rosewaters, Dr. Brown finds science "nauseating" (45). Eliot Rosewater himself is no less preoccupied with systematic documentation. Corresponding to Cat's Cradle's The Day the World Ended, Eliot has his Domesday Book, in which he "entered the name of each client, the nature of the client's pains, and what the Foundation had done about them." We also learn that "only Eliot or his estranged wife could have interpreted all that was there" (77), because the book uses an intricate code. For example,

> "Sherman Wesley Little," wrote Eliot. "Indy, Su-TDM-LO-V2-W3K3-K2CP-RF $300." Decoded, this

> meant that Little was from Indianapolis, was a suicidal tool-and-die maker who had been laid off, a veteran of the Second World War with a wife and three children, the second child suffering from cerebral palsy. Eliot had awarded him a Rosewater Fellowship of $300. (77-78)

Eliot is the creator of some other "documents," which, though far less complicated than his Domesday Book, are nonetheless testimonies to his respect for the written word: a poem, found in an envelope addressed to his wife; the roll of toilet paper with "I love you" written on each square, which Eliot passed out to passers-by (90); and the inscription, If you would be unloved and forgotten, be reasonable," which he allegedly wrote in the "men's rooms all over" New York City (68). His father, Senator Rosewater, is the author of the Rosewater Law against obscenity, with its empirical observation that "the difference between pornography and art is bodily hair" (72).

Unlike the narrative of Cat's Cradle, which derives its sense of "objectivity" from constant references to The Books of Bokonon and San Lorenzo: the Land, the History, the People, the two fictitious works, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater achieves the same effect by allusions to numerous fictitious and real works. The fictitious ones are many, and their number testifies to how important the ambience of documented truth is to this novel: Dr. Brown's psychiatry

paper (41), the Domesday Book (77) and other writings (68, 90) of Eliot, the Rosewater Law (71), Fred Rosewater's family history (103, 141), the tabloid The American Investigator referred to throughout the novel, the pamphlets in support of Capitalism (118), Eunice Rosewater's "historical" novel, Ramba of Macedon (14), Arthur Garvey Ulm's Get With Child a Mandrake Root (69), and so on. The actual books and periodicals mentioned in the novel include Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer (112), Barry Goldwater's Conscience of a Conservative (122), The Kamasutra of Vitsayana [sic] (19), The Wall Street Journal (97), and Better Homes and Gardens (113). We should notice here that these periodicals and works are mostly common reading material and perhaps symbolize the exploitation of the printed word for political, commercial, or pornographic purposes. The last use is portrayed at some length in the section dealing with Lila Buntline, the daughter of the rich lesbian Amanita, and her peddling of pornography (111-5).

The characters of Welcome to the Monkey House are mostly free of this fixation with the printed word, except for the stranger in "Tom Edison's Shaggy Dog" (104-110), who finds a book more interesting (104-5) than he does reality, until he is told a fantastic tale about Edison and his brilliant, talking dog, Sparky.

Vonnegut's treatment of technology, though much less detailed than his treatment of science, is nonetheless

emphatic in its debunking of the vanity of reasoning. Even on this issue, critics seldom avoid the typical Vonnegut trap of pseudo-morals. Thus, Stanley Schatt says that "EPICAC," the short story from Welcome to the Monkey House,

> is the only Vonnegut tale in which a man manages successfully to outwit a machine. The computer professes the very values that Vonnegut himself seems to hold sacred--a dislike for war and a strong feeling for the importance of love. (122)

Schatt does not explain why Vonnegut, in this short story, deviates from his alleged phobia of machines. Schatt also does not mention the other famous outwitted machine from Vonnegut's writings, Salo in The Sirens of Titan. However, EPICAC and Salo do surprise those critics--Schatt is not one of them--who view Vonnegut as a leftover humanistic guru from the sixties (Karl 346) spewing forth stereotypical curses against machines. If Vonnegut seems to dislike mankind's over-dependence on machines, as in Player Piano, it is not the machines that he dislikes, but rather the pretense of an accomplished discovery that those machines symbolize.

We also see this mistrust of machines as a tool of truth in "The Manned Missiles," in which Charles M. Ashland writes to Mikhail Ivankov, one father of a dead rocket-scientist to another,

> the word they put out on the big rocket we saw launched was that the firing was satisfactory,

> the knowledge gained was something wonderful, and the missile had been blown up over the ocean somewhere. That was that. (275)

Vonnegut seems to imply that the villain in this tragedy is not the machine, the missile that carried Ashland's son, nor is it the scientific community that conducted the experiment, but the very belief that "knowledge gained . . . [is] something wonderful." This knowledge is considered wonderful, because it is supposed to solve many human problems. That, for the sake of this dubious knowledge, both man and machine are sacrificed is an important implication to notice here. Thus the search for truth, the story implies, instead of solving humanity's problems, only increases them.

Technology, consequently, is not an evil in itself, but it becomes one in the hands of men hungry for truth. In Palm Sunday, Vonnegut makes this distinction clear when he tells us, "the bombing of Hiroshima compelled me to see that a trust in technology, like all the other great religions of the world, had to do with the human soul" (69).

Man's tendency to "think too much" (Cat's Cradle 31) can also cause him to find other vain, and sometimes dangerous, solutions. Besides the ludicrous ones, such as the Rosewater Law, which tries to define once and for all obscenity and perversion (God Bless You, 71), Vonnegut provides more dangerous examples of these "technological

cures" (Palm Sunday 69) throughout his fiction, some of which are ice-nine in Cat's Cradle, the Ethical Suicide Parlors in Kilgore Trout's "2BR02B" from God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, the anti-gerasone in "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow" (Welcome to the Monkey House, 293-308), and the United States Handicapper General in "Harrison Bergeron" (7-13).

"Harrison Bergeron" invites special attention here, since critic after critic have failed to see its true moral thesis. Schatt, for instance, believes that it "is a fable about what ultimately could happen in America if all people are forced to be equal" (133). This story then could be easily interpreted as a political satire against the Civil Rights Movement; in fact, it is impossible not to, if one wants to figure out what the social relevance of the story is in the light of the surface-level thesis, the evils of obsessive equality. Moreover, "Harrison Bergeron" was published in 1961, when perhaps the Civil Rights Movement did not exist as a movement, but it was a major national issue, anyway. But, even if we ignore the topics of Vonnegut's real-life championing of equality and America in the sixties, how would we fit this story into the general body of Vonnegut's work, which has an overwhelmingly liberal message?

Let us turn to the first paragraph of the novel:

> THE YEAR WAS 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God and

> the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General. (7)

Here the concept debunked is not that of equality, nor is the Handicapper General, who brutally enforces equality, the fundamental evil. Rather, the fundamental evil is the excessive reasoning, in the form of the 211th, 212th, and 213th(!) Amendments. This kind of reasoning does not ask the questions, "How does human thought depart from the rules of logic? [and] What are the variables that affect these departures from logic?" (International Encyclopaedia of Psychiatry, 393). Not only is the product of this excessive reasoning, equality reductio ad absurdum, imposed forcibly on humanity, but it is imposed through a "technological cure," "a little mental handicap radio" placed in a person's ear. Even the bureaucratic elements in Vonnegut's works, whether represented by the United States Handicapper General of "Harrison Bergeron," or by the Vice-president in charge of the Research Laboratory of the General Forge and Foundry Company" (Cat's Cradle 23), are products of excessive reasoning.

Thus, Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Welcome to the Monkey House treat reasoning, in its forms

of science and technology, as a vain and futile endeavor. But science and technology are only one aspect of Vonnegut's approach toward reasoning. Equally important is his use of the irrational elements of his works as a dialectical mirror for the vanity and the "irrationality" of reasoning.

Carl Jung's distinction between the rational and the irrational assumes the equal validity of both. Jung, in his Psychology of Transference, holds that

> thinking and feeling are rational functions in so far as they are decisively influenced by the motive of reflection. They attain their fullest significance when in reason. The irrational functions, on the contrary, are such as aim at pure perception, e.g., intuition and sensation; because, as far as possible, they are forced to dispense with the rational (which presupposes the exclusion of everything that is outside reason) in order to be able to reach the most complete perception of the whole course of events. (532)

Although the irrational elements, and characters with Jungian irrational perceptions, abound in Kurt Vonnegut's macrocosm, he can hardly be called a champion of the irrational. In his works, the function of the irrational, amidst the vain frenzy of all the rational endevour around it, is not to serve as an equally valid alternative to the rational, but to highlight the unreliability of rationality

and of reasoning in particular. Vonnegut does shows reasoning at its impotent worst; it can neither explain the irrational elements nor defend its own validity. However, the inexplicability of the irrational does not make it any more valid than the rational, because reasoning, as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, can hardly explain anything else. The presence of the irrational in our three works is therefore defined only in its reactive function, as a mirror for the vanity and irrationality of reasoning. Let us illustrate this point by considering the five major irrational elements in Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Welcome to the Monkey House, mystery, magic, miracle, fate, and fire. Besides these themes, the symbol of the cat's cradle is also an important part of Vonnegut's debunking of reasoning.

In his unpublished Preface to a new edition of Gulliver's Travels, Vonnegut admires the "rage and joy and irrationality [that] must have gone into the creation of" Gulliver's Travels (Palm Sunday 259). "Irrationality," not only in terms of insanity but also in the sense of the inexplicable, seems to be of vital importance to Vonnegut's own fictional craft, too. The inexplicable is Vonnegut's chief weapon of defense against the vanity of reasoning and is reflected in Vonnegut's use of the words mystery, magic, and miracle. These three words, in their various forms, occur frequently throughout our chosen texts, uttered alike by the characters, irrespective of their bias toward

rationality, and narrators, whether they be first person or third person. Thus, Dr. Breed of Cat's Cradle finds certain properties of crystals "a mystery" (38). The anti-rational Bokonon, of course, is "enchanted by the mystery of coming ashore naked on an unfamiliar island" (77). John, the narrator, thinks that Bokonon's becoming an outlaw is "the greatest mystery of all" (95). However, this "mystification" (God Bless You 53) does not glorify the "mystifying" (32) reality, but instead exposes the uselessness of the reasoning powers of the "mystified" ("Where I Live," Welcome to the Monkey House 4).

Magic and miracle seem to act as the specific dimensions, secular and spiritual respectively, of this world of mystery. According to Dr. Breed, magic is "the exact opposite" of science. But, in a key confrontation with John, he admits that science differs from magic primarily in intention and not perhaps so much in its correspondence to reality:

> We [John, Dr. Breed, and Miss Pefko] watched the Laboratory's receptionist turn on the many educational exhibits . . . . At her [the receptionist's] crisp touch, lights twinkled, wheels turned, flasks bubbled, bells rang.
>
> "Magic," declared Miss Pefko.
>
> "I'm sorry to hear a member of the Laboratory family using that brackish, medieval word," said Dr. Breed. "Every one of those

> exhibits explains itself. They're designed so as not to be mystifying. They're the very antithesis of magic."
>
> "The very what of magic?"
>
> "The exact opposite of magic."
>
> "You couldn't prove it by me."
>
> Dr. Breed looked just a little peeved. "Well," he said, "we don't want to mystify. At least give us credit for that." (Cat's Cradle 33)

In simplifying the phrase, "the very antithesis" to "the exact opposite," Dr. Breed tries to put into practice his and Dr. Hoenikker's precept that "any scientist who couldn't explain to an eight-year-old what he . . . [is] doing . . . [is] a charlatan." But his having to explain again to Miss Pefko "what a charlatan is" (32) and, especially, his inability to prove that science and magic are different, show us that Dr. Breed, according to his own rule, is a "charlatan," "a person who pretends to have expert knowledge or skill that he does not have" (Webster's 240). Dr. Breed as a result comes closer than any other Vonnegut creation to being an embodiment of the vanity of reasoning. However, his phrase, "Laboratory family" contradicts the cold, "rational" tone of the rest of his tirade and tells us perhaps that Vonnegut does not want him to become just another caricature of a scientist.

Dr. Breed is not the only charlatan on Vonnegut's earth; perhaps anyone who believes in the truth of either

science or the magical is a charlatan, including the admirals and generals who "looked upon him [Felix Hoenikker] as a sort of magician who could make America invincible with a wave of his wand" (36) and "Papa" Monzano, who "felt that Frank was a chunk of the old man's [Felix Hoenikker's] magic meat" (61) and that "science is magic that works" (147).

Belief in the magical is also an anomalous trait of some ultra-rational characters, such as the attorney Norman Mushari, who has faith in a "magic moment" when he can briefly take possession of large sums of money on behalf of his client (God Bless You 9) and when he is representing the potential millionaire Fred Rosewater (10). Of course, the "irrational" Eliot Rosewater's being associated with the word magic is not surprising: his sock absorbs water "through the magic of capillary action" (55), his wife fails to bear, in his father's view, the "magic child" (70), and, at the end of the novel, he thinks he has solved all of his, and the world's, problems with the wave of "a magic wand" (190).

Miracle, unlike magic, is mentioned exclusively in the contexts of science and technology and its products and people. For example, Felix Hoenikker's approaching "old puzzles [scientific questions] as though they were brand new" is called a "miracle" (Cat's Cradle 37). Vonnegut's facetious world of the "irrational rational" even has a "miraculous taxicab" (183), "the miracle of radio" ("Next

Door," Welcome to the Monkey House 121), and "the washday miracle" of Tide (God Bless You 55). Futhermore, it has Thurmond McAllister, the corporate attorney and philosopher, who considers money, especially in large sums, to be "a miracle," whose "miraculousness" (121) is not understood by those that do not covet it.

Ernest W. Ranly considers fate one of the "two major themes" that Vonnegut is "preoccupied with," the other being man (208). Fate, however, is part of the general ambience of irrationality in Vonnegut's works and attains prominence only in Cat's Cradle. Fate, for Vonnegut, is not "the ultimate meaning in human life" (Ranly 209), but rather a pseudo-scientific force that impels human beings, a force that is hypostatized into existence by Vonnegut to parody the forces of science, such as those of gravity and electro-magnetism. The parody seems to imply that much of the "faith" in scientific determinism is based on two elements, one linguistic and the other deterministic: since there is a name for the phenomenon, it must exist; and everything happens as it is "supposed to happen" (Cat's Cradle 64), because the "scientific" forces are always at work.

The linguistic element of Bokononism, its vocabulary, parodies not only science in general, as we have seen earlier, but more specifically, scientific forces and their results. All these forces and results can be gathered under the umbrella-concept of fate: a karass is a team of

human beings "that do God's Will without ever discovering what they are doing"; a kan-kan is an "instrument" that brings people to their karass (11); a wampeter is an object that members of a karass "revolve about . . . in the majestic chaos of a spiral nebula" (42); a vindit is "a sudden shove in the direction of Bokononism" (53); and a duffle "is the destiny of thousands upon thousands of persons when placed in the hands of a stuppa. A stuppa is a fogbound child" (135). Through this lingo, Vonnegut strikes at the nominalistic root of scientific endeavor, if we define nominalism as the belief that

> all universal or abstract terms are mere necessities of thought or conveniences of language and therefore exist as names only and have no general realities corresponding to them. (Webster's 965)

Fate, as evidenced throughout Cat's Cradle, is non-scientific determinism. In John's life, fate is perpetually present but varying in its precise nature. John at first calls himself Jonah, "because somebody or something has compelled me to be certain places at certain times, without fail" (11). This general view of fate, however, becomes more specific when fate connects John to ice-nine, the "seed of doom." John tells us,

> I am almost certain that while I was talking to Dr. Breed in Ilium, the wampeter of my karass that was just coming into bloom was that

> crystalline form of water, that blue-white gem, that seed of doom called ice-nine. (43)

From this fatalistic expectation for things to happen, John moves through a series of spectacular coincidences that he attributes to fate. He learns that the stone angel that he's fascinated by at Marvin Breed's tombstone salesroom (53) was originally commissioned by a "German immigrant" who had the same last name as John (56). Then, as it is "supposed to happen", he is "assigned by a magazine to do a story in San Lorenzo" (63), and again, as it is "supposed to happen" (64), his "seatmates" on the plane to San Lorenzo are the new American Ambassador to San Lorenzo and his wife. The coincidences reach their climax in John's running into Newt Hoenikker and his sister Angela, the very people he needed to talk to for his book. As time goes on, John finds his "inevitable destiny" (126) oppressive and feels "as though . . . [his] own free will were as irrelevant as the free will of a piggy-wig arriving at the Chicago stockyards" (128), thus echoing Howard Campbell of Mother Night, another victim of cruel fate.

Bokonon, the founder of John's religion, himself is a believer in fate. He stays "in Newport for a while to see if he had a destiny there" (76), and he sails the Caribbean "seeking the storm that would drive him ashore on what was unmistakably his destiny" (77). This belief of Bokonon's, "that someone was trying to get him somewhere for some reason, that there is something special about his own

destiny," according to James Lundquist, "is an essential mistake" (38). But Bokonon's belief in fate, Vonnegut seems to imply, is no less or no more vain than a scientist's belief in scientific determinism.

Except as the general force of determinism, fate does not appear to be prominent in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater and Welcome to the Monkey House. In a letter to Sylvia, his wife, Eliot Rosewater claims to "have a destiny far away from the shallow and preposterous posing that is our life in New York." Just as John and Bokonon of Cat's Cradle do, even Eliot "roams" (31) like a destiny-driven man. However, that seems to be the extent of his involvement with fate. Even the occasional coincidence, such as the Rosewaters, father and son, coughing at the same time (God Bless You 92), probably has little to do with fate. Similarly, the brief passage in "Miss Temptation" that speaks of Corporal Fuller "comprehending destiny" (72) has little elsewhere in that short story or others in Welcome to the Monkey House to sustain an argument for fate as a major theme in these short stories.

Fire, the last major aspect of the irrational in Vonnegut, is seminal to God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater just as fate is to Cat's Cradle. Fire imagery therefore is found throughout God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, not only as fire itself but in association with fire departments (22), the Moody family's being "firebugs" (91), volunteer firemen (22, 211), the firehouse (39), witchburning in Eliot's

story (82), the log cabin burning down (67), and so on. Stanley Schatt thinks that

> Vonnegut uses fire imagery here [in God Bless You] to symbolize both lust and purification: to Eliot, the firemen represent the pure altruism needed for a utopic community; but mass destruction, such as the fire-bombing of Dresden, represents something so obscene that it has a pornographic effect on him. By channeling his sexual drives into a utopic vision, Eliot can only achieve sexual gratification by creating a utopia; but his schizophrenia clouds his ability to distinguish between appearance and reality in much the same way it affected Howard Campbell, Jr. (72)

Schatt does not explain how fire in this novel acts as a purifier. In fact, fire is not a purifier. It burns places down, places such as Dresden (175), the log cabin (67), and the firehouse itself (41), and fire kills human beings such as the people of Dresden (175) and the witch in Eliot's novel (82). True, as voluntary firefighters, Eliot and others do feel revitalized, or purified if we stretch the word, but the credit for purification goes not to the fire but to the love and compassion the volunteer firemen show toward fellow-human beings. Eliot is moved by the vulnerability of people, not by the power of fire to hurt them. In fact, he claims

> to be deeply touched by the idea of an inhabited planet with an atmosphere that [is] . . . eager to combine violently with almost everything the inhabitants [hold] . . . dear. He [is] . . . speaking of Earth and the element oxygen.

He speaks of volunteer firemen as if they were twentieth-century knights; they, he says, join "in the serious business of keeping our food, shelter, clothing and loved ones from combining with oxygen" (22). Even James George Frazer's "purifactory theory of the fire-festivals" (750-53) has no specific validity in the case of Eliot Rosewater.

The opinion that fire represents lust to Eliot Rosewater is also without any evidence. Let's examine the passage in the novel that Schatt bases his opinion on:

> He [Eliot] had a book hidden in his office, and it was a mystery even to Eliot as to why he should hide it, why he should feel guilty every time he got it out, why he should be afraid of being caught reading it. His feelings about the book were those of a weak-willed puritan with respect to pornography, yet no book could be more innocent of eroticism than the book he hid. It was called <u>The Bombing of Germany</u>. (175)

The comparison of Eliot's "feelings about the book" to "those of a weak-willed puritan with respect to pornography" does not mean that the fire that the book

describes "has a pornographic effect on him" (Schatt 72). But why does Eliot feel guilty about having and reading a book about a fire, even one that killed thousands?

The answer to that question is to be found in Vonnegut's use of the irrational as a way of devaluing the reasoning powers of the rational-minded. In Cat's Cradle, we have seen how Bokonon, John, and the other Bokononists, through their belief in irrational elements such as fate, highlight the vanity and irrationality of Dr. Breed's and Felix Hoenikker's philosophy of science. But the rational-minded people in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, whether it be the attorneys Mushari and McAllister or Senator Rosewater, have for the basis of their "rationality" not science but money. In other words, they believe that since Eliot does not cling to and covet money, he is irrational. Eliot's guilt regarding the fire-bombings of human beings is thus to be compared to his guilt about being a rich person: He says, "I was born naked, just like you [common people], but my God, friends and neighbors, I have thousands of dollars a day to spend!" (21). To be alive when others are burned to death is perhaps as much a guilt-producing crime for Eliot as it is for him to be rich when others are poor, all due to the accident of his being born a Rosewater and a non-Dresdenite. This guilt produced in Eliot by fire-killings therefore has nothing to do with any "pornographic effect" and as such is as "innocent" (175) as Kilgore Trout's books being found in a pornographic store,

although "what Trout had in common with pornography wasn't sex but fantasies of an impossibly hospitable world" (20).

Fire as a fundamental theme occurs in two short stories of Welcome to the Monkey House, "The Foster Portfolio" (55-69) and "Miss Temptation" (70-83). Herbert Foster, who seems to rationally reject his father for leaving his mother, however, returns to his father's love of music and becomes "Firehouse" Harris (66-69). Fire thus liberates Herbert from the shackles of the "rational" code of society. "Miss Temptation"'s Susanna, who is "forever as startling and desirable as a piece of big-city fire apparatus" (70) and lives in a firehouse, is able to make peace with the argumentative Corporal Fuller by teaching him common sense and thus rubbing "his nose in the sweet reason that governed the universe" (82). A fire siren also keeps time in the story, as if to indicate the unreliability of clocks as a "rational" gadgets.

Lastly, fire as an agent of world-dissolution (Campbell 261-62) seems to be closely connected with Vonnegut's end-of-the-world imagery, which is exemplified by John's unfinished book The Day the World Ended and ice-nine's final destruction of the world in Cat's Cradle and in Eliot's Domesday Book and the Dresden fire-bombings of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater and Slaughterhouse-Five. I will discuss this apocalyptic imagery some more in the section dealing with wisdom and children.

Mystery, magic, miracle, fate, and fire are thus the major aspects of the irrational in our three texts. However, our discussion of irrationality would not be complete without a close look at the much-misinterpreted symbol of the cat's cradle, which relates more to the theme of the irrational in Vonnegut's works than to that of the purposelessness of life.

The title of Cat's Cradle is based on the toy Felix Hoenikker makes out of the thread from a manuscript. It is said to involve "one of the oldest games there is," and Dr. Hoenikker waves these "tangles of string" (114) in the face of his youngest son, Newt, who is frightened by his father's wanting to play with him and by this strange toy being waved in his face (18). Later on as an adult, Newt wonders if his impulsive reaction to the toy as a child was caused by the fact that, in the cat's cradle, there were "no damn cat, and no damn cradle" (114). Newt also draws a picture based on the cat's cradle, and Julian Castle thinks that it is "a picture of the meaninglessness of it all" (116).

The Vonnegut trap of the pseudo-moral is sprung wide open in the symbol of the cat's cradle, and we see several critics trapped in it, almost all of them trying to read the existentialist message of a meaningless universe into the cat's cradle. However, the critics' misinterpretations vary in degree. Thus, for instance, Raymond C. Palmer dismisses the cat's cradle as a symbol of meaninglessness

(4), Stanley Schatt insists on Newt's painting being a cynical depiction of the "meaninglessness of life" (59, 67), and Wayne D. McGinnis, in his "The Ambiguities of Bokononism," proposes two theories:

> the cat's cradle can be interpreted either as an acknowledged imposition of form on reality, the saving lie that passes through the mind, or as a nihilistic sign of "the meaninglessness of it all," the lie that sinks in and does harm. (21)

McGinnis' second theory, that of the nihilistic meaninglessness, is clearly rejected by Vonnegut through the incident involving John and Sherman Krebbs, the nihilistic "National Chairman of Poets and Painters for Immediate Nuclear War." John lends his apartment to Sherman only to find it, on his return, "wrecked by a nihilistic debauch" (58) of a murdered cat, a poem written in excrement, and burnt furniture. Vonnegut emphatically dismisses nihilism through John's reaction to the wrecking of his apartment. John says,

> I might have been vaguely inclined to dismiss the stone angel as meaningless, and to go from there to the meaninglessness of all. But after I saw what Krebbs had done, in particular what he had done to my sweet cat, nihilism was not for me.
>
> Somebody or something did not wish me to be a nihilist. It was Krebb's mission, whether he knew it or not, to disenchant me with that

philosophy. Well done, Mr. Krebbs, Well done. (59)

Even if we were to think that John is rejecting only the nihilistic meaninglessness of life and not the existentialist one, there is another passage in the novel that makes it clear that the issue for Vonnegut is not how purposeless life is but how little we know of life:

> [Bokonon tells us,] Man blinked. "What is the purpose of all this?" he asked politely.
>
> "Everything must have a purpose?" asked God.
>
> "Certainly," said man.
>
> "Then I leave it to you to think of one for all this," said God.
>
> And he went away. (177)

This, however, is not the only instance of Vonnegut's satire on existentialism; we discussed some examples of this in the last chapter in the context of The Sirens of Titan. Interpreting the cat's cradle as having anything to do with purposelessness is therefore misdirected. Such misinterpretations have led to Vonnegut's being called a "desparate humorist" (Hicks 179) and to "the current critical haste to designate Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. as a 'black humorist.'" (May 25).

The cat's cradle nevertheless becomes a more rooted and unifying symbol--and thus an apt title for the novel--if we can see it as a symbol of irrationality, the failure of reasoning. This view has much evidence. Since the

maker of the cat's cradle is Felix Hoenikker, the scientist claiming to make sense out of reality, the cat's cradle's not making much sense refers to the futility of reasoning. Moreover, Newt Hoenikker describes the cat's cradle as "nothing but a bunch of X's between somebody's hands, and little kids look and look and look at those X's . . . ." and see "No damn cat, and no damn cradle" (114). This description--"look and look at those X's"--emphasizes the impossibility of a rational understanding of a construct, whether it be God's creation or man's science. It also connects with the novel's major theme of adults as mental children. Hence the cat's cradle symbolizes the failure of reasoning, and as part of the ambience of irrationality in Vonnegut's works, it acts as an effective mirror for the vanity of reasoning. Sanity, the second connotation of rationality, is similarly redefined by Vonnegut.

Within a few minutes after meeting Lyman Enders Knowles, John, the narrator of Cat's Cradle, tells us that Knowles is insane. John comes to this conclusion based on one of Knowles' obscene mannerisms (46). This incident typifies the shocking quickness with which many of Vonnegut's characters are described to be insane by their narrator or by a fellow-character or by even a critic. John at one point even suspects his own "mental health" (34), and so does Eliot Rosewater (God Bless You 153). Insanity, consequently, seems to be a very loosely applied label in Vonnegut; on further analysis, however, we realize

that this indeterminacy surrounding insanity is a thesis of Vonnegut's. As he does with the other connotations of rationality, Vonnegut puts even the concept of sanity in the right fictional perspective. Let's examine the alleged insanities of various characters in Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Welcome to the Monkey House.

Besides Knowles, a few other characters of Cat's Cradle are said, by the other characters, to be insane. Julian Castle tells John that both Bokonon and McCabe are, "for all practical purposes, insane." But, by Julian's own admission, McCabe is "always sane enough to realize that without the holy man [Bokonon] to war against, he himself would become meaningless" (120). One cannot, however, pronounce either Bokonon or McCabe insane based on this utterance by Julian Castle alone. Yet critics have called both "insane," and we're told that "in his lunacy, Bokonon writes The Books of Bokonon" (Schatt 62). The narrator then is a follower of a lunatic, and his own sanity and thus everything he says--which is to say, the whole novel--should be questioned. At this apparent dead end, Vonnegut's message of the indeterminacy of insanity is the only way out.

That insanity, especially as it pertains to an individual, is often applied very loosely is an idea that is developed in full detail in the character of Eliot Rosewater God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater. At the beginning of the novel, we are given Norman Mushari's goal in life,

which is to have Eliot Rosewater declared "legally insane" (8). Although it is "common gossip" that Eliot is "a lunatic,"

> this characterization [is] . . . a somewhat playful one, but as Mushari [knows] . . . , playfulness [is] . . . impossible to explain in a court of law. (10)

Mushari, therefore, is disappointed that Eliot does not "hear voices" (31) and looks for other evidence. Encouraged by "document after document" proving that Eliot is insane (10), he tries to get evidence even more indirectly, through Eliot's wife's mental health.

When Sylvia Rosewater suffers "a nervous collapse," she is admitted into a private mental hospital in Indianapolis, where she is treated by Dr. Ed Brown, who later on makes "his reputation describing her illness" (41). Sylvia is diagnosed to have a made-up illness called Samaritrophia, which "is the suppression of an overactive conscience by the rest of the mind." Her conscience is overactive because "the outside world has not been even microscopically improved by the unselfish acts the conscience demanded" (42). The struggle between her conscience and the unimproving world thus drives her to a "nervous collapse," which is still not insanity. Dr. Brown also has trouble defining insanity in the case of the Rosewaters, because what is considered "normal" by the

world is questionable. In his research paper on the subject, Dr. Brown says,

> the doctor [he] was obliged to choose [some models] in determining how much guilt and pity Mrs. Z [Sylvia] might safely be allowed to feel . . . The models were persons with reputations for being normal. The therapist, after a deeply upsetting investigation of normality at this time and place, was bound to conclude that a normal person, functioning well on the upper levels of a prosperous, industrialized society, can hardly hear his conscience at all.
>
> So a logical person might conclude that I [Dr. Brown] have been guilty of balderdash in announcing a new disease samaritrophia, when it is virtually as common among healthy Americans as noses, say. I defend myself in this manner: samaritrophia is only a disease, and a violent one, too, when it attacks those exceedingly rare individuals who reach biological maturity still loving and wanting to help their fellow men. (43)

In other words, Sylvia is not insane. Toward the end of the paper, Dr. Brown welcomes the opportunity "to be utterly unscientific," because "science becomes nauseating to a therapist after a case such as this" (45). The general thesis of Dr. Brown's paper seems to be that an

individual's mental health is only as good as the mental health of the society that he is in. This notion, Tony Tanner believes, is fundamental to Vonnegut's treatment of Eliot's insanity:

> any verdict of insanity passed on Eliot Rosewater may well appear to rebound on the society that makes it. And it is another implication of the book [God Bless You] that it is better to be "crazy" in some way, than to drift on in the almost catatonic moral stupor and calm of the majority. (308)

Eliot and Sylvia are thus products of a society that is referred to as "this sick, sick society of ours" (69) by Arthur Garvey Ulm and as "this crazy country" (137) by Selena, the "pretty girl" from the orphanage (134). Mushari understandably fails to find Sylvia and Eliot either legally or psychiatrically insane.

In spite of the legal and psychiatric failures to find Eliot Rosewater insane, as we said before, he seems infected by the malaise of his society. Ulm dedicates his book to Eliot calling him "his compassionate turquoise," which he explains using John Donne's lines,

> A compassionate turquoise which doth tell
> By looking pale, the wearer is not well. (69)

Eliot has many symptoms, whether they are all related to this malaise or not. He goes through at least two nervous breakdowns (63, 177), and his wife at one point considers

him eccentric (24) and at another, "irrevocably bananas" (33). His Viennese psychoanalyst thinks Eliot "has the most massively defended neurosis" which, he says, is "untreatable" (28). Eliot also has trouble remembering people and/or their names. He thus forgets not only Ulm (69), but Lincoln Ewald (168), Roland Barry (169), and even Diana Moon Glampers (172). Yet Eliot hopes that his sanity "would never have to be proved" and that "it would never matter one way or another--whether . . . [he were] sane or not" (153).

Eliot nevertheless is no worse off than some of the other characters in the novel. His father, Senator Rosewater, has phobias about the human body (25) and bodily hair (72, 158); the attorney Thurmond McAllister is "senile" (9), yet he presides over deliberations over Eliot's sanity. Lincoln Ewald spies for Germany, because "he wanted an Iron Cross, which he requested be sent in a plain wrapper" (168). Roland Barry has a nervous breakdown in the Army because "he was ordered to take a shower with one hundred other men" (169), and Diana Glampers is "sure lightning [is] going to kill her, [and] . . . because her kidneys hurt all the time, she [is] . . . sure the lightning would hit her in the kidneys" (57).

Thus, although not the "sanest man in America," as the tabloid <u>American Investigator</u> claims him to be (181), Eliot is perhaps singled out to be suspected of insanity from amidst this "sick, sick society" (69), because he, as a

millionaire, sets out "to love [the] . . . discarded Americans" (36). Even Stewart Buntline, another idealistic millionaire, sells his soul for the "dehydrated Utopia" called money (121) and spends his earthly days drinking and cultivating "his only enthusiasm in life, the Civil War" (117).

Vonnegut treats insanity with similar skepticism even in the short stories of Welcome to the Monkey House, although the scope of his treatment here is rather limited. In "Long Walk to Forever" (48-54), Newt goes A.W.O.L. to tell Catherine that he loves her, a week before she is to marry another man. Catherine is at first annoyed by the "crazyness" [sic] (50) of Newt's actions, but agrees to marry him. In "Miss Temptation," Corporal Fuller proposes a theory of juvenile delinquency that claims that "kids [young males] go crazy" because of beautiful women (79). Even Pi Ying, the Oriental military commander who plays chess with live British men for his pieces and is hence accused of being "nuts" (87), seems to symbolize not insanity but ultra-rationality. In using his intellect as a "torture technique," Pi Ying becomes another scientist-in-disguise. Lastly, Professor Barnhouse in "The Barnhouse Effect" proves that he is saner than the rest of the society by "systematically destroying the world's armaments" (173), the weapons that Vonnegut blames for the "sickness" of the world in Palm Sunday:

> How sick was the soul revealed by the flash at Hiroshima? And I deny that it was a specifically American soul. It was the soul of every highly industrialized nation on earth, whether at war or at peace. How sick was it? It was so sick that it did not want to live anymore. (70)

So this is the insanity, the collective insanity of the world, that concerns Vonnegut in his fiction. Furthermore, he seldom portrays an individual's insanity that is not directly related to the world's. Incidentally, he does believe such insanity exists. In one of his autobiographical pieces in Palm Sunday, he writes,

> Mark [one of Vonnegut's sons, a recovered schizophrenic] has taught me never to romanticize mental illness, never to imagine a brilliant and beguiling schizophrenic who makes more sense about life than his or her doctor or even the president of Harvard University. Mark says that schizophrenia is as ghastly and debilitating as smallpox or rabies or any other unspeakable disease you care to name. Society cannot be blamed, and neither, thank God, can the friends and relatives of the patient. Schizophrenia is an internal chemical catastrophe. It is a case of monstrously bad genetic luck, bad luck of a sort encountered in absolutely every sort of society . . . [241-42]

Vonnegut avoids depicting such "individual" insanity in his fictional works perhaps because it lends itself to neither a satirist's scrutiny nor a philosopher's redefinition, both of which we see at work in his treatment of wisdom, the third and last connotation of rationality.

If you would be unloved and forgotten, be reasonable, goes Eliot Rosewater's inscription in the men's rooms of New York (God Bless You 68). If reasoning is vain and sanity is for society to take care of, to be reasonable, to be wise, is the only thing the Vonnegut individual can do; yet he often fails. This failure is evidenced in Vonnegut's frequent comparison of adults to unwise children.

Thus, in the context of Eliot Rosewater, John R. May says, "reasonable people are so scarce that it is not hard to see how the rapacious majority can consider them insane" (27). Wise individuals are indeed an exception in Vonnegut's tales; in fact, even Eliot Rosewater seems, on a second glance, to be a wise "adult." It is this panoramic folly that makes John, the narrator of Cat's Cradle, wonder, "what hope can there be for . . . such short-sighted children as almost all men and women are" (164). This comparison, of adults with children, seems to be Vonnegut's major channel to his fictional exposition of the theme of wisdom. Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Welcome to the Monkey House are full of "such short-sighted children." We can consider, for

instance, Emperor Tum-bumwa of San Lorenzo, whose monomania is fortifying his residence:

> The fortifications have never been attacked, nor has any sane man ever proposed any reason why they should be attacked. They have never defended anything. Fourteen hundred persons are said to have died while building them. Of these fourteen hundred, about half are said to have been executed in public for substandard zeal. (89)

Not all the unwise in Vonnegut's works are violent. The rich and poor of Rosewater County, who all uniformly lack wisdom, are mostly passive (God Bless You 96), and so are all the protagonists of Vonnegut's novels, unless one considers Dwayne Hoover of Breakfast of Champions its protagonist.

Incidentally, this wisdom, the lack of which Vonnegut bemoans in his works, is not to be confused with common sense. Common sense is dependent on reasoning, although not to the extent that scientific sense is, and Vonnegut, being a believer in "no causes, no effects" (Slaughterhouse 88), has no respect for anything that is so deeply rooted in reasoning. Wisdom for Vonnegut, thus, is a matter of the heart and not of the mind.

In any case, most of Vonnegut's characters, in their lack of wisdom, are frequently compared to children, for wisdom is traditionally an attribute of adults. Childish

adults and the "games" they play pervade the three novels. This theme seems to belong with Vonnegut's treatment of wisdom.

Man in Cat's Cradle is portrayed as "a child who can neither comprehend nor control the systems he creates" Rubens 7). The Hoenikkers--Felix Hoenikker, the "father of a bomb, father of three children, father of ice-nine" (82) and his children, Frank, Newt, and Angela--seem to be Vonnegut's prime exhibits in this regard. John comes across a picture of Dr. Hoenikker, in which the scientist is "all bundled up for winter, in an overcoat, scarf, galoshes, and a wool knit cap with a big pom-pom on the crown" looking like a "Christmas elf" (82). Stanley Schatt perhaps explains this image when he says that it is because scientists such as Dr. Hoenikker and Dr. Breed "ignore . . . spiritual and moral problems," they "are shown to be . . . irresponsible schoolboys who never grow up" (Schatt 61). For this reason, when Dr. Hoenikker tells the audience at his Nobel Prize acceptance speech that he has "never stopped dawdling like an eight-year-old on a spring morning on his way to school" (Cat's Cradle 17), he inadvertently conveys to the reader his "playful irresponsibility" (Southern 20) as a nuclear scientist.

The other Hoenikkers perhaps inherit his child-like qualities. Newt writes, in his letter to John, that his sister, Angela

> used to talk about how she had three children--me [Newt], Frank, and Father. She wasn't exaggerating, either. I can remember cold mornings when Frank, Father, and I would be all in a line in the front hall, and Angela would be bundling us up, treating us exactly the same. Only I was going to kindergarten; Frank was going to junior high; and Father was going to work on the atom bomb. (19-20)

But we would be missing Vonnegut's point here if we were to interpret the Hoenikker men's arrested development as resulting from Angela's domineering "motherhood." Angela's conduct is not the cause but the effect of the men's lack of wisdom. Consequently, Angela continues to "mother" Newt, even after he is grown up, and persists "in treating Newt like an infant" (80). Angela herself nevertheless shows, when she plays her clarinet, "the shrill skittishness of a frightened child" (124).

The Hoenikker children, even as grownups, are referred to by some as "kids" (46) and "babies" (47). They handle ice-nine "childishly" (165) and keep to themselves "many, many secrets" (169) about the impending destruction of mankind. Of the three, Frank resembles his father most in his "limitations" (135) as an adult, his passion for science and ignorance of everything else. What he wants, in John's opinion, is

> to do more than anything else [is] . . . to do what his father had done: to receive honors and creature comforts while escaping human responsibilities. He [Frank is] . . . accomplishing this by going down a spiritual oubliette. (151)

When John first meets him, Major General Franklin Hoenikker is the bodyguard for "Papa" Monzano, yet he looks "like a child kept up long after his customary bedtime" (97). He is said to be a "pinch-faced child" who speaks "with the timbre and conviction of a kazoo" (131) and "a fogbound child" (stuppa) in whose hands is placed "the destiny of thousands upon thousands of persons" (135). Moreover, Frank claps his hands when he is happy (133) and sometimes reproduces the speech patterns of children, as when he says to John, "Come on. Be president of San Lorenzo. You'd be real good at it, with your personality, please?" (136).

Some of the other characters of Cat's Cradle are also described as being child-like or childish. John's "Dulcinea," Mona, is said to have "no idea what love-making [is] . . . all about" (178); she is playful till her suicidal end (183). John himself doesn't seem to move "toward a maturity at the end of his story that he did not possess at the beginning," as Bryant Mangum believes he does (9). In spite of his brief hatred for Bokonon (190), John is content with his idolization of Bokonon. Even

Bokonon "playfully" invents his new religion (118), the aim of which, Wayne D. McGinnis says,

> is, of course, diversion: to provide the saving lie or life illusion necessary for play--and survival. The state of mind needed to believe the lie and to sustain the illusion must, in part, be a child's mind, capable of accepting the punning fact that San Lorenzo is a "par-a-dise" and supporting the ritual of foot-rubbing or boko-maru, the mingling of "souls" by touching "soles." ("Ambiguities" 22)

At the end of the novel, Bokonon also expresses the child-like desire to thumb his "nose at You Know Who [God]" (Cat's Cradle 191). Vonnegut's comparison of his adult characters to children, however, reaches its extreme point in the interpretation that John's and Mona's taking refuge in an oubliette (176) when "facing death" is their way of returning to their origin, the womb (Morrow 12).

Cat's Cradle also relates war to chidhood. Ambassador Horlick Minton compares men who died in war to "lost children" (170-71). Moreover, on the fuselage of each San Lorenzo fighter plane is "painted, with childish bloodlust, a boa constrictor . . . crushing a devil to death" (96). In this novel, as in the short story "The Barnhouse Effect," Vonnegut makes us wonder at the wisdom in preparing for and participating in wars; he does this by making anything military look childish.

Norman Mushari, the young and ambitious attorney in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, has "the soft eyes of a boy shyster" (7). He believes in, as we pointed out earlier, "magic microseconds" (9) and "magic moments." He also indulges in fantasies about his being a "brave little David about to slay Goliath" (10). But the Goliath he wants to "slay," Eliot Rosewater, has his own problems with adulthood. Eliot's father, Senator Rosewater, refers to him as his "boy" (24) and as his "child" (71). Furthermore, the senator thinks that Eliot hasn't outgrown his childhood:

> Eliot would not have turned out as he has, if there hadn't been all that whoop-dee-doo about his being mascot of the Fire Department when he was a child. God, they spoiled him--let him ride on the seat of the Number One Pumper, let him ring the bell--taught him how to make the truck backfire by turning the ignition off and on, laughed like crazy when he blew the muffler off. They all smelled of booze, of course, too . . . Booze and fire engines--a happy childhood regained. (62)

Eliot himself, in his conversations, has a tendency to return to the circumstances of his birth (21, 87). In fact, he explains his theory of how people should share their wealth using babies as his units:

> it's a heartless government that will let one baby be born owning a big piece of the country, the way I was born, and let another baby be born without owning anything. The least a government could do, it seems to me, is to divide things up fairly among the babies. (87-88)

Perhaps Vonnegut's implication here is that Eliot's theory is as infantile as his imagery.

A few of the other characters of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater are also likened to children, characters such as Lila Buntline, the teenager preoccupied with pornography and money, who is said to live in a "childish world" (112) and Fred Rosewater, whose "shins are covered with scars and scabs" (113), because he keeps "banging" them against furniture (142).

The short stories of Welcome to the Monkey House were all written for and published in popular magazines. This fact might account for the much softer satirical tone that Vonnegut employs in these fictional pieces as against the other two works. The child metaphor is no exception to this rule. It finds two major avenues of expression in these stories, both of which rely on implication and connotation for their satirical impact. The first is guided by the proposition set forth in "Miss Temptation," the proposition that "we all" are "tender blossoms," and that there is nothing wrong with our being so (78). The

second involves turning upside down the belief that the adult is wiser than the child.

The "tender blossoms" approach is well-illustrated in the short story that it is suggested in, "Miss Temptation." Susanna, "a muddle-headed nineteen-year-old clinging to a tiny corner of sophistication" (73), forgives Corporal Fuller for expressing his "Puritan" "frustration, self-righteousness, and doom." He at first regards her as a satanic agent of "temptation" (75), but later on realizes his error and accepts her friendship. Vonnegut and, through his guidance, his reader therefore see all people as God is supposed to see them, with compassion and understanding. Thus, Fred Bockman, although a scientist, does not receive the typical satirical treatment from Vonnegut, in "The Euphio Question." Bockman

> is thirty and looks eighteen. Life has left no marks on him, because he hasn't paid much attention to it. What he pays most of his attention to . . . is this eight-ton umbrella of his that he listens to the stars with. (178)

Very much like Dr. Hoenikker, Fred ignores all other aspects of his life except science. But unlike Dr. Hoenikker, Fred doesn't receive as strong a criticism from the narrator or the author, although the project that Fred gets involved in, "the euphio," is gently chided. Dr. Konigswasser is another scientist who escapes Vonnegut's wrath due to the "tender blossoms" approach in Welcome to

the Monkey House. The narrator of "Unready to Wear" thinks Dr. Konigswasser is "childish," but he also thinks that "it's a respectful thing to say that somebody is childish in certain ways, because it's people like that who seem to get all the big ideas" (240). Even the old men in "Welcome to the Monkey House" and "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow," who are in their "second childhood" ("Welcome" 32) are part of this childish world of adult Vonnegut characters.

We see a similar gentle satire at work in "The Hyannis Port Story" and "The Manned Missiles." In "The Hyannis Port Story," politicians are shown to behave childishly. For instance, we're told that "the Kennedys sometimes called the Rumfoords 'the Pooh people," because "they were so much like the bear in the children's book Winnie the Pooh" (139). One of the Rumfoords even accuses Kennedy of turning Hyannis Port "into an eastern enclave of Disneyland" (144). Their childishness is forgiven by the narrator. "The Manned Missiles" describes the competition in space between the Soviets and the Americans as childish game. In a letter to Mikhail Ivankov, Charles Ashland writes,

> your experts would do something, then our experts would answer back with some fancy billion-dollar stunt, and then your experts would answer that back with something fancier, and what happened finally happened. It was just like a bunch of

> kids with billions of dollars or billions of rubles or whatever. (271)

The "bunch of kids" are reproached, but they don't face either the apocalyptic poetic justice of Cat's Cradle or the impending doom found in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater.

The "wise-child-foolish-adult" approach is seen mostly in "Next Door," "Go Back to Your Precious Wife and Son," and "The Kid Nobody Could Handle." Paul, who is "old enough to be left alone for the evening," is referred to as a "baby" (117) by his mother, but soon we find his parents arguing "childishly," as he investigates a crime taking place next door. The contrast between the wise child and the foolish adult is important in "Go Back to Your Precious Wife and Son." The self-centered adult Gloria Hilton wants to have on her bathroom enclosure "a big 'G,' two feet across-and in the middle of the 'G' . . . a life-size head of herself" (196), the "G" perhaps standing for Gloria or even Gloria as God. Juxtaposed with her is the moralistic John Murra, the fifteen-year-old, who tells his adulterous father that he is "contemptible" (200). Finally, "The Kid Nobody Could Handle" depicts George M. Helmholtz, the director of a good school band, as "a child in the marketplace" of finances (252). George meets and makes peace with the boy-adult Jim Donnini, "a boy without fear, without dreams, without love" (259).

Tony Tanner describes Cat's Cradle as "an exploration of the ambiguities of man's disposition to play and invent, and the various forms it may take" (304). This description calls for two modifications: invention in Vonnegut's works is a form of play; this description also fits Vonnegut's other works, especially God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater and Welcome to the Monkey House. Moreover, the play element in these texts is interwoven with that of the child metaphor and, in a larger scheme, with that of wisdom as a connotation of rationality.

The play element, besides contributing to the general sense of levity that Vonnegut's creations carry with them, seeps into the specifics of his characters and their actions. As a result of this, he might seem to lack "high seriousness" and, therefore, he might even seem to be an immature novelist, as he does to his British reviewer in Times Literary Supplement (769). But equipped as the Vonnegut character is with an unreliable reasoning and a society-infected insanity, play is all he can do. It is either play or despair, and in despair, there is no need to write or read any fiction. Hence it is not surprising that play is not just a part of the Vonnegut character's life; it is his life. This is the idea that Felix Hoenikker coveys when he speaks of "real games." Newt tells us that his father

> had no use at all for tricks and games and rules that other people made up. . . [When] somebody asked Father what games he played for relaxation, . . . he said, "Why should I bother with made-up games when there are so many real ones going on?" (Cat's Cradle 17)

Cat's Cradle is replete with these "real games." The first three words of the novel are, "Call me Jonah." These words are spoken to the reader by the narrator, John. Besides the playful allusions to Moby Dick and the Bible, these words also highlight John's sense of play in his desire to involve the audience as his fellow-players (the imperative "call me"), his setting up rules for the play ("call me Jonah"), and his "ham"-like eagerness in "playing" a new role for a new audience. Vonnegut expands this initial playfulness on John's part and sends it in two apparently conflicting directions, the science of the Hoenikkers and the religion of Bokonon.

Dr. Breed tells John that that "all his [of Dr. Hoenikker's] ways are playful" and that Felix Hoenikker has even come across ice-nine "in his playful way" (37). Felix, furthermore, is preoccupied with "toys," such as turtles 20)--which he treats as toys rather than pets, the cat's cradle (15-17), a kite (45), and so on. Even ice-nine becomes a toy for him, his children, and ultimately the world. John wonders,

> what hope can there be for mankind . . . when there are such men as Felix Hoenikker to give such playthings as ice-nine to such short-sighted children as almost all men and women are? (164)

Frank also cultivates such "scientific" toys and games as his "wall safe" (16), the jar of bugs (19), the model of San Lorenzo (56), and the ant farm (186).

Play and science are also related in Vonnegut's works through the word experiment, which is used as a synonym for play. Miss Faust tells John that "some of his [Dr. Hoenikker's] most famous experiments were performed with equipment that cost less than a dollar." She is, of course, referring to Felix Hoenikker's "paper kite with a broken spine," toy gyroscope, top, bubble pipe, and "fish bowl with a castle and two turtles in it" (45). Frank Hoenikker, as a child, tells Angela that he is "experimenting" when he's just staging "bug fights," "spooning different kinds of bugs into the jar and making them fight." Newt tells us that once Angela

> asked Frank what he thought he was doing, and he said, "Experimenting." That's what Frank always used to say when people asked him what he thought he was doing. He always said, "Experimenting." (19)

Even Bokonon and McCabe are in a sense experimenting when they try to create a utopia, and John R. May's referring to their efforts as an "experiment" (30) implies, though

unintentionally, that Bokonon and McCabe are "social engineers," the term that Thomas L. Wymer ("Machines" 42) uses in the context of Paul and Finnerty of Player Piano. The sense of experiment accompanies and thus unites not only Bokonon and Hoenikker, but most of Vonnegut's characters, whether they be scientists or writers or philosophers or men of religion.

This analogy, if we can move away from Cat's Cradle briefly, is also apparent in Noah Rosewater's "experiments" with money (God Bless You 12) and Sylvia's experiments "with small gestures" (70). The word experiment is also frequently associated with Eliot, who experiments with the finish on his shoes (54) and with the grip on his tennis racket (177). In fact, Eliot's trying to serve the poor and the oppressed is called an experiment by his father (24), Trout (183), and McAllister (186). Similar "experiments," scientific and non-scientific, can be found in Welcome to the Monkey House. In "All the King's Horses," the murderous Pi Ying's expression is said to be "that of an experimenter, keen, expectant, entranced" (97). Also, "The Barnhouse Effect" and "The Euphio Question" deal with playful experiments (165, 190) that produce shocking results.

Cat's Cradle's religion is equally playful. On the very first page, John announces, "I was a Christian then. I am a Bokononist now" (11). However, in his subsequent conduct he proves the truth of Glenn Meeter's assertion

that "one entertains a faith, in Vonnegut's work, rather than submitting to it" (219). Bokononism itself "is founded on the elements of play," Wayne D. McGinnis says in his "The Ambiguities of Bokononism." McGinnis, in applying the excellent theories from Johan Huizinga's Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture to Bokononism, finds much evidence for the play element:

> Bokonon makes play, not the temporary, but the permanent sphere of activity, offering such consolation or diversion that everyone on the island is a Bokononist--happily playing and interested in three things only, fishing, fornication, and Bokononism. The only aspect of progress that really excites them is, significantly, the electric guitar. (21-22)

Not only the content of Bokononism but also its form, McGinnis observes, has a sense of play about it:

> The simple, repetitive nature of the Calypsoes, Bokonon's aphoristic hymns, are indeed a part of this process, and the form of the religion becomes essentially indistinguishable from its theme, both being play. (22)

McGinnis, however, does not apply this theory to Christianity in the novel. Christianity serves a function similar to Bokononism, in that it is playful, too. McCabe and "Papa" Monzano adopt Christianity as the official state religion, outlaw Bokononism, and install, on top of the

airport administration building, a cross which is "motor-driven, turning slowly, boxing the compass with electric piety" (127). Moreover, they name a training camp for soldiers after Jesus Christ (128). Signs in San Lorenzo announce, "THIS IS A CHRISTIAN NATION! ALL FOOT PLAY WILL BE PUNISHED BY THE HOOK" (95). However, John learns later on that "everybody on San Lorenzo is a devout Bokononist and that the "hook" is used very sparingly (120). Even the Christian minister, Dr. Vox Humana (!), earns his doctorate from "the Western Hemisphere University of the Bible of Little Rock," with which he made contact "through a classified ad in Popular Mechanics" (145).

Although expressed mostly through science and religion, the play element in Cat's Cradle covers some other aspects, too, aspects which, for instance, are as widely different as suicide and traffic. Newt, in his letter to John, says, "Aren't the gorges beautiful? This year, two girls jumped into one holding hands. They didn't get into the sorority they wanted. They wanted Tri-Delt" (18). This flippant attitude toward life can also be seen in the mass suicide of Bokononists toward the end of the novel. Among the corpses,

> there were men, women, and children, too, many in the attitudes of boko-maru. All faced the center of the bowl, as though they were spectators in an amphitheater. (181)

The Bokononists thus embrace death playfully, letting each other's "soles" touch and resemble, symbolically, "spectators." Traffic, especially on the mainland, is also portrayed as if it belonged in a cartoon:

> Policemen in yellow raincapes were at every intersection, contradicting with their white-gloved hands what the stop-and-go signs said.
>
> The stop-and-go signs, garish ghosts in the sleet, went through their irrelevant tomfoolery again and again, telling the glacier of automo biles what to do. Green meant go. Red meant stop. Orange meant change and caution. (29)

This description typifies the child-like playfulness that pervades the world of Cat's Cradle.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater begins with two passages that establish the importance of money in the novel:

> A SUM OF MONEY is a leading character in this tale about people, just as a sum of honey might properly be a leading character in a tale about bees.
>
> The sum was $87,472,033.61 on June 1, 1964, to pick a day. That day was the day it caught the soft eyes of a boy shyster named Norman Mushari. The income the interesting sum produced was $3,500,000 a year, nearly $10,000 a day--Sundays, too. (7)

We see a self-conscious narration in this passage ("this tale") similar to what we did in the first sentence of Cat's Cradle. The analogy of honey adds, to this playful self-conscousness, some levity with its simplistic pun on money. The second paragraph, however, establishes a seriousness, with its invoking of exact sums of money. But this seriousness doesn't negate the elements of playfulness--"to pick a day," "boy shyster," "interesting sum," and "Sundays, too." The seriousness nevertheless tells us that "this tale" involves a serious game with serious rules. The narrator thus seems to believe as does Pi Ying of "All the King's Horses" that "without rules, . . . games become nonsense" (Welcome 96). But the narrator is wrong about money being a "character" in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater; instead it is shown in the novel to be a big of the game of twentieth-century American life, "just as" monopoly money is a big part of the game of MONOPOLY.

Money invokes many kinds of excitement in the characters of this novel. Norman Mushari, Caroline Rosewater, and most others covet money while Eliot Rosewater wants to utilize it to alleviate suffering. Some of this excitement is reflected in money being referred to, occasionally, by the more exotic term treasure (9). Money, specifically that of the Rosewater Foundation, is shown to "buy" many things:

> Eliot's benefactions covered the full eleemosynary spectrum from a birth control clinic

> in Detroit to an El Greco for Tampa, Florida. Rosewater dollars fought cancer and mental illness and race prejudice and police brutality and countless other miseries, encouraged college professors to look for truth, bought beauty at any price. (17)

Under this guise of altruism, however, is the Foundation's purpose, to hand "the fortune from father to son, without the tax collector's getting a dime" (52). So the Foundation indulges in altruism playfully, not "doing it for real."

The rich are especially corrupted by the playfulness of money. Noah Rosewater proves himself an expert "player," by converting "the saw factory to the manufacture of swords and bayonets" and "the farm to the raising of hogs" (11). He also deals "more and more in valuable papers, in stocks and bonds, and less and less in swords and pork" (12). Thus, "commiting crimes against which no laws . . . [have] been passed," Noah sticks to the main rule of the "game": "Grab much too much, or you'll get nothing at all" (13).

Eliot as a descendent of Noah has the choice to play not only with the objects money can buy but also with power. As Eliot's father tells us, Eliot "could have been Governor of Indiana by lifting an eyebrow, could have been President of the United States, even, at the price of a few beads of sweat" (48). Unlike "reality," a game is usually

characterized by the ease with which a player can play it. Eliot, however, does not want this "ease," the "lifting of an eyebrow" or the "few beads of sweat." Yet he cannot escape playing the game that he has been taught since childhood, as his subsequent conduct shows us. He tries to "buy" truth from Arthur Garvey Ulm (66) the same way the Foundation encourages "college professors to look for truth" (17). He also tries to "pay" poor people to get better (75). He and his wife, Sylvia, even become the King and Queen in this masquerade:

> the King and Queen got the Rosewater family crys tal, silver and gold out of the dank vaults of the Rosewater County National Bank, began to throw lavish banquets for morons, perverts, starvelings, and the unemployed.
>
> They . . . gave them love and trifling sums of money. (40)

Thus, try as he might to quit, he remains in the game. The song "Ol' Man River" that he listens to on one of his walks goes, "Darkies all work, . . . while the white folks play" (167); Eliot finds it as impossible to change his economic class as he would his race. Money thus "has a sterilizing effect on everyone that touches it in the novel" (Schatt 76).

The novel has other games that do not directly involve money. Eliot and Sylvia manipulate each other emotionally so much so that, at the opera, he permits "her to lead him

away as easily as she might have led a toy balloon" (29). Eliot, in one of his letters, addresses his wife as Ophelia (30) and signs the letter, "Hamlet" (33). He also shows considerable playful imagination in inventing "games" such as "AW" (aspirin and wine) and "FH" (fly hunt) to entertain and educate the people of Rosewater County (78).

The play element in the short stories of Welcome to the Monkey House, however, is much more subdued. "All the King's Horses," in fact, dramatizes the metaphor of life as game, by literally having human beings act as chess pieces and accept death when it is due. Herbert Foster of "The Foster Portfolio," rejects the offer to play new "games" that money brings and settles for playing jazz in "honky-tonks." He is more successful at rejecting money than Eliot Rosewater. The euphio machine, in "The Euphio Question," however, eliminates the need for money and work by manufacturing a synthetic happiness; play is thus caricatured. In "EPICAC," the operator of a super-computer "playfully" programs the computer to write poetry. EPICAC learns not only to write poetry but also to love human beings.

In this chapter, we have seen how Kurt Vonnegut's "clusters" of morals in Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Welcome to the Monkey House are unified through the theme of rationality. In its three connotations of reasoning, sanity, and wisdom, rationality combines all the major morals and metaphors of these works.

The third major unifying theme of Vonnegut's early fiction is that of reality as a construct, which covers issues ranging from Vonnegut's answer to determinism (not just its portrayal, which I discussed in the previous chapter) to his rationale for living and writing. In the next chapter, I will examine how this sense of construct informs almost everything in the (anti-Wordsworthian) Vonnegut cosmos.

CHAPTER IV

DETERMINISTIC REALITY IN SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE (1969), BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS (1973), AND SLAPSTICK (1976)

In Chapter II, we have seen how Vonnegut's use of "character" unifies his moral and thematic concerns through his characters' losing their identity to a deterministic system and regaining a part of that lost identity after a brief rebellion against the system. In Chapter III, we have dealt with the theme of rationality in its three connotations of reasoning, sanity, and wisdom. Vonnegut's conclusions concerning rationality seem to be that man cannot arrive at objective truth through reasoning or any other means, that the individual can only be as insane as his society, and that the individual is no wiser as an adult than he was as a child. Vonnegut's treatment of these two subjects, "character" and rationality, emphasizes what man cannot do as against what he can do; through them, he portrays a deterministic cosmos in which there is little rationale and scope for human compassion and love. Therefore, if we stop with these two unifying subjects of Vonnegut's works, we know only one side of his paradoxical ethics. The more "active" side of Vonnegut's ethics,

however, is a product of his third major subject, that of deterministic reality, wherein Vonnegut advocates responsible and systematic human action in spite of the insurmountable determinism of the Vonnegut universe.

Vonnegut's determinism, it is important to point out here, varies in superficial nature from one novel to another and, in some cases, from one part of the novel to another part. Thus, the determinism of Player Piano, Mother Night, Cat's Cradle, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, Breakfast of Champions, and Slapstick is mostly societal, portrayed in terms of a human society on the Earth. The determinism of The Sirens of Titan and Slaughterhouse-Five, on the other hand, is predominantly a cosmological one. Even a third kind of determinism, that of an author's control over his characters, is discussed in detail in Breakfast of Champions. Fundamentally, however, all these forms of determinism pose the same questions that need to be resolved if Vonnegut's work is to be unified in terms of its philosophical theses.

Here are the questions: in a deterministic setup, in which free will and full-fledged "character" are untenable, is a human being capable of acting in any other way than he does? If he is not capable, where is the need for any rhetoric or even morality? What then is the function of human constructs, such as societies, families, and novels? In this chapter, I deal with Vonnegut's answers to these questions. The answers, moreover, are unified in the

subject of deterministic reality. The philosophical foundation for these answers, however, is apparently not evident to Vonnegut until the writing of Breakfast of Champions.

The authorial persona at the beginning of Breakfast of Champions is a tired and despondent one. He takes "a little pill" once in a while to "cheer up again," feels "lousy" about his books (4), and says, "I have no culture, no humane harmony in my brains. I can't live without a culture anymore" (5). Two-thirds into Breakfast of Champions, a more enthusiastic Vonnegut declares, "now comes the spiritual climax of this book, for it is at this point that I, the author, am suddenly transformed by what I have done so far" (218). What accounts for this metamorphosis is his chancing upon a philosophical foundation, a "humane harmony," that not only lends hope for the future but also restores the past, "the years the locusts have eaten" (Bible, Joel 2:25). This foundation, which is "everything about life that truly matters," is "the awareness of every animal," "the 'I am' to which all messages are sent" (Breakfast 221). Reduced to his essence, a human being thus becomes, in Rabo Karabekian's painting, "an unwavering band of light" (225), whom nothing, not even the determinism of the Vonnegut cosmos, can force into despondency and inaction.

The determinism that we saw in Vonnegut's first three novels is nevertheless equally oppressive in his other

novels, too. Furthermore, Vonnegut's solution to the problem of determinism is also the same in all his novels; it is to exert "human effort in spite of." This solution, however, varies in its specific form from one Vonnegut novel to another. For instance, his solution in Player Piano seems to be to exert human effort for "the record" (320); in The Sirens of Titan, "to uphold the honor of fools by completing the errand" ((313); in Mother Night, to acknowledge the existence of and avoid "pure evil" (181); in Cat's Cradle, to keep "the human race going" (188); and in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, "to love" (36).

Even in Slaughterhouse-Five, Breakfast of Champions, and Slapstick, Vonnegut advocates the same axiological solution to determinism, that of "human effort in spite of." However, more so than even his other works, these novels present the human action/reaction as being as systematic as the determinism that surrounds it. Deterministic reality thus unifies Slaughterhouse-Five, Breakfast of Champions, and Slapstick. In this chapter, I investigate this subject through all the four phases of Vonnegut's "solution" to the problem of determinism: distinguishing man as a construct, on the basis of his awareness, from machines; locating him in the construct of a cyclical determinism; establishing amor fati (accepting determinism yet acting in spite of it) as his characters' guiding philosophy; and demonstrating, through the authorial persona as a construct, how the determinism of

the text can be compromised through the nullifying of the distinction between fact and fiction.

Until the "spiritual climax" of Breakfast of Champions (220), Vonnegut believes that human beings are essentially machines (221). In viewing them as passive constructs, he tends "to think of human beings as huge, rubbery test tubes . . . with chemical reactions seething inside" (4). The Tralfamadorians of Slaughterhouse-Five, therefore, could be the author's mouthpieces when they "say that every creature and plant in the Universe is a machine. It amuses them that so many Earthlings are offended by the idea of being machines" (154). Moreover, Vonnegut feels "tempted" to see even his characters as "machines," tempted

> to say that . . . [a character] is what he is because of faulty wiring, or because of microscopic amounts of chemicals which he ate or failed to eat on that particular day. (Breakfast 4)

This view of human beings--and characters in novels--as machine-like constructs, however, undergoes a thorough revision in Vonnegut (by whom I mean, the authorial persona). He comes to believe that "awareness is all that is alive and maybe sacred in any of us. Everything else about us is dead machinery" (221). This realization, trite as it might seem at first glance, is important, because the distinction between man and machine as constructs, in one stroke, unifies Vonnegut's entire Weltanschauung. It can

thus be seen as the foundation for his epistemology, ethics, and politics. This distinction also explains, predictably, his vehemence against slavery of any kind: "the ultimate error is to conceive of human beings not as persons but as things, objects in space" (Wymer, "Machines" 46).

The slavery period of American history therefore haunts Vonnegut, and he even sees it extending into the present America:

> the sea pirates [the founding fathers] who had the most to do with the creation of the new government owned human slaves. They used human beings for machinery, and, even after slavery was eliminated, because it was so embarrassing, they and their descendents continued to think of ordinary human beings as machines. (Breakfast 11)

Incidentally, to Vonnegut America is not just an experiment, but a construct, the "result of playfulness on the part of the founding fathers," some of whom had "useless education" (10) while others were "sea pirates" (11). Among these founding fathers, he singles out Thomas Jefferson, who was "a slave owner . . . [and] one of the world's greatest theoreticians on the subject of human liberty" (34). Similarly, even in the futuristic Slapstick, Thomas Jefferson's integrity is questioned by the narrator, who tells Vera Chipmunk-5 Zappa, the owner of

some slaves, "if you would only write us a new Declaration of Independence, you would be the Thomas Jefferson of modern times" (23).

Vonnegut's present is equally a product of slavery. In Breakfast of Champions, when Kilgore Trout and the theater manager meet "two young black prostitutes," the narrator tells us that the prostitutes

> had grown up in the rural south of the nation, where their ancestors had been used as agricultural machinery. The white farmers down there weren't using machines made out of meat anymore, though, because machines made out of metal were cheaper and more reliable, and required simpler homes.
>
> So the black machines had to get out of there, or starve to death. (72)

The two women thus become prostitutes, machines without awareness and free will. Since machinery is always meant to be "used," they are victimized, in addition to their clients, by their pimp, who

> was a god to them. He took their free will away from them, which was perfectly all right. They didn't want it anyway. It was as though they had surrendered themselves to Jesus, for instance, so they could live unselfishly and trustingly--except that they had surrendered to a pimp instead. (73)

These two women characters are also fairly representative of Vonnegut's treatment of women and Afro-Americans in his novels: they are too warped and weighed down by the past to rebel against their present "machinehood." The women are said to have "trained themselves to be agreeing machines, "in the interests of survival" (136). Thus, when Francine Pefko and Wayne Hoobler, an unemployed black youth, find themselves within the same premises, we are told that

> Francine was pure machinery at the moment, a machine made out of meat--a typing machine, a filing machine.
>
> Wayne Hoobler, on the other hand, had nothing machine-like to do. He ached to be a useful machine. (188)

We should note here that Vonnegut's "liberal" approach toward women and minorities is not stereotypically sixties', as Frederick Karl would think it is. It is not primarily the political exploitation that Vonnegut portrays but rather the epistemological reduction of a person into "a typing machine" or "agricultural machinery" (72).

This reduction of human beings into machines, if we extend the meaning of the word machine to cover anything subhuman, is the essence of all evil in Slaughterhouse-Five, Breakfast of Champions, and Slapstick. The narrator of Slaughterhouse-Five relates its theme of war to this reduction: "one of the main effects of war . . . is that people are discouraged from being characters" (164).

Dwayne Hoover of Breakfast of Champions goes on a rampage when he is inspired by Trout's novel Now It Can Be Told to believe that he alone is a human being in a world full of machines disguised as people (253). Dwayne, consequently, illustrates Vonnegut's fundamental belief that human prejudice and aggression are based on one's falsely assuming the other person or group of persons to be subhuman. Thus, the narrator refers to the Japanese soldiers of Second World War as "yellow robots" (202), and Sammy Davis, Jr. becomes, in Trout's novel, a "black robot" (173).

Closely related to this distinction between man and machine is Vonnegut's respect for common decency as against possessive love. Characters such as Kroner of Player Piano and Barbara Pilgrim of Slaughterhoue-Five take other people's "dignity away in the name of love" (Slaughterhouse 132). The demeaning nature of this kind of love makes Vonnegut say, in Slapstick,

> I wish that people who are conventionally supposed to love each other would say to each other, when they fight, "Please--a little less love, and a little more common decency." (3)

Hence he believes that "human beings need all the relatives they can get--as possible donors or receivers not necessarily of love, but of common decency" (5). This "unwavering decency toward one and all" is also what Wilbur Swain, the protagonist of Slapstick, admires in his mother

(67). Possessive love, on the other hand, in its caricature of self-sacrificial love, degrades not only the beloved but love as the very basis of human existence. It is thus not himself but possessive love that Vonnegut satirizes when he says that he "cannot distinguish between . . . [his love] for people and . . . [his love] for dogs" (2).

Some of Slapstick's harsher reviewers have misunderstood this comment, in that they have tried and failed to make sense of it outside the context of the man-machine distinction. For instance, J. Epstein remarks that it is "a most interesting admission for a novelist" such as Vonnegut that he cannot distinguish between his love for people and his love for dogs. Epstein, however, is not surprised that this comment comes from "a relic of the 1960's," who "combines . . . portentiousness, fatigue, and anti-Americanism" (598). Similarly, Neil Hepburn attributes Vonnegut's generalizations regarding love to his "wetly 'compassionate' benevolence that indiscriminately awards the same value to every conceivable mode of action or experience" (658). What Epstein and Hepburn do not notice is that perhaps Vonnegut is prepared to reject even love, a basic element of his moralism, if in its name, a human being is treated as a possession or machine.

Another element that is connected with Vonnegut's man-machine distinction is the automobile as a recurrent image in Vonnegut's fiction in general, and especially, in

Breakfast of Champions. The automobile seems to symbolize the human tendency, that Vonnegut bemoans, to "manipulate." Thus, Paul's (30) and Finnerty's (40) decrepit cars in Player Piano might stand for Paul's and Finnerty's reluctance to take pride in controlling objects and human beings. Also, Valencia Pilgrim in Slaughterhouse-Five has an accident with the Pilgrims' Cadillac, whose carbon monoxide fumes kill her (183). She thus fails to manipulate her car the same way she has failed to manipulate Billy, her husband. In Slapstick, however, the setting of a primitivistic future makes automobiles conspicuous by their absence; however, the world of Slapstick is also much less "controlled" than that of most other Vonnegut novels.

Breakfast of Champions even has several author-drawn automobile-related pictures: a Volkswagon beetle (134), an Ajax Company truck (91), a Pyramid Company truck (90), a truck device (168), a "This Car is a Lemon" sign (275), and so on. Moreover, one of the two major characters of the novel, Dwayne Hoover, is a Pontiac dealer, who periodically devises selling strategies; the other, Kilgore Trout, spends a good part of the novel "hitching rides" on trucks and conversing with the truck drivers concerning their lack of control over their lives. The automobile is hence a theme closely related to Vonnegut's distinction between man and machine.

The theme of man vis-a-vis machine leads us to Vonnegut's next phase in the denouement of his "solution" to determinism, which is to locate man inside an intricately "constructed" deterministic system. The idea of repetition is fundamental to Vonnegut's deterministic construct, whether it be the determinism of Slaughterhouse-Five, which seems to be modelled after Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence or that of Breakfast of Champions, which is based on continuity in general as a basic feature of existence or that of Slapstick, where it is historical.

The doctrine of eternal recurrence, which Nietzsche "regarded as his most significant concept" (Magnus 8) states not only that "everything recurs" but also "that we ought to behave as if it does" (7). Nietzsche believes this recurrence to be logical, since it accommodates limited space and energy in "an eternity of time" (13).

The cyclical determinism of Slaughterhouse-Five seems to correspond to Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, although neither Vonnegut nor any of his critics mentions Nietzsche (or the Hindu karmic theory that Nietzsche owes a great deal to) as a possible influence. Billy Pilgrim, after coming "unstuck in time," sees "his birth and death many times . . . and pays random visits to all the events in between" (23). This time-travel is possible because of the novel's axiomatic cyclical nature of time. However, in spite of his being able to travel

through time, Billy lacks the Tralfamadorian ability to see several or all moments in time at once:

> All moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. ((27)

It is important to understand the tyranny of determinism in this novel, which we fail to if we do not notice two things in this passage: the Tralfamadorians do not have any more freedom from this time-based determinism than Billy (the moments are "permanent" for them, too); and their ability to see many moments at once does not change the cyclical, repetitive nature of this determinism any more than Billy's time-travel does. The determinism of Slaughterhouse-Five, based as it is on unstoppable repetition, is thus an inflexible one. Moreover, in its cosmological tyranny, it does not spare beings of any planet. It is also intricate in that not only is it a cyclical construct of moments, but each moment is "structured" to be the way it is (154).

Continuity is to the determinism of Breakfast of Champions what eternal recurrence is to that of Slaughterhouse-Five. To the narrator of Breakfast of Champions, "life is . . . a polymer" (228), whose "molecule" goes "on and on, repeating itself forever"

(227). It is this continuity that is also the basis of Vonnegut's use of phrases such as "etc." and "and so on". He says,

> the proper ending for any story about people[,] it seems to me, since life is now a polymer in which the Earth is wrapped so tightly, should be that same abbreviation, [etc.] . . . .
>
> And it is in order to acknowledge the continuity of this polymer that I begin so many sentences with "And" and "So," and end so many paragraphs with " . . . and so on." (228)

Furthermore, the belief in continuity also makes Vonnegut satirize the Aristotlian obsession with beginnings, middles, and ends in Slaughterhouse-Five (5, 88), in Mother Night (136), and in Breakfast of Champions, through "the Hawaiian word . . . [for] both hello and goodbye," aloha (101). The obsession of "old-fashioned storytellers" with "a beginning, a middle, and an end" seems to Vonnegut to be the direct consequence of their isconceptions of life.

Breakfast of Champions has another effective vehicle for the notion of life's continuity in the symbol of the skating rink that the truck driver describes:

> I'd see folks go in, and I'd see folks come out . . . but I couldn't figure out what kind of a machine it was that made the drone. The building was a cheap old frame thing set up on cement blocks, and it was out in the middle of nowhere.

> Cars came and went, and the folks sure seemed to like whatever was doing the droning . . . .
>
> . . . . It was full of folks on roller-skates . . . They went around and around. Nobody smiled. They just went around and around. (120)

The skating rink is an obvious symbol of life as Vonnegut sees it; the symbolism is obvious because such an elaborate description of a skating rink is otherwise an unwarranted response to Kilgore's Trout's question as to what West Virginians do for amusement. The "windowless building which droned monotonously" and which "folks go in . . . and come out" of and go "around and around" in (120) is indeed life as a continuing "activity" with births and deaths scarcely slowing it down. One wonders, however, why the people at the skating rink "seemed to like" the drone but would not smile.

Vonnegut also uses skating as a symbol of life as continuity in Slaughterhouse-Five, in which Billy Pilgrim hallucinates about going on

> skating, doing tricks in sweatsocks, tricks that most people would consider impossible--making turns, stopping on a dime and so on. The cheering . . . [goes on], but its tone . . . [is] altered as the hallucination . . . [gives] way to time-travel. (49)

One notices how continuity and repetition are common to reality and hallucination in Billy's world.

The determinism of Slapstick is mostly historical, and the theme of repetition is also very much at its core. Wilbur Swain, the protagonist, lives to be over a hundred years old and notices a sense of repetition to such historical phenomena as wars and rises and falls of civilizations. In the future wolrd of Slapstick, America gets divided into several provinces such as the Dukedom of Oklahoma and Kingdom of Michigan. Slavery makes a comeback. Moreover, peace, Swain assures us, is cyclical: "we find it. We lose it. We find it again. We lose it again" (219). Similarly, as the novel's central pair of human beings, Wilbur and Eliza are replaced by Wilbur and Melody, who again, in the afterlife, are replaced by Wilbur and Eliza.

Repetition in Vonnegut, which James Lundquist wrongly assumes as leading nowhere (77), is a distinguishing feature of deterministic reality; perhaps it is inevitably so, since any elaborate construct cannot avoid repetition without difficulty and awkwardness. As a theme, repetition is also reinforced in the three novels through the means of recurring phrases and characters, coincidence, and the metamorphosis of characters and images.

Vonnegut repeats certain phrases and characters in all his works; some of the phrases occur too often to suit everyone's taste. The recurrent phrase, "Hi Ho" in Slapstick, for instance, reminds Frederick Karl of Walt Disney's Snow White; Neil Hepburn thinks that it is even

idiotic. Perhaps this annoyance to critics is a deliberate construct of Vonnegut's: repetition is an integral part of life, especially as Vonnegut views it, and annoying as it might be, it still has the license of realism. The phrase "so it goes," which symbolizes the "matter-of-factness" of all events and death in particular, is thus repeated fifty-nine times in Slaughterhouse-Five, and on some pages four (214) or five (210) times per page. "And so on," which to Vonnegut represents continuity (Breakfast 228), occurs twenty-seven times in Breakfast of Champions, ten times in Slaughterhouse-Five, and nine times in Slapstick. As a repetitive device of inductive logic, "and so on" also plays an important role in creating the ambience of connectedness, which is definitive to any deterministic construct. In Slapstick, "Hi Ho" is the ruling phrase; it not only fits into the tradition of slapstick, but it also evokes a sense of the recurring highs and lows of life. Besides these, such mottos as "Goodbye, Blue Monday" (Breakfast 42, 43, 242, 272) and "Lonesome No More" (Slapstick 159, 167, 173, 177, 180, 186, 187, 204) are introduced as subtitles but go on to become incantations that transform, through realistic repetition, the text into the world. Perhaps Slapstick's Wilbur Swain also offers a cogent interpretation of ritualistic repetition in Vonnegut, when Swain says, "life can be painless, provided that there is sufficient peacefulness for a dozen or so rituals to be repeated . . . endlessly" (44).

Characters from other novels also reappear in these novels. Charles B. Harris, in the context of Slaughterhouse-Five, points out some of these reappearances:

> Every novel Vonnegut has written beforeSlaughterhouse-Five finds its way directly or indirectly into the Dresden novel. At least three characters--Eliot Rosewater and Kilgore Trout from God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and Howard Campbell, Jr. from Mother Night--as well as the Tralfamadorians, who first appear in Sirens of Titan, reappear in Slaughterhouse-Five. Each character therefore has a "past" supplied by the reader's memory of those previous fictions. (241)

Similarly, Francine Pefko of Player Piano and Kilgore Trout and Eliot Rosewater of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater and Slaughterhouse-Five are reincarnated into Breakfast of Champions and Norman Mushari from God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater comes back in Slapstick to be Eliza's attorney. These characters, in inter-connecting several Vonnegut texts, also reinforce Vonnegut's determinism by extending its "domain" and making it an even more intricate construct.

Coincidence is another of Vonnegut's ways of building constructs through repetition. Frequent coincidences, moreover, emphasize determinism. They are not only

independent of human will, but in the case of a brief text, they establish an uncomfortably high number of connections in reality that are beyond human understanding and manipulation.

Slaughterhouse-Five has several inexplicable coincidences. Kilgore Trout, in talking to his paper route children, uses phrases from the titles of his novels, all "incidentally" (167). Another coincidence occurs on the Pilgrims' wedding night, when a yacht goes past their "marriage bed." The yacht carries Lance Rumfoord and his bride, Cynthia Landry, and much later Billy Pilgrim shares "a hospital room with Rumfoord's uncle, Professor Bertram Copeland Rumfoord" (120). Similarly, Billy alone of all the passengers of the airplane he is in survives the accident (156); his eventual assassin, Paul Lazzaro, is also a sole survivor (35). Yet another coincidence, which the narrator refers to as a "miracle," takes place when Billy suffers an acute attack of stage fright before he addresses the Lions Club of Ilium, New York. He, however, is a grand success with the audience. The narrator explains the "miracle" by informing the reader that Billy has "taken a course in public speaking" (50). A more "inexplicable" coincidence than the Lions Club incident is the fact that Billy and his German guard Werner Gluck are "distant cousins, something which they never" find out (158). Billy's Tralfamadorian adventure is also anticipated by Trout's novel The Big Board, in which "an

Earthling man and woman" are "kidnapped by extra-terrestrials" (201). Later on Billy even comes across a magazine that claims to know Montana Wildhack's whereabouts while he alone knows where she is (204). Billy also finds the photograph depicting bestiality, which is shown to him first by Roland Weary in Germany (40), again in an adult bookstore in New York (205). Finally, the serenity prayer that hangs on Billy's office wall in Ilium, New York (60) gets repeated in the locket on Montana's silver chain (209).

If coincidences in Slaughterhouse-Five happen mostly to Billy Pilgrim, in Breakfast of Champions, they happen to both Kilgore Trout and Dwayne Hoover, the two "champions" of the novel. Trout is often linked with coincidences. For instance, we are told that "Fred T. Barry, incidentally, . . . [is] exactly the same age as Trout. They . . . [have] the same birthday" (33). Moreover, Trout's tuxedo closely resembles that of Vonnegut's (the authorial persona's) father (34), and Trout also has Vonnegut's father's "wasted face" (293). Trout also encounters a mining town owned by Eliot Rosewater (126), while going to an arts festival in Midland City on Eliot's invitation.

Coincidences are common in Dwayne Hoover's life, too. The motto, "Goodbye, Blue Monday" (42) appears both on the sign in front of Dwayne's business and on a "five-hundred-pound bomb . . . to be dropped on Hamburg, Germany" (43).

He also experiences a "telepathic" coincidence. A woman named Mary Young, before she dies of pneumonia in the County Hospital, utters, "Oh my, oh my" (63), and she releases "a small cloud of telepathic butterflies," one of which brushes "the cheek of Dwayne Hoover, nine miles away." Dwayne hears "a tired voice from somewhere behind his head" whisper "Oh my, oh my" (64). Also, the narrator tells us that as Dwayne is "berating . . . Wayne Hoobler in the used car lot," Eliot Rosewater's chartered plane lands at Will Fairchild Memorial Airport (268). The significance of the coincidence, however, is not explained.

Two of the coincidences in Breakfast of Champions are called "amazing" by the narrator. We are told that it is "an amazing coincidence that the truck driver had read a book by Kilgore Trout" (129). Also, "a mildly amazing coincidence" is the fact that the man who has raped Patty Keene is also the one who has caused Gloria Browning's pregnancy (148), Don Breedlove (bad pun). He also has a wife and three kids (149).

In Slapstick, coincidence is not as common as it is in the other two novels. The two major instances of coincidence seem to be Eliza's "prophetic" statement concerning Mars where she eventually goes (56) and the Swains' mother's referring to Dr. Cordelia Cordiner as an "over-dressed little sparrow-fart" (101), which epithet is also used for her by her daughter later on (122).

Deterministic repetition is also accomplished by Vonnegut through the metamorphosis of characters and images, "things flowing into one another," in a manner reminiscent of Schopenhaur (Freedom 62). Metamorphosis, in suggesting a flexible universe, might still seem to contradict determinism. Yet against the backdrop of an overwhelmingly controlled and intricately constructed reality, metamorphosis can only be an illusive construct of human beings that, instead of defeating determinism, highlights it. Furthermore, metamorphosis, in a Schopenhauerian sense, reaffirms the connectedness of Vonnegut's universe, the connectedness which also informs and enables his deterministic construct. It is this quasi-supernatural connectedness that we find common to all the repetitive feature of Vonnegut's deterministic reality.

Metamorphosis, being a conspicuous device of Vonnegut's repertoire, has understandably received some expert attention, although it has not been examined in and unified with the wider contexts of repetition, determinism, and constructs. Two critics in particular have developed definitive approaches to the metamorphosis of characters and/or imagery in Vonnegut. Kathryn Hume in "The Heraclitean Cosmos of Kurt Vonnegut" studies the "protean" nature of Vonnegut's characters and situations, and Charles B. Harris's "Time, Uncertainty, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: A Reading of Slaughterhouse-Five" has an exhaustive analysis of recurrent imagery in Slaughterhouse-Five. But Harris

and Hume are interested in thematically unifying only a narrow portion of the Vonnegut expanse; while Harris restricts himself to Slaughterhouse-Five and to the connections between recurrent images (not even metamorphosis) and "Chapter One," Hume's approach does not relate the theme of metamorphosis to other themes in Vonnegut's novels. Hence the need to view this subject through a "wide-angle lens."

Whether it owes its philosophical basis to Heraclitus, Lucretius, or David Hume, the metamorphosis of characters and images in Vonnegut is an ever-present theme. Vonnegut's characters, and especially his protagonists, are often "protean." Player Piano's protagonist, Paul Proteus, starts this long line of "protean" characters, which includes Malachi Constant who becomes Unk who becomes Malachi Constant in The Sirens of Titan, Howard Campbell the Nazi and anti-Nazi and Resi (alias Helga) in Mother Night, the Johnson-become-Bokonon of Cat's Cradle, and Eliot "the prince and the pauper" in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater.

In Slaughterhouse-Five, the metamorphosis of characters is inextricably linked to Vonnegut's repetition of certain images. An apt example of this connection would be the "nestled like spoons" image, which follows Billy through his time-travels. Whether Billy is "nestled like spoons" with his fellow-P. O. W.'s on a train (70), or with Valencia "in their big double bed" (72, 126), or with the

P. O. W.'s in a theater (144), or symbolically, with the dead hobo beside the railroad track (148), the recurrence of the image, "nestled like spoons," suggests that the identities of his companions are interchangeable. They are all essentially the same, whether in being part of the reality outside Billy or in their humanity. Similarly, Billy's feet in Germany are the colors of "blue and ivory" (72, 80), and so are the feet of the dead hobo (148) who becomes, in death and decrepitude, a transformed Billy. Perhaps it is this universal humanity that makes the quartet of singers at Billy's party (177) remind him of the four German guards (179) in Dresden.

These transformations nevertheless need not be limited to animate beings, for the province of determinism (hence the repetition of essence) extends to the inanimate, too: "for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Bible, Genesis 3:19). It is the constant comparison of the animate to the inanimate that accomplishes this metamorphosis. Thus, the "radium dial" on Bill's father's watch (90) metaphorically <u>becomes</u> the "radium dial" faces of the Russian soldiers in Germany (91). Montana's body even has the architecture of Dresden before the bombing (133). Moreover, Billy at one point looks like a kite (97) and at another like a scarecrow (124). Vonnegut even establishes imagistic connections among the inanimate: the train (69) and the tent (72) both have orange and black stripes, both Montana's pictures (205) and her locket (208)

are "soot and chalk," and the "geodesic dome" on Tralfamadore (111) makes a reappearance in the novel as the "geodesic dome" in Chicago (142). These metamorphoses sometimes seem to acquire even an anti-fairy tale dimension. Thus, Billy wears a ragged Cinderella costume (145), Dresden after bombing resembles the moon, and the ski resort in Vermont is transformed into war-torn Europe through the presence of some Europeans (156-57).

Metamorphosis in Breakfast of Champions is even more psychedelic. The two prostitutes that Trout meets are described as space creatures when they are said to saunter off, "their feet sticking to the planet, coming unstuck, then sticking again." They disappear "around a corner" (74). Trout also uses space imagery when he says, about his robbers, "for all I know, they may not even have been Earthlings . . . . For all I know, that car may have been occupied by an intelligent gas from Pluto" ((76). In Trout's stories, automobiles come alive (26-27), a chimpanzee becomes the President of the United States (88), and language keeps "turning into pure music" (110). Apart from the metamorphoses surrounding Trout, we can find other instances of this device in the truck that is "about to become a part of Philadelphia (102), the interchangeable Lyle and Kyle (115), time and Satan both being serpents (220-01), and Bunny's having "the same unhealthy color of the blind fish that used to live in the bowels of Sacred Miracle Cave" (176). Moreover, the recurrent images of the

magic wand (137, 161) and the mirrors (19, 90, 94, 193, 197, 229, 294))--which Trout thinks of as leaks into other worlds--augment the metamorphic quality of Breakfast of Champions.

For Wilbur and Eliza Swain of Slapstick, metamorphosis occurs both at personal and international levels. They are born physically deformed and hope for the reenactment in their lives of the story of "The Ugly Duckling" (58). But in their case, the duckling does not grow up to be a swan: Eliza dies on Mars still missing her brother--her prince-turned-swine (115-16)--and Wilbur grows up to be a drug-addicted President of the United States, who helplessly watches the country divide itself. Yet as they grow up, their imagination makes the world seem more pliable than it is. The fact that their imagination and its metamorphic powers fail to modify the world, however, only highlights the omnipotence of determinism. Through the dialectical indirection of metamorphosis, Vonnegut therefore emphasizes the inflexibility of determinism in Slapstick. Metamorphosis is thus found to be an integral feature of the Swains' world-view.

As children, Wilbur and Eliza view their parents' visitations as "annual space voyage[s] to our asteroid" (59). Carrying this imagination into adulthood, Wilbur later on creates extended families in the country by introducing new middle names for everyone and making people with common middle names establish their own close

networks. He thus tries to eliminate for others the loneliness that he has experienced as a child. Eliza has her own imaginative adventures of metamorphosis; for example, she plans a meeting with her brother that transforms the ordinary into the pschedelic:

> an Inca servant of Eliza's . . . fired a magnesium flare into the air.
>
> Everything touched by that unnatural dazzle became statuary--lifeless and exemplary . . .
>
> The helicopter materialized directly over us [Wilbur and company], itself made allegorical, transformed into a terrible mechanical angel by the glare of the flare. (138)

Described once as the "bride of Dracula" (67) and at another time, as "the Mammoth Cave" (87), Eliza thus lets her imagination be her "magic wand."

Slapstick's international politics of the future has an antecedent in a passage from Slaughterhouse-Five that depicts America as a divided nation and China as the new world power. When Billy goes to attend the convention on flying saucers,

> he has . . . to cross three international boundaries in order to reach Chicago. United States of America has been Balkanized, has been divided into twenty petty nations so that it will never again be a threat to world peace. Chicago has been hydrogen-bombed by angry Chinamen. (142)

The world of Slapstick is divided in a similar manner, although there are other changes, too. Wilbur tells us,

> people began to die by the millions of "The Albanian Flu" in most places, and here on Manhattan of "The Green Death."
>
> And that was the end of the Nation. It became families, and nothing more [emphasis mine].
>
> Oh, there were claims of Dukedoms and Kingdoms and such garbage, and armies were raised and forts were built here and there. But few people admired them. They were just more bad weather and more bad gravity that families endured from time to time. (187)

This new world is characterized therefore by a historical regression that involves a return to forts, armies, and coherent families. The only thing that this future has that mankind's past does not is fluctuations in gravity, which nevertheless reemphasize regression or even primitivism, in that they sometimes require human beings to crawl "on all fours" (79) as an animal would. Even these changes in gravity, Wilbur and Eliza conjecture, could be an ancient phenomenon that has not occurred in the recent history: "it might even be abnormal on earth for gravity to be stable for long periods of time" (52). Significantly, Wilbur Swain's campaign photographs carry the inscription, "THE PAST IS PROLOGUE" (166). The metamorphosed world of

Slapstick is thus mostly a resurrected past. In this regard, even Slapstick seems to be based on the doctrine of eternal recurrence, which is of course more developed in Slaughterhouse-Five.

In becoming the new world power in Slapstick, China perhaps recovers her past glory, thus fitting into the novel's pattern of historical regression. China, more importantly, is the creator of several metamorphoses in this novel. The Chinese establish a colony on Mars (28) and even send "two hundred explorers to Mars--without using a space vehicle of any kind" (64). Although they choose to remain mysterious (90, 137) by volunteering "no details" (64), they are known to author many magical metamorphoses. They successfully experiment "with making human beings smaller, so they would not need to eat so much and wear such big clothes" (64). Later in the novel, Wilbur tells us that "the miniaturization of human beings in China . . . [has] progressed so far . . . that their ambassador . . . [is] only sixty centimeters tall" (118). The Chinese also discover that "some people could communicate with certain others without visible or audible signals" (94). Another of their metamorphic achievements is turning ordinary men and women into "geniuses--by teaching pairs or small groups of congenial, telepathically compatible specialists to think as single minds" (95-96). Equipped as they are with all these powers of transforming reality, the Chinese are also suspected of being able to increase and decrease

gravity (156, 159). They are, however, portrayed as being superhuman; their metamorphic powers only make them agents of determinism and not its nullifiers.

Determinism in Slaughterhouse-Five, Breakfast of Champions, and Slapstick is thus a cyclical, repetitive construct that involves recurrent phrases and characters, coincidences, and metamorphoses. However, even against such an insurmountable obstacle, Vonnegut advocates the need for human action. Determinism in Vonnegut, moreover, works at several symbolic levels and his solution to determinism resembles Nietzsche's amor fati.

Amor Fati is much similar to the philosophy expressed in the serenity prayer, which Vonnegut quotes twice in Slaughterhouse-Five: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom always to tell the difference" (60, 209). Since God does not exist for Nietzsche as well as Vonnegut, man is to grant himself this serenity. One wonders, with Peter Scholl, if this secularized religion is tenable:

> Vonnegut has lost the Faith, has repudiated Christianity, its creeds and assorted institutions, but he has retained all the ethical reflexes which sometimes embellish that religion . . . . He retains belief in the worth of man as an article of faith, though it is a faith he cannot justify intellectually . . . (11)

But an author should not be evaluated on the basis of the soundness of his beliefs but rather on the compelling quality of his fictions. Vonnegut passes that test especially in his "constructing" of several levels of determinism.

If "the absence of any hindrance and restraint" is freedom (Schopenhauer, Freedom 3), Billy Pilgrim does not have free will. In a way, everything in his life is an unyielding obstacle, for "among the things Billy Pilgrim . . . [can not] change . . . [are] the past, the present, and the future" (Slaughterhouse 60). The Tralfamadorians explain this determinism to him by comparing him to a ladybug "trapped" in amber, just as in the "paperweight in his office which . . . [is] a blob of polished amber with three ladybugs embedded in it" (77). The Tralfamadorians also symbolize determinism when they rob Billy of even the illusion of free will. For instance, the narrator tells us that

> Billy's will was paralyzed [by the Tralfamadorians] by a zap gun aimed at him from one of the portholes. It became imperative that he take hold of the bottom rung of the sinuous ladder, which he did. The rung was electrified, so that Billy's hands locked onto it hard. He was hauled into the airlock, and machinery closed the bottom door. (76)

They also take Billy "to Tralfamadore, where he . . . [is] displayed naked in a zoo . . . [and] mated there with . . . Montana Wildhack" (25). Treated thus like an animal--taken "naked" to a "zoo" and "mated"--Billy becomes a symbol of a human being stripped of his illusory free will.

Vonnegut also employs symbolic strategies in Breakfast of Champions and Slapstick to portray the lack of free will in human beings. Breakfast of Champions has two kinds of textual determinism that symbolize determinism at a macrocosmic level: chemical and authorial. Vonnegut believes that human beings have "chemical reactions seething inside" them. These internal chemicals, together with the chemicals (drugs) they might be taking, can "wreck" their brains, as they do Vonnegut's mother's, or cheer them up, as they do Vonnegut (4). The distinction of external chemicals versus internal ones ultimately does not matter. They are both chemicals and both responsible for the chemical "slavery" of mankind.

Dwayne Hoover in Breakfast of Champions is controlled by his internal chemicals. According to the narrator,

> the bad chemicals in his [Dwayne's] head were fed up with secrecy. They were no longer content with making him feel and see queer things. They wanted him to do queer things, also, make a lot of noise. (39)

The chemicals fully control him. They make "him put his car in gear" (64), "forget all about Hawaiian Week" (99),

"demand from Kilgore Trout the secrets of life" (252), and be cruel to his secretary-mistress (159). At one point, Dwayne even wants "to give her [Francine] a beating in public," because "his bad chemicals" make him "think she richly" deserves it (272). Vonnegut blames "bad chemicals" for even such diverse occurrences as presidential assassinations and the holocaust (133). Incidentally, we see a similar loss of individual control to bad internal chemicals in Wilbur Swain's mother in Slapstick. We are told, "because she was a symphony of chemical reactions like all other living things, . . . her chemicals insisted that she shriek in response to the bang" (65).

Besides these internal chemicals, Vonnegut's characters in these three novels are also subjected to several external chemicals. Alcohol, called "yeast excrement" in Breakfast of Champions (208), plays a major role in the lives of Vonnegut (Slaughterhouse- Five 4, 12), Eliot Roswater (100), Montana Wildhack's mother (208), Rabo Karabekian (Breakfast 208), Vonnegut's uncle (Slapstick 9), Eliza Swain (121, 137), Wilbur Swain (228), and Vera's husband (209). Wilbur is of course addicted to "tri-benzo-Deportamil" (155, 235-36). Other non-alcoholic drugs mentioned in these works include Billy's morphine (Slaughterhouse 99, 123), Vonnegut's "pills" (Breakfast 4, 248), "dope" (164), cocaine (282), and hashish (Slapstick 114). The most dangerous external chemical, according to

Breakfast of Champions, however, is not a substance, but bad ideas.

Trout becomes "a fanatic on the importance of ideas as causes and cures for diseases" (15), because his bad ideas give Dwayne's "craziness . . . shape and direction" (14) and become his "mind poison" (15). He thus believes that "human beings could be easily felled by a single idea as by cholera or the bubonic plague. There . . . [is] no immunity to cuckoo ideas on Earth" (27). Trout even wants his tombstone to read, "we are healthy only to the extent that our ideas are humane" (16). However, Dwayne is not the only person whose "health" is threatened or ruined by Trout's ideas; Trout cannot even help "inadvertently poisoning the collective mind of New York City" with his "pluto gang" theories (78). In this manner, his ideas "poison" the Earth just as science does, although "like most science-fiction writers, Trout . . . [knows] nothing about science" (123, 238). The narrator of Slaughterhouse-Five, who believes that Trout's prose is "frightful" but his ideas are good (110), is therefore proven wrong in Breakfast of Champions. In any case, Vonnegut portrays ideas as powerful chemicals that weave their own controlling net around human beings. In Breakfast of Champions, he also uses his deterministic powers as the author of his characters to convey the same idea at a different textual level.

In Breakfast of Champions, the authorial persona plays God to the characters, his "creatures"; he even feels that he is "on a par with the Creator of the Universe" (200). He proudly proclaims himself, for instance, as Trout's creator:

> I do know who invented Kilgore Trout. I did.
>
> I made him snaggle-toothed. I gave him hair, but I turned it white. I wouldn't let him comb it or go to a barber. I made him grow it long and tangled . . . .
>
> And, two months after Trout received his first fan letter, I had him find in his mailbox an invitation to be a speaker at an arts festival in the American Middle West. (32)

These utterances are not merely "a series of narcissistic giggles" (Welcome to the Monkey House xi), for their emphasis is not on the "utterer" but on Trout's loss of free will even in regard to the little details of his physique and daily life.

In claiming his authorship of Wayne Hoobler, Vonnegut the authorial persona goes further and stretches the character's lack of independence to cover the realm of all possibilities; he declares that he is

> the person who . . . [has] created all Wayne's misery to date, who could kill him or make a millionaire or send him back to prison or do

> whatever he damn pleased with Wayne. (Breakfast 192)

Similarly, Vonnegut claims that he "could have killed . . . [Eliot Rosewater] and his pilot, too, but I [Vonnegut] let them live on" (269). At its extreme, this deterministic control can extend even to the intrinsic value of a character's existence: it is up to an outside force (Vonnegut) to give the character a meaningful life or "a life not worth living" (71). Thus, as Stanley Schatt observes,

> the characters in Breakfast of Champions are puppets, and Vonnegut makes it clear that he is the puppet-master, that both Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout are his creations, and that they must do whatever he wants them to do. (98)

Schatt, however, does not notice how Vonnegut uses his "puppets" to symbolize human beings "trapped" in a deterministic construct. Vonnegut's "puppeteering," moreover, is not limited to his characters; in its expanse, it includes the reader, too.

Vonnegut's treatment of his reader in Breakfast of Champions, if evaluated according to the standards of the conventional novel, can only be characterized as "irresponsible" and "whimsical." This treament, however, reinforces the reader's empathy for the powerlessness of Vonnegut's characters and, by implication, for that of human beings in general, who find themselves in a

deterministic reality. Vonnegut achieves this effect by attacking the reader's senses of discovery and accountability.

One of the major functions of suspense in the traditional novel is to give the reader a sense of discovery; the reader is thus "hooked" and humored into staying with the text. In Breakfast of Champions, and to a lesser extent in Slaughterhouse-Five and Slapstick, Vonnegut deliberately destroys suspense. Through this gesture, he seems to demand that the reader redefine his relationship with the text according to the author's rules, which require that the reader become the author's "puppet" in order to empathize with the characters.

Let us analyze the first three paragraphs of the novel for elements that defeat suspense:

> This is a tale of a meeting of two lonesome, skinny, fairly old white men on a planet which was dying fast.
>
> One of them was a science-fiction writer named Kilgore Trout. He was a nobody at the time, and he supposed his life was over. He was mistaken. As a consequence of the meeting, he became one of the most beloved and respected human beings in history.
>
> The man he met was an automobile dealer, a Pontiac dealer named Dwayne Hoover. Dwayne Hoover was on the brink of going insane. (7)

Of the seven sentences here, at least four refer to the future and reveal conclusive details about it. Even among the rest (the first three sentences of the second paragraph), two sentences (second and third) depend, for the completion of their "thought," on the sentence to follow, a sentence that is entirely about the future. The future is thus revealed by the narrator-author, who also seems to be omniscient, because his vision has the focus to see that Dwayne is "on the brink of going insane" and the range to see not only the history of human race but also the "planet" that is "dying fast." Most importantly, these passages create no suspense; by the end of the third paragraph, we already know what will happen toward the end of the tale: Trout and Dwayne meet, Trout will become famous, and Dwayne will become insane.

Vonnegut's undoing of suspense, however, is not limited to the first three paragraphs. His "prophetic" voice intrudes again and again into the narrative to announce the future. For example, when Dwayne insults Harry LeSabre, the authorial persona tells us that

> later on, of course, Dwayne would assault all sorts of people, even three strangers from Erie, Pennsylvania, who . . . [have] never been to Midland City before. But Harry . . . [is] an isolated victim now. (43)

The "of course" and the casual return to "now" at the end are significant here. They exemplify the deliberate

indifference of the authorial persona to the discovery process of reading. Vonnegut's intention thus is for the reader to become part of the text rather than receive any special treatment as the audience. Another such narrative "jump ahead" occurs after Dwayne meets Patty Keene. At this point, Vonnegut prophesies that

> she [Patty] would get up enough nerve that night to call him on the telephone, but Dwayne wouldn't be home to answer. He would be in a padded cell in the County Hospital by then. (146)

Glenn Meeter might be correct when he observes, in the context of Vonnegut's prophecies in general, that "the artist risks less than the prophet, commits himself less fully. It is less dangerous to create than to reveal" (219). Yet the emphasis in Vonnegut's prophecies is neither on the prophet nor on the prophecy but on the reader, who is prophesied to. In being privy to this omniscient knowledge, the reader indeed plays a parodoxical role. He knows much more about the future of the characters than they do and much less about what lies between "now" and the end of the novel than the omniscient narrator. The reader therefore travels neither with the narrator nor with any of the characters, which he would have if this were a conventional novel. Being alone and not knowing much of what happens between now and the end (death), Vonnegut seems to say, is very much the lot of the common man. There are no guarantees about a truly

realistic process of discovery. Consequently, the reader should realize that he is the common man and should expect no special treatment in the form of the predictable conventions of the novel. Besides the sense of discovery through suspense, the other special treatment that Vonnegut denies his reader is the reader's assumption that the author is accountable to him.

Vonnegut's persona in Breakfast of Champions is a whimsical one that seldom "owes the reader any explanations." In the second paragraph of the novel, for instance, we are told that Trout becomes, "as a consequence of the meeting [between Dwayne and him], . . . one of the most beloved and respected human beings in history" (7). However, we are never told how this consequence comes about. In other words, how and why does Trout become famous? The author has no explanation. Another instance of this authorial pose of unaccountability occurs when, "out of the blue," Vonnegut interrupts the narrative about Dwayne and Patty Keene to tell us that

> earth scientists had just discovered something fascinating about the continent that Patty Keene was standing on, incidentally. It was riding on a slab about forty miles thick, and the slab was drifting around on molten glurp. And all the other continents had slabs of their own. When one slab crashed into another one, mountains were made. (143)

What this theory of the continents has to do with either Dwayne or Patty is for the reader to speculate upon; the author of course has no explanation. A bit later in the text, "Vonnegut" becomes even more whimsical. He writes "etc." in large letters because, he says, "I feel like it" 228). Moreover, Dwayne's resting "his chin on poor Trout's shoulder" (253), which the author calls an "extraordinarily unnatural" gesture, is given a extra-textual interpretation:

> he [Dwayne] did it because I wanted him to. It was something I had ached to have a character do for years and years. Dwayne did what the Duchess did to Alice in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. (252-53)

"Because I wanted him to" might seem at first to be a tautology: of course, the reader knows that characters do what the author wants them to. But as a conscious violation of habitual expectations, it highlights the author-reader (or, reader-text) relationship and ultimately, the reader, the purpose of his reading the novel, and the way he would relate the text to the world. Through the latter relationship, moreover, Vonnegut impresses on his reader that the text's treatment of him is much similar to the world's treatment of him and that the world is as much a deterministic construct as the text. In thus being a symbol of the world, Breakfast of Champions

emphatically expresses Vonnegut's determinism and its "construct" quality.

Slapstick's symbolic representation of determinism starts with the lives of Wilbur and Eliza Swain and ends with planet Earth. Wilbur Swain says of the Vermont apple farmers, whose burial ground he reflects upon,

> they were innocent great apes, with limited means for doing mischief, which, in my opinion as an old, old man, is all that human beings were ever meant to be. (36)

The "limited means" of the characters of this novel also represent a deterministic universe.

Wilbur and Eliza are "dizygotic twins" (27), who are born with certain congenital deformities. In a passage that is full of painful self-consciousness--reminiscent, incidentally, of John Gardner's Grendel--Wilbur describes his and his sister's "horridness" (Grendel 3):

> We were monsters, and we were not expected to live very long. We had six fingers on each little hand, and six toes on each little footsie. We had supernumerary nipples as well--two of them apiece.
>
> We were not mongolian idiots, although we had the coarse black hair typical of mongoloids. We were something new. We were neanderthaloids. We had the features of adult, fossil human beings

> even in infancy--massive brow-ridges, sloping foreheads, and steamshovel jaws. (Slapstick 28)

As "monsters" (28-29), Wilbur and Eliza are robbed of their free will by their parents the same way Billy Pilgrim, as a "curio," is stripped of his free will by the Tralfamadorians. Their parents, who are convinced by their advisors that Wilbur and Eliza are "no more true relatives of theirs . . . than baby crocodiles" (29), "entomb" them in " a spooky old mansion . . . in the midst of two hundred acres of apple trees on a mountaintop near the hamlet of Galen, Vermont." After secluding their children in this mansion, the parents, with the help of "carpenters and electricians and plumbers," proceed "to turn [it] into a sort of paradise" for Wilbur and Eliza (30). The parents, Caleb and Letitia, thus play God for their Adam and Eve. Later on, Caleb and Letitia, on the advice of Dr. Cordelia, destroy even this deterministic "paradise" (71) when they separate Wilbur and Eliza and send Wilbur to "a school for severely disturbed children" (104) and Eliza to "an expensive institution for people of her sort" (111).

Wilbur and Eliza, however, are not the only characters in the novel whose lives are "constructed" by someone else's will. Wilbur goes on to "create" artificially extended families by having a computer relate human beings to each other on the basis of new middle names (169-70). This new "creation" is followed by a return to the

feudally-controlled societies (188, 213) and, in the case of Vera, even slavery (22, 26, 204, 207).

All these symbolic levels of determinism in our three texts, nevertheless, do not deter the Vonnegut protagonist from exerting "human effort in spite of." Nietzsche's philosophy of amor fati seems to characterize their responses. Realizing that free will is impossible is the leads one to amor fati.

Chapter Four of Slaughterhouse-Five ends with the following two paragraphs:

> "You sound to me as though you don't believe in free will," said Billy Pilgrim.
>
> "If I hadn't spent so much time studying Earthlings," said the Tralfamadorian, "I wouldn't have any idea what was meant by 'free will.' I've visited thirty-one inhabited planets in the universe, and I have studied reports on one hundred more. Only on Earth is there any talk of free will." (86)

Vonnegut seems to agree with the Tralfamadorian's view of free will, because he lets the Tralfamadorian have the "last word" (of the chapter, at least), without qualifying or modifying his statement. The rest of the novel and the other Vonnegut novels seem to exhibit the same belief in the impossibility of free will. Moreover, even without such clear pronouncements as the one quoted above,

Vonnegut's adherence to determinism is emphatic, as I have demonstrated so far in this chapter.

Given this "pessimistic" view of free will, we might be tempted to expect from Vonnegut's texts a philosophy of inaction. However, determinism only encourages him to advocate responsible action, in a manner much similar to that of Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, in delineating a deterministic cosmos, also rules out the possibility of free will. Eternal recurrence, however, does not invalidate the human will to act. This way, it does pose

> an existential paradox. In the absence of a memory of previous states, I am free to choose my destiny. I do not know what I shall become except in so far as I actually choose. Still, the eternal recurrence intensifies the dynamics of choice, because whatever I choose to be that I shall be for infinite recurrences. . . . [Thus] it admonishes us to stamp the character of eternity upon our lives. (Magnus 53)

Action thus creates Being (Heidegger 193-94) or, to use Vonnegut's loosely-defined term, "awareness" (Breakfast 221). The rationale for human action therefore could be that "through that which we do we only find out what we are" (Schopenhauer, Freedom 62). Moreover, an individual's

actions can also "determine" humanity: "in choosing myself, I choose man" (Sartre 18).

But in any deterministic setup, could we act any other way than we do? If we can, the setup is not strictly deterministic. It leaves us enough "tether" to "negotiate" with fate and to be responsible for our actions. Nietzsche bases his philosophy of Amor fati on this idea of a negotiable destiny; he thus

> calls for the Sisyphian assumption of one's destiny, amor fati: "Before fate strikes us it should be guided . . . once it has struck us, however, one should seek to love it." (Magnus 54)

Strict determinists would consider amor fati more of a hope than a possibility. This hope also serves as the raison d'etre for many of Kurt Vonnegut's characters and is embodied in the serenity prayer, which occurs twice in Slaughterhoue-Five. Amor fati in Slaughterhouse-Five, Breakfast of Champions, and Slapstick is found in the characters' actions in two philosophical modes: acceptance of one's destiny and "bargaining in good faith with destiny" (Slapstick 2).

When Billy Pilgrim in Slaughterhouse-Five wears his modified Cinderella costume, the narrator comments that "it was Fate, of course, which had costumed him [Billy]--Fate, and a feeble will to survive" (151). But before he comes to accept "Fate," Billy goes through several periods of not just "a feeble will to survive" but even no will to live at

all. When fired at in Germany, he thus gives "the marksman . . . a second chance" (33) and "wouldn't do anything to save himself" (34). In Ilium, he is said to be "unenthusiastic about living" (60), having found "life meaningless" (101). We are also told that he does not "really like life at all" (102).

From this vegetative existence, Billy grows into a more mature state of, what Lucretius would call, "cheerful acceptance of the universal lot" (24). For instance, when he is "advised to be content with knowing that . . . the lumps could work miracles for him, provided he . . . [does] not insist on learning their nature," not only is the proposition "all right with him," but he is also "grateful" and "glad" (Slaughterhouse 137). Even in talking to the "hateful" Bertram Copeland Rumfoord, Billy accepts war as a "necessity" (not a political one, but a deterministic one). He goes on to say, "everything is all right, and everybody has to do exactly what he does" (198). Of Billy's compliant nature, the narrator also tells us that

> Billy cried very little, though he often saw things worth crying about, and in that respect, at least, he resembled the Christ of the carol [which is quoted also as the epigraph of the book]:
>
> The Cattle are lowing,
> The Baby awakes,
> But the little Lord Jesus

No crying he makes. (197)

It is in this uncomplaining posture that Billy finds peace; he even tries to teach it to others through "letters and lectures about the flying saucers, the negligibility of death, and the true nature of time" (190). One wonders if Billy's philophical stance is primarily intellectual or emotional or, as the allusion to Jesus Christ would imply, spiritual. Tony Tanner thinks it is even aesthetic:

> Billy becomes completely quiescent, calmly accepting everything that happens as happening exactly as it ought to (including his own death) . . . . If anything, he views the world aesthetically: every moment is a marvellous moment, [sic] at times he beams at scenes in the war. (312)

In any case, Billy Pilgrim comes to terms with his destiny. Even the authorial persona echoes the matter-of-factness of Billy's attitude through the frequent use of the phrase "so it goes" and through the "Yon Yonson" poem. The same sense is also conveyed when Harrison Starr, the movie-maker, compares writing an "anti-war book" to writing an "anti-glacier book," meaning that "there would always be wars, that they . . . [are] as easy to stop as glaciers." Vonnegut the authorial persona of course agrees with Harrison (3).

Kilgore Trout in Breakfast of Champions, the narrator tells us,

> no longer sheltered ideas of how things could be and should be on the planet, as opposed to how they really were. There was only one way for the Earth to be, he thought: the way it was.
>
> Everything was necessary. He saw an old white woman fishing through a garbage can. That was necessary. He saw a bathtub toy, a little rubber duck, lying on its side on the grating over a storm sewer. It had to be there. (103)

This acceptance of the status quo can also be seen in Trout's agreeing to go to the arts festival, in spite of early misgivings (34). Without this attitude on Trout's part, therefore, he would not have gone to Midland City and met Dwayne Hoover; the novel would not have existed, for "it is a tale of . . . [the] meeting" of Trout and Dwayne, a tale about "the breakfast of champions." Trout, furthermore, is not a conservationist because he realizes the futility of protest: he says, "I laugh about" things "I used to weep" about. He even believes that God has the same approach to reality (84-85).

Wilbur and Eliza in Slapstick also have the "serenity to accept the things . . . [they] cannot change." According to Dr. Cordiner, "they have almost no ambition at all, . . . so life can't disappoint them. They want only that life as they have known it should go on forever" (98). Inasmuch as their tolerance of "things as they are" is concerned, Dr. Cordiner is correct. After a brief

rebellion against the system, in the form of her suing her mother and her brother, Eliza makes peace with her family but leaves for Mars to eventually die there. Wilbur shows the same dignified acceptance of reality. He resigns himself to mediocrity, which is his destiny in the absence of his sister, together with whom he would form a single genius (50). Moreover, he calmly accepts the "gravity crash," the death and destruction it causes, and the division of the United States, of which he is the President.

However, one incident that happens immediately after the "gravity crash" invites special attention. Wilbur tells us,

> I must have suffered something like shell shock. People were crying for help there in the hamlet, and I was the only doctor. But I simply walked away. (154)

Reasons such as the death of his horse, Budweiser, and the fact that he is under "shell shock" might seem sufficient explanations for this irresponsible, or even unethical, conduct if we ignore the connection between this instance and similar instances in the lives of Billy Pilgrim in Slaughterhouse-Five and Dwayne Hoover in Breakfast of Champions. When "a black man" taps "on Billy's car window" "to talk about something," Billy does "the simplest thing" by driving on as soon as the light changes (Slaughterhouse 59). Similarly, Dwayne Hoover breaks "Wayne Hoobler's

heart by shaking his head vaguely, then walking away," when the black ex-convict asks him for a job (Breakfast 99). Pleading fear of "bad neighborhoods" for Billy and insanity for Dwayne is obviously not the answer, because if it were so, the narrator would have provided it. However, viewed in the philosophical context of accepting the status quo, the conduct of these three protagonists of Vonnegut's is understandable, although not laudable. It is not the suffering individuals they thus ignore, but rather the enormity of human suffering. In this, they are similar to Sylvia Rosewater, who has a nervous breakdown because "the outside world has not been even microscopically improved by the unselfish acts the conscience has demanded" (God Bless You 42). I do not mean, however, that Billy, Dwayne, and Wilbur are as "unselfish" as is Sylvia (or her husband, Eliot Rosewater); they are not. But in their "detachment," they display a "cosmic cool" (Olderman 198) that might be misconstrued as cynicism or apathy.

"Bargaining in good faith with destiny" is a phrase that Vonnegut introduces in Slapstick (1-2) in the context of the slapstick comedians Laurel and Hardy, who "perpetually intoxicated and instructed" Vonnegut "during . . . [his] childhood in the Great Depression" (2). Vonnegut says that "they never failed to bargain in good faith with their destinies, and were screamingly adorable and funny on that account" (1). Even if one does not share Vonnegut's enthusiasm for Laurel and Hardy, one recognizes the

importance of the message that they embodied, "bargaining in good faith with destiny," to Vonnegut's whole work and its message. What Vonnegut says of Laurel and Hardy can be said of his characters in Slaughterhouse-Five, Breakfast of Champions, and Slapstick, although his characters are not perhaps as "screamingly adorable and funny" as Vonnegut thinks Laurel and Hardy are.

"Bargaining in good faith with destiny," however, is not a contradiction in terms, but a part of one's acceptance of destiny. After all, Vonnegut's "good faith," like Nietzsche's, is placed in destiny. Billy Pilgrim and the other characters of Slaughterhouse-Five also exemplify this approach to life. Billy not only does not "get mad at anything" (30), but also wants to use his knowledge of the cyclical nature of life "to comfort . . . many people" (28). This is the reason why he assures "the fatherless boy that his father . . . [is] very much alive still in moments [that] the boy would see again and again" (135). Moreover, Billy wants to "comfort" all mankind through "letters and lectures" (190). He is even assassinated during one of his lectures.

"Bargaining in good faith with destiny" is not limited to Billy Pilgrim in this novel. In this respect, Eliot Rosewater of Slaughterhouse-Five, for instance, is much similar to the Eliot Rosewater of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater. He experiments "with being ardently sympathetic with everybody," because "that might make the world a

slightly more pleasant place to live in" (102). One should remember that this is the same Eliot who finds "life meaningless" (101). If his destiny is thus a meaningless life, he is not afraid to bargain with it through love for others. We find the same spirit of hope against hope furthermore in the British prisoners of war in Germany, who try to make "war look stylish and reasonable, and fun" (94), and in the German cabdriver, who hopes to see Vonnegut and O'Hare "again in a world of peace and freedom . . . if the accident will." "If the accident will," the phrase that Vonnegut says he likes "very much" (2), also characterizes the glimmer of hope that the bird sound "poo-tee-weet" seems to convey to Billy Pilgrim in Slaughterhouse-Five (215, 2) and to Eliot Rosewater in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (188).

The characters of Breakfast of Champions hope that destiny is on their side when they exert their human effort. Kilgore Trout thus wants his tombstone to read, "SOMEBODY (Sometime to Sometime): He Tried" (38). His optimism is obviously based on human effort: "He Tried." Moreover, he bemoans the human lusts for "gold and . . . a glimpse of a little girl's underpants" but still thanks

> those lusts for being so ridiculous, for they taught us that it was possible for a human being to believe anything, and to behave passionately in keeping with that belief--any belief.

> So now we can build an unselfish society by devoting to unselfishness the frenzy we once devoted to gold and to underpants. (25)

Trout does not say why one should be unselfish and how this "faith" is any more "rational" than faith in God or faith in "gold and underpants." He is nevertheless, like many other Vonnegut protagonists, convinced that love of mankind is the most valid reason for "bargaining in good faith with destiny." If Trout believes in God at all, it is a passive God who relies on selected inviduals to do his good works. Thus, Trout replies to the question, written on a men's room wall, "what is the purpose of life?" with "to be the eyes and ears and conscience of the Creator of the Universe, you fool" (67).

Even Dwayne, in believing himself to be God's only creature with free will, acts in his own perverse "good faith" when he attacks other people, whom he genuinely believes to be "unfeeling machines" (259). It is important to note--and no critic of Vonnegut's seems to have--that Dwayne Hoover is no more free from his conscience than the other Vonnegut protagonists. He tells Wayne Hoobler that he has deplored (until the reading of Trout's Now It Can Be Told),

> human slavery--not only black slaves, but white slaves, too. Dwayne [has] regarded coal miners and workers on assembly lines and so forth as slaves, no matter what color . . . . (263)

Dwayne therefore cannot be viewed as a man without a conscience. Vonnegut makes him the co-protagonist of Breakfast of Champions, along with Kilgore Trout, not for the sake of comic relief but to embody an angry "good faith." Thus both Kilgore Trout and Dwayne Hoover seem to "bargain in good faith with destiny."

The authorial persona of Breakfast of Champions, by his own constant admission, is the maker of his characters' destiny. As the God of this deterministic system, he shows his own "good faith" by "freeing" Kilgore Trout and by allowing a few of his other characters to have wills that are occasionally free from his will. Through this gesture toward his "creatures," Vonnegut might be proposing that God do the same with His, thereby making the world's determinism as flexible as the text's. Vonnegut thus seems to want man to be like "The Man" in Trout's Now It Can Be Told, on whose tombstone is written, "NOT EVEN THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE KNEW WHAT THE MAN WAS GOING TO SAY NEXT: Perhaps The Man was a better universe in its infancy" (175).

In the Epilogue of Breakfast of Champions, Vonnegut meets Kilgore Trout and "frees" him, saying

> I'm approaching my fiftieth birthday, Mr. Trout . . . . I am cleansing and renewing myself for the very different sorts of years to come. Under similar spiritual conditions, Count Tolstoi freed his serfs. Thomas Jefferson freed his slaves. I

> am going to set at liberty all the literary characters who have served me so loyally during my writing career.
>
> You are the only one I am telling . . . . Arise, Mr. Trout, you are free, you are free.
>
> (294)

By setting Trout "at liberty," Vonnegut releases him from the prison of the author's will; he seems to promise not to employ Trout in any other text. Vonnegut, however, brings Trout back in Jailbird: "Yes--Kilgore Trout is back again. He could not make it on the outside. That is no disgrace. A lot of good people can't make it on the outside" (ix). What does Vonnegut mean by "outside," since for a character there is no "outside" (just as there is no "outside" for a human being)? Perhaps the only "outside" possible is non-existence; Vonnegut might be implying, satirically, that even "a lot of good people" need to exist and that the world and the text need not operate on the principle of the survival of the fittest. In bringing back Trout, however, Vonnegut shows that no escape from determinism is possible, even an escape that is aided by its creator. Incidentally, Vonnegut does not mention who the other "literary characters" are that he has set free.

Vonnegut gives a few of the other characters in the novel their freedom, but only briefly. Of the characters that are given a brief "parole," the bartender at the Midland City Holiday Inn is the most prominent. In

controlling the bartender, Vonnegut's will seems to oppose itself. It thus validates Nietzsche's assertion that the will can be its own opponent:

> in the given circumstances we are at the same time the commanding and the obeying parties, and as the obeying party we know the sensations of constraint, impulsion, pressure, resistance, and motion, which usually begin immediately after the act of will; we are accustomed to disregard this duality, and to deceive ourselves about it by means of the synthetic concept "I" . . . . (26)

Vonnegut tells the reader that he has given the bartender his name (Harold Newcomb Wilbur), awarded him medals from the Second World War, and "put all his medals under his handkerchiefs in a dresser drawer." In spite of this detailed governing of Harold's life, Vonnegut says, "he [Harold] went on staring at me [Vonnegut], even though I wanted to stop him now." Vonnegut explains this "freedom" but still tries, in vain, to "manipulate" Harold:

> Here was the thing about my control over the characters I created: I could only guide their movements approximately, since they were such big animals. There was inertia to overcome. It wasn't as though I was connected to them by steel wires. It was more as though I was connected to them by stale rubberbands.

> So I made the green telephone in back of the bar ring. Harold Newcomb Wilbur answered it, but he kept his eyes on me. (202)

If Harold's rebellion against his creator only consists of staring, Kazak the dog reacts more violently for having been replaced as "a leading character in an earlier version" of the novel" (285). Kazak attacks Vonnegut. He is "flung back by the fence" (290), but Vonnegut sustains testicular damage that requires surgery (289). The author thus realizes that he "should have known that a character as ferocious as Kazak . . . [is] not easily cut out of a novel" (286). This incident is significant. Vonnegut, as the author of Kazak and of his own testicular injury, seems to believe that it is only poetic justice that the author of a deterministic system should be punished by its victims, that too, in the "parental" region of his body. Moreover, this "apology" of the author for his earlier ill-treatment of Kazak, is based on Vonnegut's belief in the ethical implications of life imitating art. He says,

> Why . . . [are] so many Americans treated by their government as though their lives were as disposable as paper facial tissues? Because that . . . [is] the way authors customarily . . . [treat] their bit-part players in their made-up tales.

Vonnegut resolves therefore to "shun storytelling . . . . [and] write about life"; in his works, "every person would be exactly as important as any other" ((210). Whether he keeps this difficult promise or not, this promise not only lets his characters "bargain in good faith with their destinies" but also requires him to do the same with his destiny as an author of deterministic constructs.

Slapstick, as I mentioned before, contains the phrase, "bargain in good faith with destiny" (2). It also exemplifies this "bargaining" well, mostly through the lives of Wilbur and Eliza. Wilbur and Eliza, as children, are made to feel that they are "monsters" by their parents and the parents' advisors (28-29). In spite of this ill-treatment, Wilbur goes on to become the President of the United States and the co-author, with his sister, of many ingenious theories, including the one about new middle names as the basis for artificially extended families. Eliza is "locked away for many years against her will--in an institution for the feeble-minded" (111). However, she proves her sanity and intelligence to be released and successfully sues her mother and brother for "damages" (112). Thus, although subjected to tremendous ill-treatment, both Wilbur and Eliza "bargain" their way out of loneliness and humiliation. They also try to help humanity become less lonely, through their extended families scheme. The "scheme" of course is an amor fati construct, a construct "built" in response to determinism.

Earlier in this chapter we have seen how Vonnegut's determinism shows systematic organization and thus is a construct. We find the same "construct" quality in the way Vonnegut himself "bargains with his destiny" as an author, or "artifice-maker." Vonnegut's authorial persona itself can be interpreted as an anti-deterministic construct, which compromises the determinism of the fictional text by erasing the distinction between fact and fiction.

Charles B. Harris points out that "the very fact that Slaughterhouse-Five is so carefully patterned serves as reminder that the Billy Pilgrim plot is an aesthetic construct produced by an ordering imagination" (238). We find the same "careful patterning" in Breakfast of Champions and Slapstick, too, and the fact that all the three texts, and fictions in general, are aesthetic constructs is obvious. What is not so obvious, at least to many of Vonnegut's critics, is that any element, factual or fictional, inside these constructs has the same "truth" value. In fact, their "truthfulness" does not matter, because both fact and fiction inside a text serve as building blocks for "construction."

In his analysis of Slaughterhouse-Five, Charles Harris also writes that

> it is important to recognize that the Vonnegut of Chapter One is, indeed, a character in Slaughterhouse-Five. Of course he is very much like Vonnegut the author, has had the same

> experiences, but he remains nonetheless the author-as-character. Moreover, he becomes the first-person narrator for the remainder of the novel . . . . (230)

Harris does not say why the distinction between Vonnegut the authorial persona (or, character) and Vonnegut the actual person is "important." It is nevertheless an important one, because the failure to make this distinction has resulted not only in the scathing criticisms of Vonnegut the person on the part of such critics as Frederick Karl (347), J. Epstein (598), and David Myers (55), but also in the "sentimental" biographical criticisms of Stanley Schatt (83, 105), Raymond Olderman (198), Robert Hipkiss (56-57), and Jerome Klinkowitz (74-76).

This distinction, moreover, is crucial to the reading of Slaughterhouse-Five, Breakfast of Champions, and Slapstick, because Vonnegut the authorial persona intevenes repeatedly in the narratives of these texts, perhaps in his bid to bargain with the deterministic destiny of the novel as a form. Failure to see this authorial persona as a construct results in the mistaking of Vonnegut--the person, not the persona--as a sentimental didacticist and his writings as random heaps of detail in search of a critic to unify them. Thus, as Robert Merrill points out, that the

> "Kurt Vonneguts" [of the novels] are "literary constructs." When he tells us [in Breakfast] that his mother committed sucide, we are sure he

> is telling the truth, but he has assimilated such facts into a fictional context, so the question of their "truthfulness" is irrelevant. (101)

We cannot, however, be sure that Vonnegut "is telling the truth." In fact, Vonnegut seems to blend fact and fiction beyond recognition in constructing his authorial persona. (In speaking of an authorial persona, I of course assume that his appearances as a character/narrator/author in our three novels constitute a single unified persona and not several personae.)

Some of the believable "facts" that we learn about Vonnegut through these three novels include his having worked for General Electric in Schenectady, New York, where he was also a voluteer fireman (Slaughterhouse 10), teaching "creative writing in the famous Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa" and "working on . . . [his] famous book about Dresden" (18), Dwayne Hoover's dog Sparky being "modeled after" a dog Vonnegut's brother owned (Breakfast 216), Vonnegut having a psychiatrist named Martha (268), and his sister, Alice, being "the secret of whatever artistic unity" he has ever achieved (Slapstick 15). There are yet other biographical "facts" in these texts that seem questionable. For instance, one doubts that Vonnegut and his wife once "were United World Federalists" (Slaughterhouse 11), that he had a friend named Bernard V. O'Hare (brother Bernard metamorphosed?)

and friend's wife named Mary (4-16), and that Wilbur Swain is indeed Vonnegut (Slapstick 19).

The guise of "fact," however, is an important part in the making of an authorial persona. Thus, the more fact-sounding the details are the better the credibility of the persona. Vonnegut seems to tempt us deliberately to think of his persona as an actual person, Kurt Vonnegut, by introducing into the persona many of the actual details of his own life. Hence the presence of biographical sketches--on the last page or inside covers of his novels--that fit both Vonnegut the person and Vonnegut the persona. The title page of Slaughterhouse-Five even includes a description of the author and the novel:

> "Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: A fourth-generation German-American now living in easy circumstances on cape cod (and smoking too much), who, as an American infantry scout hors de combat, as a prisoner of war, witnessed the fire-bombing of Dresden, Germany, "The Florence of the Elbe," a long time ago, and survived to tell the tale. This is a novel somewhat in the manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore, where the flying saucers come from. Peace.

If we read only that part of the passage that provides realistic details from the "author's" life and ignore the description of the novel's techinique, we would no doubt fall for the "persona" trap. However, if we correlate both

the parts, we would realize that to believe the biographical details as being factual would be much similar to imagining that flying saucers exist and that they come from the planet Tralfamadore; they both demand the "suspension of disbelief." The reader of course suspends his disbelief in acknowledgement of the construct quality (or artificiality) of the text.

The Vonnegut persona also highlights the irrelevance of the question of "truthfulness" by taking exaggerated pains to point out the "truthfulness" or the fictional nature of certain characters and events. His constant claims of having "made up" one character or another in Breakfast of Champions (32, 192, 202, 285, etc.) and the phrase, "this really happened" in Slapstick seem unnecessary unless this "fact-fiction" game is a way of showing the "fictional" or "construct" nature of both fact and fiction inside a text. The first few sentences of Slaughterhouse-Five exemplify this narrative pose well:

> All this happened, more or less. The war parts, any way, are pretty much true. One guy I knew really was shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his. Another guy I knew really did threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. And so on. I've changed all the names.
>
> I really did go back to Dresden with Guggenheim money (God love it) in 1967. (1)

Vonnegut certainly does not expect the reader to remember which events "more or less" happened, which "parts" are "pretty much true," and which characters "really" did what. He forces the reader, however, to realize that the distinction between fact and fiction does not matter. Raymond Olderman ascribes this technique to the genre of the fable, of which Vonnegut is a proponent:

> The universe he [Vonnegut] pictures is indifferent to man and man spends his time trying to twist that indifference into order and meaning. The fable is an appropriate form for Vonnegut because it requires a certain willing suspension of disbelief in order for us to go on reading . . . . We need illusions not to escape life but to deal with it, and what better form for the author's gift of an illusion than the fable. (190)

What Olderman says of "illusions" (that aid one not in escaping from reality but in coping with it), applies to Vonnegut's use of the even broader subject of deterministic reality, which, unlike fable, encompasses his authorial persona. Through his authorial persona, Vonnegut also demonstrates how a construct can compromise determinism.

In this chapter, we have seen how the subject of deterministic reality unifies Slaughterhouse-Five, Breakfast of Champions, and Slapstick in its being a common quality of both the determinism of Vonnegut's world and the

solutions that his characters (including his persona) develop in response to this determinism.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Part One of Friedrich Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future begins with these lines:

> The will to truth which will still tempt us to many a venture, that famous truthfulness of which all philosophers so far have spoken with respect --what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! (9)

In the context of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (who, incidentally, drops his "Jr." with the last novel in this study, Slapstick), this will to truth brings up many questions in the critic's mind. Let us, in summing up the contents of this dissertation, explore the implications of three of these haunting questions, questions regarding the definition of truth in criticism, the relationship in Vonnegut between freedom, love, and meaning, and the applicability of each of our three subjects ("character," rationality, and deterministic reality) to all of the early Vonnegut fiction.

One wonders if the subtlety (and the complexity) that a critic finds in Vonnegut and presents in the form of a

work such as this dissertation is the product of the critic's or the author's intellect. Moreover, in any quasi-New Critical avoidance of the author's intentions, the critic is left with the lingering question as to how truth is to be defined without the help of a corresponding reality. In other words, can logic replace correspondent truth? It cannot, but if truth is defined within the boundaries of the text, critical views are accountable only in terms of the text and not the author's intentions. This of course is a commonplace New Critical assumption. However, it does not allow for the pluralistic possibility of several equally valid critical interpretations of a given text. Therefore, in this dissertation, I am guided by the postulates that there cannot be several equally valid interpretations and that, to be valid, my interpretation has to be the only one that fully accounts for Vonnegut's early fiction. Pluralism, I believe, is thus valid only when the "truths" involved do not contradict each other. To use a legal analogy, a defendent is either guilty or not guilty; he cannot be both. This approach, in spite of its "fundamentalist" anti-pluralism, assumes truth to be inflexible and emphasizes the critic's accountability to the text.

Unifying the concepts of freedom, love, and meaning in Vonnegut's philosophy is another responsibility that a critic can scarcely avoid. In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, we saw how Vonnegut cherishes human freedom

and dislikes any institution that treats man as a machine. In the absence of free will, even the illusion of freedom is more important to Vonnegut than all the so-called accomplishments of human civilization (that embody the truth of determinism), accomplishments such as technology or philosophy or even literature. The latter effort, to negate the determinism of the text, in fact leads Vonnegut to literary chaos, which begins perceptibly in Breakfast of Champions and becomes unbearably oppressive for the critic starting from Jailbird. This is the reason why this study restricts itself to the early Vonnegut. The later Vonnegut writings are indeed not only more complicated than his earlier ones as is the case with several literary figures such as Blake, Wordsworth, and Joyce, but are deliberately formless and anarchic.

Love for Vonnegut is neither the solution to determinism nor the meaning of human existence, because for him there is no solution to determinism and there is no meaning to human existence that man is capable of finding. Thus, love gives us neither freedom nor meaning. However, it is valuable comfort to the individual, who is "trapped" in a deterministic universe without any humanly accessible meaning to it. This is the message of love of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater and, less emphatically, of all the other Vonnegut novels.

Vonnegut avoids the existentialist angst regarding the meaning and purpose of life by declaring, through the

"alien perspectives" of Bokonon, the Shah of Bratpuhr, the Tralfamadorians, and so on, that it is futile to search for the meaning of human existence. Given mankind's limited rational and irrational repertoire, Vonnegut seems to be certain that man would never be able to "know" the purpose of existence. For this reason, we do not find any existentialist bias in either Vonnegut's humor or his seriousness. This also seems to be the reason why most Vonnegut writings avoid the topic of the existence of God. For Vonnegut these are questions that human minds are not capable of answering.

Finally, this dissertation assumes that the subjects of "character," rationality, and deterministic realilty unify not only the three texts that each of these themes is applied to in the chapters of this dissertation, but Vonnegut's early fiction in general. Although we cannot fully verify this assumption unless we apply each subject to each text of the early Vonnegut period, we can, however, answer certain immediate questions that this assumption gives rise to. Here are three such questions: Does Billy Pilgrim go through a brief rebellion--as do Paul Proteus, Malachi Constant, and Howard Campbell--to partially regain his identity? How does the subject of rationality apply to Howard Campbell? Finally, how can the reality of Cat's Cradle be seen as a construct?

Billy Pilgrim's brief rebellion seems to occur in the form of his lectures and letters. Although he knows that

he cannot change the course of destiny, he still tries to comfort others who are not privy to the same cosmic knowledge of cyclical time and impermanent death. His "rebellion," of course, does not alter the course of destiny; however, it helps him gain an identity and a better grasp of reality.

Howard Campbell's intellectual commitment to art, which leads him into playing "games" with ideas, undermines his reasoning powers, his sanity, and his wisdom as a responsible adult. Campbell can thus be seen as an embodiment of the failure of rationality, especially its failure to help man come to terms with the truth of determinism.

The reality of Cat's Cradle is primarily a combination of two elements, Hoenikker's science and Bokonon's religion. Both of these elements are shown in the novel to be systematically put together by their creators. Moreover, Cat's Cradle is presented to the reader as a scholarly book by its narrator, John. Its elaborate table of contents and chapter divisions are also part of its "construct" quality.

Thus, this dissertation uses the three subjects of "character," rationality, and deterministic reality to unify the early Vonnegut fiction. Through these subjects, Vonnegut seems to advocate the need for human effort in spite of the identity-threatening deterministic reality of his universe and the limited rational means of humanity.

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