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THE THEME OF LONELINESS IN VONNEGUT'S FIRST
FOUR NOVELS.

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THE THEME OF LONELINESS IN VONNEGUT'S FIRST FOUR NOVELS

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Norman, Oklahoma
1978

THE THEME OF LONELINESS IN VONNEGUT'S FIRST FOUR NOVELS

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THE THEME OF LONELINESS IN VONNEGUT'S FIRST FOUR NOVELS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Kurt Vonnegut's vision is embodied in the unending search for self which is the operative force in his novels. In its broadest sense, this vision encompasses man's loneliness and the consequent loss of identity. In its narrowest scope, this vision is Vonnegut's quest for a personal credo. Vonnegut's vision is, in the anthropological sense, a study of man and his variously complex relationships.

Loneliness is the continuous thread that runs throughout his fiction, and it unifies his world view. He approaches it, however, from a new direction in each of his novels. In his first novel, Player Piano, he uses the theme of automation to present loneliness as the logical consequence of a conflict between the machine society and the individual human ego. In his second novel, The Sirens of Titan, he examines loneliness on a cosmic scale by means of a science-fiction motif which features the human ego in conflict with the universe. His

third novel, Mother Night, investigates loneliness through guilt, and his fourth, Cat's Cradle, reveals it by religion.

In all of his novels, his vision remains fairly constant while his themes and techniques undergo a progressive change. The "moral" of Vonnegut's Mother Night seems collectively appropriate to all of his novels when he says: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be." This is his statement of concern for man's search for self-realization in a world that is essentially indifferent, and that indifference is the cause of man's loneliness. Vonnegut's awareness of the despair generated by such loneliness accounts for his phenomenal popularity in a decade of disillusionment.

Admittedly, Vonnegut's ideas are not profoundly different from the ideas of other contemporary American writers; he is conceived to be original primarily because the form he uses to convey these ideas is radically different. Vonnegut has fashioned a new form of literary expression from several older generic traditions which make his work seem modern. His technique is an innovative one that combines such respected genres as anatomy and romance with the brashly modern visual, aural, and oral forms of film, journalism, and television.

Vonnegut's technique has met with mixed critical reaction, and it has earned him both friends and foes who have alternately defended him as "the most talked-about American novelist since Ernest Hemingway" and attacked him as a "bogus

talent" whose so-called contemporary techniques are "slick and superficial." Despite his publication of six novels and numerous stories and essays in such prestigious magazines as Saturday Evening Post and Esquire, no appraisal of his work appeared in Modern Fiction Studies until 1971. Most critical opinion since then, however, has been noticeably positive. He was acclaimed earlier by such notable writers as Graham Greene and Leslie Fiedler whose insight seems to have been prophetically accurate judging by the increased frequency of thoughtful articles on Vonnegut which have begun to appear in scholarly journals. The rumor of his being considered a candidate for the Nobel Prize in 1974 caused many of the critics to view his "new" techniques as the means to revitalizing and restoring the older forms and traditions which had passed from our literature. Max Schulz was quick to perceive in Vonnegut's technique a major contribution to contemporary literature:

His novels are not organized according to one fictional kind but follow multiple modes, at once novel of manners, confessional journal, science fiction, social satire, detective story, soap opera, and slick magazine tale. The resultant farrago of literary syntaxes has bewildered and offended both British and American readers, whose expectations are never consistently satisfied.¹

The very key to his success lies in Vonnegut's deliberate refusal to consistently satisfy the expectations of his readers. While this conscious inconsistency has prompted Schulz to lament that "his audience has been slow in learning how to read his stories",² this tendency guarantees the aesthetic

strength and freedom of his fiction. His vision is macro-cosmic and ever new precisely because his mode is never the same from novel to novel.

Vonnegut's mode is a practiced inconsistency which may be only partially attributed to his desire for experimentation. More importantly, his technique must be based upon inconclusion because it is most appropriate for his vision of the irresoluble dilemma of contemporary man as the victim of the incurable illness of cosmic loneliness. The illness is not terminal, however, and the patient is busily engaged in a search for a cure. Vonnegut's prescription is merely a pain-reliever instead of a vaccine as he suggests that man's search should concentrate upon self-definition, understanding, and awareness. To put it a different way, Vonnegut sees man as the inhabitant of an indifferent, hostile, and inconclusive universe; and he is recommending that man find some kind of meaning for life by seeking knowledge of himself as well as his institutions. Knowledge of external systems such as science, politics, or religion is useless as a single means of imposing order upon the chaotic universe. This search for meaning in the self should not become an escape from reality, however, but a means of confronting and accepting human limitations. Peter J. Reed argues that Vonnegut cautions against the wrong kind of turning inward.

True knowledge of self and of relationship of self to exterior reality avoids both deluding self-absorption and dogmatic faith in programmatic conceptions of existence.

In avoiding those twin distortions of perception, Vonnegut argues, lies a man's best hope for behaving toward his fellows with respect, compassion and understanding. That, perhaps, is what Vonnegut tries to show us when he presents no villains and no heroes, but rather men muddling through as best they can, some a little better than others as they learn to love.³

Vonnegut's innovative technique has brought a great deal of negative criticism because it has been severely misunderstood by the so-called "serious" critics, and even Vonnegut has occasionally been apologetic about what he refers to as his "demonstrably ordinary mind" and his middle-class American origins. Critics and authors alike should remember that neither of their voices would be heard if it were not for the middle-class people who listen. Sociologist Philip E. Slater reminds us that all authors are "writing primarily for those people whose behavior has the greatest impact on the society, and who have the power and resources to improve it." The majority of what we all have to say is about middle-class life, and that should be kept in mind "whenever it begins to sound as if all Americans attend college or own their own homes."⁴ The point here is that Vonnegut's technique is so effective because it has the same range that Chaucer's tales, Shakespeare's plays, and Twain's novels had in their periods. It is "vulgar" in the most positive sense of the word, and that gives it the strength of universal appeal even though the subjects of his novels are often topical. Jerome Klinkowitz recognizes the importance of Vonnegut's consistently middle-class point of view as

not simply a requirement of the form; if we look at Vonnegut's nonfictional work, we will see that it is an integral part of his expression. His review of The Random House Dictionary, for instance, is written as a middle-class appreciation: "Prescriptive, as nearly as I could tell, was like an honest cop, and descriptive was like a boozed-up war buddy from Mobile, Ala." . . . The American middle-class is a constant point of reference in Vonnegut's commentary on life.⁵

However, it should not be concluded that Vonnegut's fiction is limited to any one national prejudice. While the targets of his satire such as military establishments, capitalism, war, politics, business, and naturalism, are often viewed from a twentieth-century American perspective, the themes of his novels are universal because his protagonists are invariably confronting the universe itself in their quest for meaning.

Reed has noted that

The basic questions Vonnegut's novels explore are timeless, even if the form in which they are pursued remains closely tied to a period. The breadth of Vonnegut's readership may indicate that his appeal need be no more tied to one era than to one generation.⁶

Like Klinkowitz, Reed, and others, I argue that Vonnegut is a serious novelist who deals with serious subjects, but he uses humor as a primary means to discuss them. Comedy is an essential element of his literary technique, but it is not the only one. Unfortunately, he has been characterized as a "black humorist" by several major critics, but his underlying purpose has far greater significance than a joke of the gallows humor type. To classify Vonnegut as a merely "comic" writer of any kind is equivalent to calling Swift a regular

"prankster." One might just as well give an artist a tube of red paint and require him to paint a sunset--there could be no awareness of blue sky or subtlety of varying hues. In response to the other charge against him, of sentimentality, Vonnegut has confessed his guilt by admitting, "There is an almost intolerable sentimentality beneath everything I write. British critics complain about it. And Robert Scholes, the American critic, once said I put bitter coatings on sugar pills."⁷ What most of the critics fail to realize is that sentimentality, or perhaps more properly, sentiment, is one of the most powerful weapons in his literary arsenal. It is part of his plan to "catch people before they become generals and presidents and so forth and you poison their minds with . . . humanity."⁸ Vonnegut's use of sentimentality is the second half of his one-two literary punch, and he uses it effectively to arouse the emotional response of his readers after his humor has captured their attention. Reed has noted the humanistic aspect of Vonnegut's sentimentality which reveals him to be a very compassionate, gentle, and troubled man whose novels present a touching ambivalence.

On the one hand is the constant implication that man could do better, and on the other hand a kind of resignation, a feeling that things cannot really be expected to go better. "So it goes." Yet in spite of the haunting pessimism, there is a recurrent affirmation that life can be improved, can be lent meaning, especially through love. Nor is his advocacy of love a trite reiteration of vague current fads or a pandering to recent voguish vocabulary. Vonnegut readily exposes the limitations of naive faith in romantic love or free-flowing goodwill. Uncritical love is never easy, and Vonnegut's

heroes labor long and hard learning and practicing it. But once mastered, love proves the most satisfying source of personal fulfillment his protagonists can achieve.⁹

It would be wise for the critics to recall the strong roles of both humor and sentiment in the writings of Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck before they denigrate Vonnegut for using them so effectively to speak to his audience on its own humanity.

The foregoing argument has been most succinctly resolved by Robert Scholes in his appraisal of Vonnegut's underlying serious intent to help

"to create the conscience of the race." What race? Human certainly, not American or German or any other abstraction from humanity. Just as pure romance provides us with necessary psychic exercise, intellectual comedy like Vonnegut's offers us moral stimulation --not fixed ethical positions which we can complacently assume, but such thoughts as exercise our consciences and help us keep our humanity in shape, ready to respond to the humanity of others.¹⁰

Even though his intellectual comedy often borders upon the saeva indignatio practiced by Swift, the overall attitude of Vonnegut is one of sympathetic concern for the loneliness experienced by modern man. Readers of his fiction will probably not be surprised to learn that Vonnegut's vision of the world is based upon his concern for mankind's loneliness; but that vision is one of such complexity that the full range of meaning in his novels remains to be fully explored. This study will deal with loneliness as the dominant, unifying element in his first four novels, and it will include an analysis of his progressively changing literary technique

as it has moved from the relatively conventional forms to what has been termed the radically innovative use of some of the oldest and newest modes of fictions.

Kilgore Trout, the science-fiction writer created by Vonnegut, once wrote a novel entitled, 2BR02B, which speaks to the point of Vonnegut's literary purpose. Vonnegut appeals to his reader's sixth sense, the sense of being without which all of our other five senses would be meaningless. It is our sense of being that provides our awareness in the world we inhabit. "To be," whether it is used by Shakespeare or Kilgore Trout, is a powerful phrase leading to other meaningful concepts such as "I am, you are, he she or it is. All of us are, and therefore we think!" This is the meaning of Vonnegut's concern for our awareness of our own humanity. Generally speaking, the message of Vonnegut's fiction may be paraphrased as "To thine own self be human!" In short, he has never ceased to combine an anthropological and a humanistic viewpoint.

CHAPTER II

PLAYER PIANO

Since the beginning of Vonnegut's first extended fictional portrayal of the quest for self was Player Piano, this chapter will consider it at some length in order to establish a foundation for the analytical chapters to follow. First, I shall discuss Vonnegut's innovations of theme and attempt to define the complex term "quest for self." Second, I shall discuss Vonnegut's innovations of form which consist largely of returns to older forms. The two are related because Vonnegut uses form to illuminate theme; he is less interested in science-fiction gimmicks than present humanistic concerns.

It follows, then, that Player Piano is here considered as more than a science-fiction novel, an anti-utopian novel, or a black humor novel. It is, Vonnegut has stated, "a novel about people and machines... a novel about life."¹ The apparent theme of Player Piano is anti-machine, but its primary subject is loneliness examined against a background of social revolution. This appears to be Vonnegut's first

attempt to reorder reality in order to explore the frustrations of the people he knew in "Schenectady, a very real town, awkwardly set in the gruesome now." ²

Player Piano might best be classified as a work of sociology expressed in fictional form because of its probing examination of human frustrations and because, in this book, Vonnegut writes more like a social scientist than a novelist. His analyses clearly anticipate the ideas underlying Philip Slater's thesis on American loneliness, but only Peter J. Reed seems to have clearly understood the sociological element of this novel:

for all its technological sophistication and social innovation, the America described in this book resembles the one we live in, and we quickly realize that what Vonnegut wants to tell us about is not so much the future as the present. ³

Illum seems an obvious microcosm of American society in Vonnegut's description of its tripartite division:

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. ⁴

Vonnegut sets the novel in the indefinite future which he describes as "another point in history when there is no more war," and while many critics have seized upon this futuristic and pacific setting to prove their theories concerning his being a science-fiction writer or the trauma of war as the dominant influence upon his work, I would suggest that he intentionally sought the hypothetical environment

in order to concentrate upon the inherent political, economic and technological concerns of a society viewed in scientific isolation from international involvement. America is depicted as the superpower that has emerged from the latest world war, and that was a war won by the miracle of the machine--"production with almost no manpower." (p. 9) Machines have replaced men in this society for what first appeared to be a good cause, but the effects of automation are far-reaching as they provide both theme and conflict in Player Piano.

Doctor Paul Proteus is the protagonist of the novel, and it is through his experience of a series of sociological conflicts that Vonnegut explores the subject of loneliness. Despite his enviable position as the "most important, brilliant person in Ilium, the manager of the Ilium Works," Proteus is clearly frustrated in his desires for community, engagement, and dependence. The machine has supplanted human purpose in this society to such a degree that even the elite manager and engineer "rulers" of the machine have begun to feel the loss of their sense of human dignity. The resulting alienation is gradually developed through Paul's character as he struggles to express his vaguely understood discontent with the system. He tries to regain his belief in the rightness of the machine-dominated society which had won the war, but he is unable to overcome an ambiguous sense of doubt and loneliness. He had missed serving in

the war.

Paul wished he had gone to the front, and heard the senseless tumult and thunder, and seen the wounded and dead, and maybe got a piece of shrapnel through his leg. Maybe he'd be able to understand then how good everything now was by comparison, to see what seemed so clear to others--that what he was doing, had done, and would do as a manager and engineer was vital, above reproach, and had, in fact, brought on a golden age. Of late, his job, the system, and organizational politics had left him variously annoyed, bored, or queasy. (pp. 14-15)

His divided loyalty in the conflict of man versus machine is important because it points to the ultimate lack of resolution in the novel, and it still allows for the slow growth of Paul's awareness of his dual commitment to and against technology. This contradictory character of Proteus makes it possible for Vonnegut to show Paul's conversion to the rebels' cause as the result of a long, tense and persuasive argument, a conversion that is finally accomplished by an act of human outrage and self-realization when he is asked to betray his best friend for the "good of the system."

The conflict of community versus competition is the first to be encountered by Proteus as he is torn between his need for stability and his need to satisfy the corporate demands of Kroner and Baer, supreme manager and engineer of the entire Eastern Division, and the ambitious demands of Anita, his social-climbing wife. This desire for community also accounts for his strongly nostalgic interest in the past represented by inefficient Building 58 which had been Thomas Edison's original machine shop in 1886. Paul

regards it as "a vote of confidence from the past," and he visits it to cure his "periods of depression." It reminds him of his youth when he possessed both innocence and faith in the system. It was in Building 58 that he and two other young engineers, Ed Finnerty, his best friend, and Lawson Shepherd, his self-appointed enemy, had recorded on tape the movements of the building's most skilled machinist, Rudy Hertz. This same love of the past accounts for his attachment to his cheap, old Plymouth with a broken headlight which he drives across the bridge into Homestead where most of the people live. Nostalgia and the search for stability are combined in his plan to move his wife out to the old Gottwald (God's woods) farm where "he daydreamed of living a century before." His fantasy even includes farming--"now there was a magic word. Like so many words with a little magic from the past still clinging to them, the word 'farming' was a reminder of what rugged stock the present generation had come from, of how tough a thing a human being could be if he had to." (p. 144) The chief appeal of the farm to Paul was its complete isolation from "the boiling rapids of history, society, and the economy. Timeless." (p. 147) Paul is attempting to withdraw from the present and the "progressive" moment of his technological society by escaping into a dimly-understood past which he believes to be his Eden.

Even though the attempt is doomed, it is not an unusual approach toward fulfillment of the desire for

community. Slater observes that a nostalgic longing is appropriate because in the past

. . . there were in our society many oases in which one could take refuge from the frenzied invidiousness of our economic system--institutions such as the extended family and the stable local neighborhood in which one could take pleasure from something other than winning a symbolic victory over one of his fellows.⁵

Paul's rejection of the automated society seems to be a logical response because technology is often named as one of the major causes of frustration of the desire for community.

Slater points out that

Technological change, mobility, and the individualistic ethos combine to rupture the bonds that tie each individual to a family, a community, a kinship network, a geographical location--bonds that give him a comfortable sense of himself. As this sense of himself erodes, he seeks ways of affirming it.⁶

This search for some means of self-affirmation underlies Vonnegut's repeated emphasis upon the need for uncritical love. He frequently presents it in an Adam and Eve image or what he refers to as Das Reich Der Zwei (Nation of Two) in a later novel, Mother Night. In a sense, this is one of the few ways in which man can attempt to "force" a sense of community, and even though it is achieved only on a small scale, it provides a degree of self-affirmation by virtue of a mutual bond between at least two individuals. Paul, for his part, feels he has this kind of relationship with his wife, Anita, and to a lesser degree with his best friend, Finnerty. Anita's love for Paul is not at all uncritical,

but it is at least physically satisfying, and Paul must accept it in order to avoid loneliness. His love for Anita is part of his self-identity, and he doesn't want to lose her.

She was what fate had given him to love, and he did his best to love her. He knew her too well for her conceits to be offensive most of the time, to be anything but pathetic.

She was also more of a source of courage than he cared to admit. . . .

She was also all he had....He felt oddly disembodied, an insubstantial wisp, nothingness, a man who declined to be any man. Suddenly understanding that he, like Anita, was little more than his station in life, he threw his arms around his sleeping wife, and laid his head on the breast of his fellow wraith-to-be. (p. 134)

Finnerty's love for Paul is no less selfish than Anita's in its demand for Paul to give something more than he receives.

"Funny what I expected from this reunion, what I guess everybody expects from affectionate reunions. I thought seeing you would somehow clear up all sorts of problems, get me thinking straight," said Finnerty....He used words to describe his feelings that Paul could never bring himself to use when speaking of a friend: love, affection, and other words generally consigned to young and inexperienced lovers. It wasn't homosexual; it was an archaic expression of friendship by an undisciplined man in an age when most men seemed in mortal fear of being mistaken for pansies for even a split second. (p. 87)

While this shows some genuine affection on the part of Finnerty, it is none the less a selfish demand upon Paul, and his later comment is even insulting when he says of Paul that "you find out quick enough that old friends are old friends, and nothing more--no wiser, no more help than anyone else." (p. 87) This affection, however, doesn't

prevent Finnerty from later using Paul as a figurehead of rebellion in order to strike out at the mechanical society to which Finnerty has never really belonged. Finnerty's role of social outcast leads to his intense loneliness which explains both his failure at self-affirmation and his motive for insurrection.

Each of Paul's attempts to fulfill his desire for community is thwarted by the strange combination of cooperation and competition in his society. The best example of this is the fraternal institution of an annual retreat to an island called "The Meadows" where the most important and promising men are invited to participate in a circus-like demonstration of "brotherhood" and "tradition." The careers of managers and engineers are made or broken there in what is described as

an orgy of morale building--through team athletics, group sings, bonfires and skyrockets, bawdy entertainment, free whiskey and cigars; and through plays, put on by professional actors, which pleasantly but unmistakably made clear the nature of good deportment within the system, and the shape of firm resolves for the challenging year ahead.
(p. 44)

This is a strange "orgy" because everyone there is painfully aware of the dangers of any kind of overindulgence, and the competition for organizational advancement is so strong that the so-called "team spirit" atmosphere is a travesty. As Peter J. Reed has noted, this trip to "The Meadows" has the overt purpose of regeneration through its heavy reliance

upon tradition, sentiment, and ritual drawn from the past to sanction the dehumanizing "progress" of the present. The oldest of the technicians, Kroner and Baer, seek to recapture their lost youth, and the retreat takes on a religious tone in the ceremony staged by the sacred Oak (the symbol of their organization) where they met to honor deceased members.⁷ Vonnegut creates an instant of trust and fraternity, however meretricious, for that moment is one of the few when the sense of community is strong.

In the brief moment before Kroner spoke again, Paul looked about himself. His eyes met those of Shepherd and Berringer, and what passed between them was tender and sweet. The crowd had miraculously become a sort of homogenized pudding. It was impossible to tell where one ego left off and the next began. (p. 191)

The covert purpose of "The Meadows," however, is to encourage competition through athletic contests, partisan slogans, and corporate politics symbolically represented in the red, white, blue, and green "teams" jockeying for power and position in the organization.

Vonnegut reveals the sociological conflict of community versus competition on several levels in the novel. While "The Meadows" represents this conflict on the institutional level of business, Paul's self-proclaimed nemesis, Lawson ("Dog-Eat-Dog") Shepherd, represents competition on the personal, individual level.

Paul had never known what to make of Shepherd, had found it hard to believe that any man really thought as Shepherd did. When Shepherd had first

arrived in Ilium, he had announced to his fellow new arrivals, Paul and Finnerty, that he intended to compete with them. Baldly, ridiculously, he talked of competitiveness and rehashed with anyone who would listen various crises where there had been a showdown between his abilities and those of someone else, crises that the other participants had looked upon as being routine, unremarkable, and generally formless. But, to 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. (p. 54)

This apparent aggressiveness of Shepherd's seems to conceal his strong desire for community and the kind of relationship he eventually finds with Paul's ex-wife, Anita. Slater views this obsessed belief in competition as a kind of mask used by many American businessmen to conceal their loneliness, and it aptly describes Shepherd's perpetual running of various races in the novel.

Studies of business executives have revealed, for example, a deep hunger for an atmosphere of trust and fraternity with their colleagues (with whom they must, in the short run, engage in what Reisman calls "antagonistic cooperation"). The competitive life is a lonely one, and its satisfactions are very short-lived indeed, for each race leads only to a new one.⁸

Ironically, Shepherd's aggressiveness will bring him all of the frustrations, anxieties, and loneliness of the system that Paul has rejected. In short, he will earn the right to compete in an infinite number of new races.

On the broadest and most symbolic level, the community versus competition conflict seems best illustrated by the Ghost Shirt Society's attack upon the mechanized system. In this instance, the futuristic, progressive, technological

society represents the "community" element of the conflict, and the Ghost Shirt Society represents the element of competition. In an excellent example of ironic reversal, Vonnegut has made the fully-automated society assume the static quality of the "stable" past because it has "solved" all of the problems of modern man by removing such things as waste, imperfection, war, poverty, hunger and purpose from his daily existence. The novel's best expression of this point may be seen in the scathingly satiric chapter seventeen which describes the typical home-life of the American "average man." Edgar R. B. Hagstrohm and his family live in a self-cleaning M-17 house, and he has a "complete security package" of health, life, and old age insurance as well as automatic payroll deduction payments on the house, car, furniture, equipment, etc. that are controlled by the world's most advanced computer, EPICAC XIV.⁹ This is the ultimate machine:

EPICAC XIV could consider simultaneously hundreds or even thousands of sides of a question utterly fairly . . . EPICAC XIV was wholly free of reason-muddying emotions . . . EPICAC XIV never forgot anything . . . in short, EPICAC XIV was dead right about everything. (p. 116)

EPICAC XIV is also the ultimate cause of the desperate loneliness experienced by the Hagstrohm family. Edgar complains, "I'm no good to anybody, not in this world," and his wife, Wanda, echoes his sentiments saying "nobody needs me." In this chapter, the word "life" begins to sound like a curse

or a prison sentence. The two major forces of the novel meet in this chapter as the perfection of the machine is held up to the imperfection of humanity.

The Ghost Shirt Society, representative of competition, is just as effectively ironic because it is an institution resurrected from the past in order to bring about a change in the present. Instead of providing a romantic escape from reality, the Society allows a brutal confrontation with reality. Max Schulz has noted an additional ironic twist in Vonnegut's use of the Ghost Shirts.

The Ghost Shirt Movement, pledged to destruction of the authoritarian machine-dominated society and to restoration of a society of men, proves to be no less instinctively totalitarian. In engineering a Messiah, the Movement uses Paul Proteus as remorselessly as do the managerial elite. Equally distressing is the obtuseness of the survivors of the aborted Revolution, who having destroyed the machines, begin to repair them out of pride and amusement, starting the process of recreating the system which will render them useless again. Thus the problem of stability posed by the novel in the form of such antitheses as spiritual needs versus material satisfactions and of human disorderliness versus machine-controlled regularity continues unresolved at the end.¹⁰

The lack of resolution observed by Schulz seems to be a fairly consistent characteristic of Vonnegut's novels. It would appear that Vonnegut links man's loneliness with mutability by placing his protagonist between the static and the dynamic in nearly every novel. Player Piano ends most appropriately, therefore, with Paul and Finnerty discussing the importance of change.

"Things don't stay the way they are," said Finnerty. "It's too entertaining to try to change them."

. . . "Most fascinating game there is, keeping things from staying the way they are."

"If only it weren't for the people, the goddamned people," said Finnerty, "always getting tangled up in the machinery. If it weren't for them, earth would be an engineer's paradise." (p. 313)

Finnerty's reference to an engineer's paradise lends new meaning to Von Neumann's final assertion that "This isn't the end, you know. . . . Nothing ever is, nothing ever will be--not even Judgment Day." (p. 320) This conclusion of the novel seems to be affirmative because it recognizes that life is experienced in an endless state of motion and change. Human change, however erratic, appears to be more desirable than the regulated and harmonious motion of the machines which had so fascinated Paul in Building 58. The full significance of the machines' hypnotic rhythm is not seen until Paul's pentathol-induced dream in the Ghost Shirt Society headquarters. While under the influence of the drug, Paul moves through a dream ballet to the music of the Building 58 Suite. James Mellard views this stylized movement of the dream-dance as a surrender of Paul's true identity and states that the sequence celebrates an idealized identity and the essential self of humanity through Paul's loss of individuality.

Ultimately, Paul's dream-dance celebrates the fully human, the notion that good things can come from dismal evil, that laudable benevolence can come from base motivations, and that exquisite beauty can come from refuse--"the most beautiful peonies I ever saw," said Paul, "were grown in almost pure cat excrement." 11

Underlying this observation is the realization that good, benevolence and beauty must all evolve from the process of change. That would seem to be the reason that Vonnegut concludes Player Piano without resolving the problems it presents. Change is proof of life, and the end of change is death. The desire for community will always vie with the desire for competition to maintain the constant state of transition. Proteus and the Ghost Shirt Society represent this year's failure in the revolt against machines.

The revolution of the Ghost Shirts also represents the second sociological conflict described in Slater's thesis on loneliness. Through the revolution, Paul experiences the conflict of engagement and uninvolvedness as he attempts to come to grips with the problems of his society. His first impulse toward engagement is only vaguely expressed at first, and even Paul does not fully understand his motives for desiring some kind of involvement. He can only rely upon a stereotyped image of himself as a transitional savior of some kind.

Fuzzily, Paul was beginning to see that he had made an ass of himself in the eyes of those on both sides of the river. He remembered his cry of the night before: "We must meet in the middle of the bridge!" He decided that he would be about the only one who didn't feel strongly about which bank he was on.

If his attempt to become the new Messiah had been successful, if the inhabitants of the north and south banks had met in the middle of the bridge with Paul between them, he wouldn't have had the slightest idea of what to do next. He knew with all his heart that the human situation was a

frightful botch, but it was such a logical, intelligently arrived-at botch that he couldn't see how history could possibly have led anywhere else. (p. 114)

His desire for engagement is, in its initial stages, a mere wish for reconciliation of the useful and the useless elements of human society. More importantly, it is a romantic response which is typical of American perception of social problems. Slater sees this kind of response as a denial of social reality:

We are, as a people, perturbed by our inability to anticipate the consequences of our acts, but we still wait optimistically for some magic telegram, informing us that the tangled skein of misery and self-deception into which we have woven ourselves has vanished in the night. Each month popular magazines regale their readers with such telegrams: announcing that our transportation crisis will be solved by a bigger plane or a wider road, mental illness with a pill, poverty with a law, slums with a bulldozer, urban conflict with a gas, racism with a goodwill gesture. . . . Whatever realism we may display in technical areas, our approach to social issues inevitably falls back on cinematic tradition, in which social problems are resolved by gesture.¹²

Paul's "middle-of-the-bridge" speech is certainly a gesture in the cinematic tradition. Ironically enough, all of the particular problems Slater mentions have been resolved in Player Piano, but the larger social problem of man's purpose in a machine society remains. Paul explains in his trial for sabotage/treason that the machines "have exceeded the personal sovereignty willingly surrendered to them by the American people for good government. Machines and organization and pursuit of efficiency have robbed the American people of liberty and the pursuit of happiness." (p. 296)

Paul's adoption as the titular leader of the Ghost Shirt revolution is the turning point in his search for self-realization. His conversion to the rebels' cause up to this point had been slow "for want of a blow severe enough to knock him off the course dictated by the circumstances of his birth and training." (pp. 178-79) His first solid step toward social engagement had been taken when his superiors ordered him to betray his best friend:

For once, his dissatisfaction with his life was specific. . . . This was about as basic as an attack on integrity could be, and Paul received it with the same sort of relief that was felt when the first shots of the last war were fired--after decades of tension. (p. 132)

Paul's desire for engagement is fully realized at a point just before his trial for sabotage when he is asked by Kroner, his corporation superior, to name the leader of the Ghost Shirt Society. This is the climax of the novel, and Paul's response is reminiscent of Huck Finn's declaration of moral conviction in Mark Twain's masterpiece.

Here it was again, the most ancient of road-forks, one that Paul had glimpsed before, in Kroner's study, months ago. The choice of one course or the other had nothing to do with machines, hierarchies economics, love, age. It was a purely internal matter. Every child older than six knew the fork, and knew what the good guys did here, and what the bad guys did here

Bad guys turned informer. Good guys didn't--no mater when, no matter what.

Kroner cleared his throat. "I said, 'Who's their leader, Paul?'"

"I am," said Paul. "And I wish to God I were a better one."

The instant he's said it, he knew it was true, and knew what his father had known--what it was to belong and believe. (p. 293)

Paul does more than accept general responsibility for the Ghost Shirt insurrection here; he makes a social commitment to "confront on equal terms an environment which is not composed of ego-extensions."¹³ He has discovered a self-identity which is totally his own, and for the moment, at least, he has gained a measure of engagement and community with the myriad members of other "good guys" and "bad guys" who had made a choice personally appropriate to their goals.

There are literally dozens of examples of the tendency toward uninvolvedness as the other half of this particular conflict. One of the most obvious is Paul's disappointing attempt to escape to his private Eden on the old Gottwald farm where he would shout "to hell with everything" from what he believed to be his safe womb of time. He sets his modern "shock-proof, water-proof, anti-magnetic, glow-in-the-dark, self-winding chronometer" back twelve minutes to correspond with the hands of an antique grandfather clock with wooden works. Other examples of the tendency to avoid engagement are the unconsciously farcical allegorical dramas performed at "The Meadows" and the government's failure to acknowledge the Ghost Society letter which set forth the proposal to place the welfare of man before machines and to recognize human imperfections as a virtue in a creation by God.

The official reaction to the Ghost Shirt Society was the official response to so many things; to ignore it, as pressing and complicated matters were ignored in the annual passion plays at the Meadows. It was as though the giving or withholding of official recognition were life or death to ideas. And

there was the old Meadows team spirit in the reaction too, the spirit that was supposed to hold the system together: the notion that the opposition wanted nothing but to win and humiliate, that the object of competition was total victory, with mortifying defeat the only alternative imaginable. (p. 293)

Slater calls this form of avoiding social issues "the Toilet Assumption--the notion that unwanted matter, unwanted difficulties, unwanted complexities and obstacles will disappear if they are removed from our immediate field of vision."¹⁴ Generally speaking, he concludes that "our approach to social problems is to decrease their visibility: out of sight, out of mind."¹⁵

Vonnegut employs the Toilet Assumption metaphor in an ironic twist of plot in Player Piano. The Ghost Shirt Society revolution turns out to be a further example of avoiding reality. At the conclusion of the novel, Paul finally learns that the original Ghost Dance Indians of the 1890's had been horribly massacred. The bullet-proof "magic" of their Ghost Shirts failed them when they made a last desperate stand against the thousand-to-one odds of the U.S. Cavalry. Just as the Indians had fought against the changes of the white-man's world to avoid becoming "second-rate white men or wards of the white men," Paul's revolutionaries are fighting to avoid becoming "second rate machines themselves, or wards of the machines." The paradox of both movements lies in the fact that their respective leaders were very much aware of their predestined defeat before they began. The motives of the

four "thought-chiefs" of the modern Ghost Shirt Society reveal their true detachment from reality when they confront the failure of the revolution. Of Finnerty, he explains "He had got what he wanted from the revolution...a chance to give a savage blow to a close little society that made no comfortable place for him." (p. 320) Professor von Neumann, the former political scientist, viewed the revolution as a "fascinating experiment!" He had been less interested in achieving a premeditated end than in seeing what would happen with given beginnings. (p. 320) Lasher, the most realistic of the four, was also the most contented with the failure of the revolution because it offered him the best prize possible for his two specializations as an anthropologist and a minister. "A lifelong trafficker in symbols, he had created the revolution as a symbol, and was now welcoming the opportunity to die as one." (p. 320) As the chief instigator of the revolution, Lasher saw most clearly that it had to fail because human imperfection was not as efficient as machine perfection. He finds value in man's efforts to change history even when they are doomed. His philosophy is, "It doesn't matter if we win or lose, Doctor. The important thing is that we tried. For the record, we tried!" (p. 315) Lasher's pragmatic view of reality seems to contrast with Paul's naive avoidance of reality. Vonnegut explains that "Paul, perhaps, had been the one most out of touch, [with reality] 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." (p. 314)

His naivete about the revolution allows Paul to achieve self-realization by confronting directly the frustrations of the engagement/uninvolvement conflict. Peter J. Reed has noted that Paul's internal struggle is the test which proves his mettle.

Repeatedly he inclines toward evasion, and his nostalgia does not provide the most substantial base for a revolutionary stand. Yet he does make that stand. In fact, Paul probably has more to lose by so doing than any of the other leaders. And while Paul must undergo the most testing changes, and most drastic reversals of values to become a revolutionary, and never becomes as articulate as the other leaders in espousing his cause, he ultimately shows the most genuine human compassion, purity of conscience, and pragmatic sense of purpose.¹⁶

Even though he is disillusioned by the revolution, Paul is the only one who is able to come to terms with his environment as something other than ego-extensions. His motivation has not been the idealism or egocentric goals of the other three leaders, and he demonstrates this by his change of mind in the final toast of the novel.

"To a better world," he started to say, but he cut the toast short, thinking of the people of Ilium, already eager to recreate the same old nightmare. He shrugged. "To the record," he said, and smashed the empty bottle on a rock. (p. 320)

His disillusionment here reveals both insight and loneliness as he seems to be the only member of the revolution who has achieved an awareness of the vital roles of both the humans and the machines in the cyclical nature of the system. The

final statement of the novel seems to announce Paul's new awareness: "Hands up," said Lasher almost gaily. "Forward March." (p. 320) Here is man's willing surrender to the technology he has created, and it is also man's recognition of the inevitable progression of history. It is an affirmative ending because it reassures us that humans will continue to rebel against this prisonhouse of their own creation despite the failure of this rebellion, this man, or this period of history. The process of change is once more confirmed as Paul drinks to "the record" of man's forward march of life.

The third sociological conflict of Slater's thesis on loneliness is represented by the various individual searches for independence within a society that has become almost totally dependent upon technology "for the control of one's impulses and the direction of one's life."¹⁷ The dominant symbol of control in Player Piano is the currently "ultimate" computer, EPICAC XIV, located in the Carlsbad Caverns and described by Vonnegut as nearly omniscient.

EPICAC XIV, though undedicated, was already at work, deciding how many refrigerators, how many lamps, how many turbine-generators, how many hub caps, how many dinner plates, how many door knobs, how many rubber heels, how many television sets, how many pinochle decks--how many everything America and her customers could have and how much they would cost. And it was EPICAC XIV who 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. . . . (p. 117)

The computer is further invested with a religious quality during a dedication ceremony when the President of the United States, Jonathan Lynn, speaks of his feelings of "deep reverence and humility and gratitude" as he declares the greatness of this "modern miracle." President Lynn declared that "EPICAC XIV was, in effect, the greatest individual in history, that the wisest man that had ever lived was to EPICAC XIV as a worm was to that wisest man." (p. 119)

In direct contrast to this electronic controller of men's destinies, Vonnegut presents the Shah of Bratpuhr, who is the spiritual leader of six million members of the Kolhour sect. In one of the most satisfying scenes of the novel, the Shah is introduced to EPICAC XIV, and he asks it to answer a riddle which his people believe can only be answered by an all-wise God whose arrival among the people will mean an end to human suffering. The conflict between man and machine is sharply defined in Vonnegut's description of the Shah's question and the computer's non-response.

The Shah dropped to his knees on the platform and raised his hands over his head. The small, brown man suddenly seemed to fill the entire cavern with his mysterious, radiant dignity, alone there on the platform, communing with a presence no one else could sense. . . . The Shah turned to a glowing bank of EPICAC's tubes and cried in a piping sing-song voice:

"Allakahi baku billa,
Moumi a fella nam;
Serani assu tilla,
Touri serin a sam."*

Translation by Khashdrahr Miasma.

*"Silver bells shall light my way,
And nine times nine maidens fill my day,
And mountain lakes will sink from sight,
And tigers' teeth will fill the night."

. . . "Siki?" cried the Shah. He cocked his head, listening. "Siki?" The word echoed and died--lonely, lost.

"Mmmmmm," said EPICAC softly. "Dit, dit.
Mmmmm. Dit."

The Shah sighed and stood, and shook his head sadly, terribly let down. "Nibo," he murmured. "Nibo." . . . "'Nibo'--'nothing.'" He asked the machine a question, and the machine didn't answer," said Halyard. (p. 120)

The Shah's disappointed response to EPICAC's failure to answer his questor's riddle (which is, of course, unanswerable) is to declare the machine a "Baku" or false god which is precisely what it has become in this technology-worshipping society. It has the capacity for fulfilling all of the physical needs of mankind, but it is unable to be the "spiritual leader" of even one human being, and is therefore inferior to the Shah who is supposed to represent an undeveloped nation of backward people. Reed observes that the Shah of Bratpuhr

exposes what we all hold suspect in the human consequences of automation, in the military mentality, in the proliferation of labor-saving gadgetry, and in the middle-class home life. The guide showing the Shah the wonders of the mechanized home comes off a little like Richard Nixon protesting the merits of American kitchens to Chairman Khrushchev.¹⁸

The other symbol of control in the novel is the National Industrial, Commercial, Communications, Foodstuffs, and Resources Board which is represented by the vaguely defined "Company" employing the elite managers and engineers to serve

the various machine "works" across the country. While it is this particular form of control from which Paul specifically struggles to become independent, the real source of his and everyone else's frustration is their dependence upon machines for the control of their daily existence. The machines have been depicted as so successful in their roles as rulers of destiny that the Shah of Bratpuhr very perceptively refers to the citizens of this electronic utopia as "slaves."

Few examples of genuine independence exist in Player Piano because so much of the novel is based upon the premise that automation is the villain that has caused man's abdication of self-responsibility. There are some rather obviously dramatic or "forced" attempts at independence such as Finnerty's somewhat stereotyped image of the Irish rebel who's "spoiling for a fight" or Shepherd's self-aggrandizing stance of corporate competitor in which he believed himself to be a man who "asked no quarter, gave no quarter" and was "doggedly master of his fate and not his brother's keeper." (p. 54)

Only three characters in the novel may be regarded as being somewhat independent. The first two are rather quickly sketched personifications of independence. Both are rugged individualists bordering upon eccentric, but each represents an independence forged from the materials of their respective generations. Mr. Haycox (hay cocks or stacks), caretaker of the old Gottwald farm, is the old-world image of the independent man who had confronted his environment

without the aid of machines. His struggle with nature was bare-handed, and his reality was the tangible kind. He has no use for nor tolerance of the modern world of mechanics and real estate salesmen whose Ph.D.'s entitle them to tend machines. Slater's Toilet Assumption would seem to be completely irrelevant to him as he faces the immediate reality of animal waste and its disposal. There are no flush facilities on the Gottwald farm, and Haycox demonstrates his scorn for the so-called "doctors" of realty and science by his reference to excrement. "'I'm a doctor of cowshit, pigshit, and chickenshit,' he said. 'When you doctors figure out what you want, you'll find me out in the barn shovelling my thesis.'" (p. 151) Later in the novel, after Paul has recognized him as a human being by using the words "friend" and "favor," Mr. Haycox tells him that the bird's-eye maple bed in the hundred year old farmhouse had been a place where "six independent people had died, and fourteen had been born." (p. 178) Mr. Haycox leaves no doubt that he is one of the fourteen.

The independent man of the modern period is represented by Alf Tucci who has refused to accept either of the standard options offered to the lower I.Q.'s of his society. He has avoided the Army and the Reeks and Wrecks corps by using his wit and talent as a T.V. shark guessing the names of songs being played with the volume turned off. His independence gained from his mastery of an electronic device is the most appropriate kind for his generation because he is one of those

too young to "remember when things had been different, could hardly make sense of what had been, though they didn't necessarily like what was." (p. 35) Alfie takes fierce pride in his skill at what amounts to little more than a sophisticated game of charades because it gives him a sense of identity and purpose. His advice to his kid brother, Joe, who is "just starting out" as a match game shark, reveals his sense of dignity derived from his one uniquely human talent.

If you want to stand out, have something to sell, you got to do hard work. Pick out something impossible and do it, or be a bum the rest of your life. Sure everybody worked in George Washington's time, but George Washington worked hard. I'm who I am because I work hard. (p. 255)

He boasts that "anybody by the name of Tucci stands on his own two feet," (p. 255), and this is later confirmed by his refusal to join the Ghost Shirt Society in their revolution. Finnerty recognizes the strength of Tucci's inherent independence when he explains at a Ghost Shirt meeting that "He isn't anybody's and never will be. He never joined anything, his father never joined anything, and his grandfather never joined anything, and if he ever has a son, he'll never join anything either." (p. 281) The social scientist, Lasher, is the one who points up the futility of Tucci's kind of independence, however, when he perceives it to be as totalitarian as the machine society in its resistance to change.

Lasher smiled sadly. "The great American individual, he said. "Thinks he's the embodiment of liberal thought throughout the ages. Stands on his own two feet, by God, alone and motionless.

He'd make a good lamp post if he'd weather better and didn't have to eat." (pp. 281-82)

Alfy's independence viewed in this light seems to be a negative stance because inaction is destructive in any form. The failure to change results in a static condition which is basically anti-life.

The independence of Paul Proteus differs greatly from that of Alfie Tucci and Mr. Haycox in that it is largely involuntary. Paul is independent at the conclusion of the novel simply because he has found nothing to depend upon. He is without a means of sharing the responsibility, control or direction of his life because he cannot believe in either of the opposing sides of the novel's conflict. Tony Tanner has neatly summarized this recurring dilemma in Vonnegut's work:

Both sides want to use the hero; both sides want to impose a particular role on him and make him into a special sort of messenger or conveyor of information. And, as Paul discovers, between the two sides "there was no middle ground for him." Paul is a typical American hero in wanting to find a place beyond all plots and systems, some private space, or "border area"--a house by the side of the road of history and society. He would like not to be used, not to be part of someone else's plan.¹⁹

Paul's false escape from the "system" seems all the more ironic when we realize that he has never actually been in control of his destiny. His early decision to resign as manager of the Ilium Works seems to be as much an impossible dream as his later acceptance of the messiah role in the Ghost Shirt rebellion. He deludes himself in believing that

he is able "to quit, to stop being the instrument of any set of beliefs or any whim of history that might raise hell with somebody's life." (p. 114) He later indulges his childish fantasy by reading "novels wherein the hero lived vigorously and out-of-doors, dealing directly with nature, dependent upon basic cunning and physical strength for survival" (p. 135) The truth about Paul's "independence" is revealed by Finnerty's solemn and unabashed explanation of Paul's function as a symbol to be used by whichever side controlled him at the moment:

"You don't matter," said Finnerty. "You belong to History now."

A heavy door thumped shut, and Paul knew that he was alone again, and that History, somewhere on the other side of the door, would let him out only when it was good and ready to. (p. 276)

Paul has no delusions about his independence at the end of the novel when he realizes that he is no longer at the center of things. Finnerty had predicted this change of perspective early in the novel when he told Paul that "out on the edge you see all kinds of things you can't see from the center." He nodded. "Big, undreamed-of things--the people on the edge see them first." (p. 86) As the protagonist, Paul's movement has been a steady, protean progress from slightly off-center toward that very "edge" of the system he views so ambivalently. That vantage point finally permits him to see all of the spiritual poverty, emotional vacuity, and social hypocrisy of his world that the Shah of Bratpuhr

(the novel's other true "outsider") has perceived from the beginning.

The result of Paul's journey from center to edge is the stark loneliness of the individual who has progressed beyond the edges of both the system and the revolution against it. His desires for community, engagement, and dependence have been thwarted by reality in the utopian society of this futuristic America which Vonnegut projects as the logical consequence of a rampant technology in the 1950's. Paul's frustration has not been resolved by the revolution as in the cases of Finnerty, von Neumann and Lasher whom Vonnegut respectively describes as "satisfied," "at peace," and "contented" at the novel's conclusion. Paul is the final symbol of American loneliness in this prophetic novel. As Vonnegut says of him, "an awakening conscience, unaccompanied by new wisdom, made his life so damned lonely, he decided he wouldn't mind being dead." (p. 212) But Paul is not dead, he is merely detached from the illusions which had previously sustained him. He has confronted reality, and the result is alienation. This is the crisis Slater has in mind when he explains the cause and effect relationship between technology and loneliness:

Individualism finds its roots in the attempt to deny the reality and importance of human interdependence. One of the major goals of technology in America is to "free" us from the necessity of relating to, submitting to, depending upon, or controlling other people. Unfortunately, the more we have succeeded in doing this the more we have felt

disconnected, bored, lonely, unprotected, unnecessary, and unsafe.²⁰

Player Piano anticipates Slater's theory, for it clearly reveals the dangers of a utopia achieved by American technology.

Reed reminds us that Vonnegut is more concerned with the problems and actions of an entire society than of one man and that Paul's story is used as a means to reveal a nightmare society of the future which is frighteningly similar to American society in the present. This is important because it best explains Vonnegut's deliberately neutral position at the novel's conclusion. Despite critical opinion to the contrary, Player Piano does not end on either a negative or positive note. Paul Proteus has neither succeeded nor failed because his function was to reach an awareness of his own humanity. "The main business of humanity is to do a good job of being human beings," says Paul, "not to serve as appendages to machines, institutions, and systems." (p. 297) The main business of a Proteus is to do a good job of changing, and change seems to be a primary concern of Vonnegut. Reed has recognized this element in Vonnegut's work when he states that "'Forward March,' with its significant capitals, ends the book with an old clarion call, a positive note,"²¹ but the phrase might also be little more than a statement of motion and direction for changes to come. Future changes are vital to continued existence regardless of their negative

or positive effects. Both Proteus and humanity are mutable and symbolic of life while the machines and the system are immutable and symbolic of death--the ultimate loneliness.

This struggle between life and death reflected in the conflict of man versus machine continues to be important in Vonnegut's novels, and later he devises new techniques in which to present them. Player Piano, however, is quite conventional in technique. Because of its apparent conventionality, many critics have dismissed it as an "uneven" attempt or a "typically weak first novel," without affording it the closer examination it deserves. David H. Goldsmith has said of Vonnegut's prose style that, in this novel, it is "reminiscent of Steinbeck at his worst," and he has elsewhere termed it "derivative, neo-Hemingway."²² The most perceptive negative criticism, however, comes in Peter J. Reed's assessment that

Player Piano makes a great many points about human behavior in general, about the unpredictable quirks of life itself, about society and its institutions. But perhaps Vonnegut is a little too intent on making all of these points. Be that the cause or not, the book remains somewhat unsettled and fragmented, never quite cohering into a consistent, sustained form.²³

The novel's elusive quality has caused Reed to declare it "the most difficult of Vonnegut's novels to assess." One aspect of this novel that is not difficult to assess is Vonnegut's source of a plot based on automation. Vonnegut readily admits to interviewers that he "cheerfully ripped off the plot of Brave New World." ²⁴

When asked why he had chosen the science fiction form for his first novel, Vonnegut explained that it resulted from his fascination with computer-operated milling machines built by General Electric to cut rotor blades for jet engines. His description of the experience is extremely close to Paul Proteus' memory of the day he and Finnerty and Shepherd had tape-recorded the movements of Rudy Herz, the lathe operator. Vonnegut told a Playboy interviewer about the experience:

This was in 1949 and the guys who were working on it were foreseeing all sorts of machines being run by little boxes. The idea of doing that, you know, made sense, perfect sense. To have a little clicking box make all the decisions wasn't a vicious thing to do. But it was too bad for the human beings who got their dignity from their jobs.²⁵

His immediate rejoinder to a question regarding the appropriateness of science-fiction to convey his thoughts on the subject of computer technology was that "there was no avoiding it, since the General Electric Company was science fiction."²⁶ His stated reasons notwithstanding, there is, perhaps, a deeper motive underlying Vonnegut's choice of both science fiction and the dystopian setting for his first novel. In his disillusioning experience as a public relations man for General Electric from 1947 to 1950, he observed firsthand the loneliness and frustration that must logically evolve from twentieth-century man's surrender to his own technology.

In the attempt to describe that surrender, Vonnegut has written an iron utopia in the Renaissance tradition

developed by Sir Thomas More. Vonnegut uses the modern form of science fiction to probe the serious problems of his day in much the same way that More employed fantasy to raise serious social questions in his period. Both men base their approaches upon the concept of the necessary division of labor which dates back to Plato's Republic. In each society, justice is only possible in the human community when each man does the work for which he is suited best. Vonnegut even introduces his own outside observer equivalent to More's Raphael Hythloday ("Nonsense-Talker") in the Shah of Bratpuhr character who speaks in a kind of nonsense non-language such as "Takaru yamu brouha, pu dinka bu." (p. 29) He also makes limited use of the pastoral romance in certain sections of Player Piano. The scenes depicted on the corporate island retreat "The Meadows," for example, are very much in the tradition of the pastoral refuge from the troubles and anxieties of ordinary life. It is ironic, of course, that Shepherd and Paul's wife, Anita Proteus, reconcile their previous enmity in an adulterous act, committed in the idyllic Meadows just right for confessions of love by a shepherd to his "coy mistress." Player Piano may also be considered a pastoral romance in the broader sense through Paul's combined allusions to the golden age (of science) and the Garden of Eden (Gottwald farm) in comparison to the "fruits of technology" in his society. In the most expansive meaning of the term, the pastoral is any literary work which contrasts the

advantages of the simple life to the disadvantages of the complicated life. The simple life of the working men--such as those so ironically described by Vonnegut in the Homestead scenes--therefore serves as a means of criticizing the class structure of society in Player Piano. More to the point, however, is Vonnegut's apparent indebtedness to the prose romance form. M. H. Abrams refers to the Gothic novel and the chivalric romance as the ancestors of the prose romance, and he goes on to say that

It typically deploys simplified characters, larger than life, who are sharply discriminated as heroes and villains, masters and victims; the protagonist is often solitary, and isolated from a social context; the plot emphasizes adventure, and is often cast in the form of the quest for an ideal, or the pursuit of an enemy; and the nonrealistic and occasionally melodramatic events are sometimes claimed to project in symbolic form the primal desires, hopes, and terrors in the depths of the human mind, and to be therefore analogous to the materials of dream, myth, ritual and folklore.²⁷

So many examples of these characteristics may be found in Player Piano that it would appear that Vonnegut has chosen the prose romance as the most appropriate form for his ideas. Paul Proteus, for instance, seems to represent the solitary protagonist in his isolation from the social context of Ilium. Unable to find acceptance or purpose in either his own class of engineers or the rebel Homesteaders, Paul becomes an archetypal symbol of loneliness. The establishment of such a representational character is viewed by Northrop Frye as one of the essential differences between the novel and the romance

forms. Frye states that

The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romance that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively. That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping around its fringes. Certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel.²⁸

There seems to be a high degree of subjective intensity and more than a suggestion of allegory in the characters and plot of Player Piano.

The plot of Player Piano emphasizes adventure in the form of a national revolution to overthrow the machines and the corporate government. The quest in Player Piano seems a reversal of the usual search for an ideal in that the "perfect" society is here depicted as the enemy of human existence, and therefore it is a quest for escape from the ideal. The most melodramatic event in the plot is a symbolic projection of one of the primal desires, hopes or terrors of the human mind. Paul's admission of his hatred of his famous father during the treason trial indicates an Oedipus complex of some magnitude. This central myth provides a logical motive for Paul's ambivalent rejection of the past and his fear of the future. Vonnegut makes full use of the materials of dream (pentathol dream-dance to the Building 58 Suite), ritual (Luke Lubbock, the lodge-parade leader), and folklore (Ghost Shirt magic of the nineteenth-century Indians).

Further evidence that Vonnegut writes more in the manner of a romancer than a novelist may be found in a closer examination of his method of characterization. Vonnegut seems to possess the ability to create stereotyped characters who are easily recognizable but who are slightly distorted or exaggerated to the point of vivid originality. Much like Charles Dickens' Scrooge or Micawber, Vonnegut's characters are not meant to be "real" or even believable, but they are not easily forgotten once met.

Most of the characters in Player Piano are drawn as simple but exaggerated stereotypes with the possible exception of Paul whose role as protagonist is never quite developed into a "hero" in the strictest sense. Most of the heroes and villains in Player Piano are distinguished more as "good guys" and "bad guys" rather than as embodiments of pure good and evil. The masters and victims are distinctly drawn in the caste system of Ilium which is divided into the machines and their engineers and managers (masters) and the citizens and soldiers of Homestead (victims). Even his minor characters have uniquely eccentric personalities such as Luke Lubbock who changes identities with a change of costume each time he leads a lodge parade through Homestead. The lodge costumes and uniforms give a certain majestic quality to the otherwise drab and scrawny Luke who "with an I.Q. of about 80, has titles that'd make Charlemagne sound like a cook's helper." (p. 96)

Vonnegut's use of the apparent simplicity of the romance form gives him greater literary range than many ordinary novelists because it permits him to incorporate several literary elements into a single form. As Frye has noted, "the romance, which deals with heroes, is intermediate between the novel, which deals with men, and the myth, which deals with gods."²⁹ He also cautions that "pure" examples of either romance or the novel forms are never found since the forms of prose fiction are always mixed. By choosing a highly flexible and imaginative form, Vonnegut is able to invent to such an extent that he seems anything but a proponent of the "anti-literary novel." He seems instead to be a proponent of the fully-literary novel by his inclusion of as many various forms as possible.

Player Piano seems a good example of Vonnegut's imaginative power achieved through variety of forms because while it is basically a quest-romance, it employs such diverse elements as episodic structure, comic interludes, pastoral settings, and dream-allegory. Vonnegut's serious purpose is clothed in humor as he explores the archetypal inner conflict of human loneliness in his first full-length fiction. Paul Proteus as the embodiment of that conflict becomes the representational or Messianic hero of the quest-romance. Northrop Frye refers to the Messianic hero as a redeemer of society in the quest-romance which consists of three stages: "the agon or conflict, the pathos or death-struggle, and anagorisis

or discovery, the recognition of the hero."³⁰ In his role as hero, Paul breaks away from his peer group after losing a fist-fight with a bartender in the agon stage. He experiences the pathos stage of a ritual death and rebirth when he is drugged and taken underground in "a chamber whose air was still and damp, dense with the feel of dead mass pressing down from above." (p. 272) The rebirth occurs when Paul is told that he is the new Messiah who will save the world from automation. Lasher explains his role to him in the chamber of an air-raid shelter:

In the past, in a situation like this, if Messiahs showed up with credible, dramatic messages of hope, they often set off powerful physical and spiritual revolutions in the face of terrific odds. If a Messiah shows up now with a good, solid, startling message, and if he keeps out of the hands of the police, he can set off a revolution--maybe one big enough to take the world away from the machines, Doctor, and give it back to the people. (p. 275)

The anagorisis stage of the quest occurs when Paul comes to recognize that the unsuccessful revolution was nothing more than a project for self-gratification by a bored citizenry. As Paul observes before the revolution occurs, "simple commentaries, special personal resentments, were reasons enough for joining anything that promised a change for the better. Promised a change for the better, or, Paul amended his thought after looking into some of the eyes, promised some excitement for a change." (p. 278) The most startling discovery Paul makes is that the entire quest has been a romantic venture, and it forces him to face a reality he is powerless to

change. In explaining that part of the discovery stage, Frye refers to quest-romance meaning in dream terms when it becomes "the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality."³¹ From at least one perspective then, the revolution has been a success because it has allowed the bored citizens to temporarily escape the reality of machine-domination by tearing up enough machines to keep them happily occupied with repairing them. By repairing the damaged machines, however, the citizens are contained within the continuing reality of machine-domination, and the cycle remains in motion.

Frye relates the quest-romance to ritual forms by viewing it as a victory of fertility over the waste land.³² For Vonnegut, the process is not so simple, for he inverts the waste land image and uses it in an ironic fashion. A clear example of his ironic use of the quest pattern is the Orange-O machine which was an "excretor of the blended wood pulp, dye, water, and orange-type flavoring." (pp. 317-18) The people once hated it, but when they find and repair one in the aftermath of the Ghost Shirt rebellion, "the people applauded and lined up, eager for their Orange-O. The first man up emptied his cup, and went immediately to the end of the line for seconds." (p. 318) We have here not a triumph of the fertile or the natural over the mechanical but a reassertion of the sterile and the artificial. The "precious

objects" obtained by the quest are even more obvious in Vonnegut's description of dawn in rebellion-torn Ilium:

In the early light, the town seemed an enormous jewel box, lined with the black and gray velvet of flying ash, and filled with millions of twinkling treasures; bits of air conditioners, amplidynes, analyzers, arc welders, batteries, belts, billers,
 (p. 315)

Two final elements of the romance form should be considered. The first is the scene of the hero-villain conflict described by Frye.

. . . . the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world. The conflict however takes place in, or at any rate primarily concerns, our world, which is in the middle, and which is characterized by the cyclical movement of nature.³³

The scene of the conflict is especially important in Player Piano because Vonnegut has used the middle world so well.

Paul is the Messianic hero from the "upper world" of the elite class of managers and engineers, or, on a more symbolic level "humanity," and the enemy is the "demonic power" of the inhuman machine in the "lower world" such as EPICAC located in Carlsbad Caverns. The second element of the romance seems more important, however, because it brings together several major points concerning Vonnegut's art. The dichotomous nature of the romance gives us some understanding of how Vonnegut's use of this form accounts for his work's broad appeal to both intellectual and popular audiences. The revolutionary nature of the romance helps us to understand Vonnegut's

choice of it to show change as life-supporting, and most importantly, it clarifies the leitmotiv of loneliness found in his work. Frye provides the key to this understanding in his general discussion of the romance:

The romance is nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfillment dream, and for that reason it has socially a curiously paradoxical role. In every age the ruling social or intellectual class tends to project its ideals in some form of romance, where the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threats to their ascendancy. . . . Yet there is a genuinely "proletarian" element in romance too which is never satisfied with its various incarnations, and in fact the incarnations themselves indicate that no matter how great a change may take place in society, romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on. The perennially childlike quality of romance is marked by its extra-ordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space. ³⁴

Vonnegut's fiction is both intellectual and proletarian in that it has attracted the attention and admiration of scholars and laborers alike. In a profession where sales measure success, his publishers report that his books are selling one million hardback copies and five million paperback copies per year. The charisma of his work results from his ability to translate an immense dissatisfaction with our society's various incarnations into viable human experience. In short, as man retreats from his self-created confusion of a technological society, he finds some fascination in his own loneliness. Vonnegut examines that loneliness through the romance form as an appropriate expression of the human need for incessant change. This may explain his frequent use of science

fiction as an "imaginative golden age in time or space" where such change may realistically occur. Science fiction, like the romance, is "perennially childlike" in its persistent and hopeful search for the "new" aspects of life. Even nostalgia is "new" in the sense that it originates from the realm of imagination where anything is truly possible. Such is the setting of Player Piano which Peter J. Reed has dubbed the "Nostalgic Future."

Vonnegut blends the elements of romance with characteristics of satire and irony while using the devices of humor and symbol. Perhaps the best example of Vonnegut's use of symbol and irony is the player piano from which the book's title comes. Reed has noted that this instrument is an effective symbol because it is one of the oldest and most innocently amusing machines designed to replace man's mechanical skill. He further observes the obvious connection between the hole-punched piano rolls and the tape-recorded movements of old Rudy Herz, the lathe operator who was replaced by a self-controlled machine.³⁵ Tony Tanner, however, best reveals the truly ominous nature of this symbol through definition of both player and piano:

A piano player is a man consciously using a machine to produce aesthetically pleasing patterns of his own making. A player piano is a machine which has been programmed to produce music on its own, thus making the human presence redundant.³⁶

This underlying irony of Vonnegut's symbolism is made explicit through Rudy Herz's statement to Paul Proteus in the

Homestead Bar as both watch the antique instrument play Alexander's Ragtime Band. "Makes you feel kind of creepy, don't it, Doctor, watching them keys go up and down? You can almost see a ghost sitting there playing his heart out." (p. 38) The "ghost" to be seen is the man of the future displaced by automation.

Another important symbol is the cat which Paul finds in the Ilium Works and takes with him to the malfunctioning Building 58, where it is swallowed up by a robot sweeper. The cat somehow manages to escape alive from Building 58 only to die atop the electrified wires of the security fence. While Reed interprets this as a kind of "triumph in defeat" and views the cat as "a symbol of animal life in a world of machines," I see it as Vonnegut's serious suggestion of death as the only escape from the automated trap which man has created for himself. His last statement describing the cat's death is prophetic: "She dropped to the asphalt--dead and smoking, but outside." (p. 21) There is no triumph and there is no defeat, for this sterile, mechanized world does not allow for any such creative or noble ideals as those. It provides for life within the system and death outside of it. With such limited freedom it is no wonder that the Shah's language has no equivalent for the phrase "average man" but must translate "citizen" as Takaru or "slave." Vonnegut's irony may seem a bit gimmicky here when we realize that Takaru reversed is urakat (u-r-a-kat), but his questioning of the real danger of technology is profoundly serious.

What Vonnegut has done with the word Takaru is an example of one of his strongest devices as he combines irony and symbolism in the onomastic development of Player Piano. Here and in his later novels, as in many traditional works of satire and romance, the names of his characters provide comedy, irony, and occasionally serious symbolism. The Shah of Bratpuhr again serves as a good example of this device, for his name as well as his nephew's has ironic significance. The Shah is the spiritual leader of the nation of Bratpuhr (brat poor or pure) which is a country rich in people but poor in technology. His nephew, Khashdrahr Miasma, has a name which suggests materialism (cash-drawer) and a poisonous atmosphere since "miasma" is Greek for pollution rising as a vapor from decomposing animal or vegetable matter. These names add a double twist of irony to these two characters since they suggest that the Shah who is variously described as "tiny and elegant as a snuffbox" and "like a priceless brooch in its gift box" is not above the temptations of materialism. This makes his concern for the takaru a little less believable and places him in the same category as the elite managers and engineers of Ilium whom he had criticized. To the State Department guide accompanying the Shah, Vonnegut cleverly assigns the name of "Halyard" which Webster's defines as "a rope or tackle for raising or lowering a flag."

Many of the minor characters' names are so obviously self-explanatory that little discussion is necessary. Lasher,

for example, is the one who verbally "lashes" or "whips" his followers into rebelling against the system, and Ludwig (Teutonic for "renowned in battle") von Neumann (of new man) is the political scientist interested in experimenting with humans as pawns of revolutionary change. Peter J. Reed has suggested that Anita Proteus is "a 'man-eater,' besides being 'neater,'" but these seem weak interpretations when we learn that "Anita" is Hebrew for "grace" in the sense of mercy. The name takes on a highly ironic meaning then, for as one of "the dull wives feeding on the power and glory of their husbands" (p. 88) in the competitive structure of the corporation, Anita has all the "grace" of a ball peen hammer in her ambitious struggle for greater social status through Paul.

The most complex name in the book is that of the protagonist, and it is difficult to understand how most of the critics have failed to notice that Vonnegut has used it very shrewdly on three distinct levels of meaning. Tony Tanner has perceived another implication of the protagonist's name by his observation that the initials of Paul Proteus suggest his relation to the theme of Player Piano. While most have commented upon "Proteus" as the name of a mythical Greek god noted for abrupt changes of appearance or form at will, they have largely ignored the name's underlying implication of the character's uncertain search for identity or self-definition. David Goldsmith seems to be the only critic

who has recognized the name of Proteus as a reference to Charles Proteus Steinmetz, a real electrical engineer and inventor born in Germany in 1865 but forced to immigrate because of his socialistic editorials. He came to America in 1889 and worked for the General Electric Company from 1893 until his death in 1923. A true visionary, he authored books on such widely divergent topics as Engineering Mathematics (1910) and America and the New Epoch (1916).³⁷ This level of meaning for the name of Proteus nearly gives Player Piano the appearance of a roman à clef. Vonnegut's ingenuity does not end there, however, for the given name, "Paul", also has multiple levels of meaning. As a figurehead "apostle" of the Ghost Shirt rebellion, Paul reminds us of the Biblical "Paul" who was originally a Jewish "Saul" who experienced conversion to Christianity. This allusion is a further implication of the search for self-understanding. The most ironic meaning of the full name of the protagonist is found if we accept the meaning of "Paul" in Latin as "little" and the "change" aspect implicit in Proteus. Since the plot of the book concludes with a revolution that has failed to alter the system, Paul Proteus as its Messiah is symbolic of the results--"little change"--which seems to be a principal statement Vonnegut is making.

Player Piano contains nearly all of the major ideas he develops in his later books. More importantly, Player Piano establishes Vonnegut as a social scientist working

through the medium of fiction. As Karen and Charles Wood have noted, Vonnegut shares the opinion of H. G. Wells that the greatest value of the novel is that it can deal with social problems and examine the "tremendous work of human reconciliation." ³⁸ Vonnegut is thus viewed as a novelist of idea cum experience who writes of the fantasy and fact in dichotomous human existence confused by appearance versus reality. Reed has interpreted Vonnegut's anti-Utopian approach as proof that he believes that "The answer to the meaning of life lies within each man . . ." ³⁹

I would argue that Vonnegut's vision in Player Piano is based upon sociology rather than autecology. He concerns himself with both man and his society in exposing the loneliness of one and the forces of change in the other. Vonnegut realizes that the two are not separable and that attempts to establish a genuinely "individual" identity are dangerous enterprises. Philip Slater views this modern tendency toward individualism as one of the major sources of frustration and loneliness because a part of each individual is undeniably committed to the society in which he exists. Some aspect of each individual such as the id or ego must be sacrificed to his society. Slater explains that

An individual, like a group, is a motley collection of ambivalent feelings, contradictory needs and values, and antithetical ideas. He is not, and cannot be, a monolithic totality, and the modern effort to bring this myth to life is not only delusional and ridiculous, but also acutely destructive, both to the individual and to his society.⁴⁰

This is the destructive element in Player Piano that causes Paul Proteus to feel the loneliness that results from the frustration of his desires for community, engagement and dependence. Conversely, this also explains the justifiable persecution of Paul and the other rebels by the Ilium society. The Ghost Shirt rebellion presented a very real danger to the welfare of America, and quelling it was a matter of group survival. In short, Vonnegut is dealing with the ego in crisis with society in Player Piano, and the man versus machine theme is his means of explaining individual loneliness. The complex "machine" here is more than a mechanical system, it is the intricate complexity of American society. In the next chapter, we will encounter loneliness on the cosmic level in The Sirens of Titan.

CHAPTER III

THE SIRENS OF TITAN

Vonnegut resumed his search for self-affirmation in The Sirens of Titan (1959) when he moved from the consideration of individual human loneliness in a given society to the higher plane of human loneliness in the cosmos. Just as he provided no resolution to the dilemma of Paul Proteus in Player Piano (1952), he offers no conclusion of Malachi Constant's quest for absolutes in The Sirens of Titan. In both cases, Vonnegut maintains his neutrality by stubbornly refusing to give definitive answers or to make moral judgments. This neutrality is important to Vonnegut, for it is the essentially human characteristic of ambivalence which causes much of man's loneliness in an inhuman Newtonian universe.

Vonnegut explained the necessity for his stance of moral neutrality in the preface to his play, Happy Birthday, Wanda June (1970). Telling his readers why Estelle Parsons had decided not to produce an earlier version of his play, he reveals one of his major literary philosophies:

She failed to produce Penelope for this reason: it was a lousy play. Actors complained that there

were no parts for stars, that everybody got to talk as much as everybody else, that nobody changed or was proved right or wrong at the end.

This intolerable balancing of characters and arguments reflected my true feelings: I felt and still feel that everybody is right no matter what he says. I had, in fact, written a book about everybody's being right all the time, The Sirens of Titan. And I gave a name in that book to a mathematical point where all opinions, no matter how contradictory, harmonized. I called it a chronosynclastic infundibulum.

I live in one.¹

He adds to this explanation that one of his father's dying complaints was that he "had never written a story with a villain in it," and he concludes that the reason he is "chickenhearted about villany" is that reading Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology, "and some other things" had made him realize at the age of twelve, "My gosh--all those people had to be what they were."²

By the time he wrote The Sirens of Titan, twenty-five years later, Vonnegut had expanded this insight to make the conflict of fate versus free will central to The Sirens of Titan. Here he uses the theme of cosmic responsibility to approach loneliness from a new direction. In what the critics have variously described as his most existential and absurdist book, Vonnegut employs human ambivalence to explore man's inner and outer space. He announces his purpose and theme quite early in the first chapter of the narration:

Everyone now knows how to find the meaning of life within himself.

But mankind wasn't always so lucky. Less than a century ago men and women did not have easy access to the puzzle boxes within them.

They could not name even one of the fifty-three portals to the soul.

Gimcrack religions were big business.

Mankind, ignorant of the truths that lie within every human being, looked outward--pushed ever outward. What mankind hoped to learn in its outward push was who was actually in charge of all creation, and what all creation was all about.³

The narrator is of course speaking to the reader from some point in the future as he describes a time which is our present. The present-day world is referred to as the "Nightmare Ages" when the human soul is terra incognita and life is a "nightmare of meaninglessness without end." (p. 8)

In more specific terms, the narrator states that the action of this "true story" takes place sometime "between the Second World War and the Third Great Depression." While the Second World War seems an allusion to historical fact, the "Depression" mentioned is not a financial one but the emotional despair of frightened and lonely man living in the post-sputnik nuclear era of 1959. It seems more than coincidental that Vonnegut's fictitious American President in the "Cheers in the Wirehouse" chapter reminds us of Dwight D. Eisenhower when he announces a "New Age of Space" to relieve unemployment. Eisenhower was President when the real Space Age began with the launching of the first sputnik on October 4, 1957, and The Sirens of Titan was published in October, 1959. Vonnegut's President sounds suspiciously like the Kansas dialect of Eisenhower as he mispronounces the words, "progress" (progerse), "chairs" (cheers), and "warehouse" (wire-house) in speaking of American manufacturers' overstocks.

The strongest evidence of Vonnegut's intent to use the present as his true setting is the chrono-synclastic infundibulum (time-space warp) which causes Winston Niles Rumfoord to realize that "everything that ever has been always will be, and everything that ever will be always has been." (pp. 25-26) In short, time past and time future are contained in the present, and, as Peter J. Reed has said of Vonnegut, "Now is essentially his first concern."⁴

The sense of time in coexistent tenses seems very important to the book's theme, for it returns us full cycle to the basic conflict of fate versus free will. As David Ketterer has noted, mankind's concept of punctual, linear, Earth time is not a constant because it is not universally applicable. The true nature of time is directly related to the theme of cosmic responsibility

Because any idea of control must invoke the principle of cause and effect, which is possible only given a linear conception of time, the understanding that the nature of time is relative goes some way toward undercutting most conceptions of control. This is the paradox Rumfoord signifies. He seems to be, in turn, controller and controlled, but he does not exist in linear time. What we have here is the central religious mystery of fate or determination and free will, given God's omniscience, in science-fiction garb....This is the contradiction, or rather paradox, at the heart of Vonnegut's fiction. . . .⁵

That is, mankind exists only in the present and chronology is a human notion superimposed on the universe. Vonnegut underscores this important difference between human time and universal time in the first chapter, "Between Time and

Timbuktu," which is intended to suggest the theological concept of time and eternity. Vonnegut narrowly defines these terms as "punctual" time and "infundibulated" time and assigns a major character to symbolize each kind. Constant becomes the symbol of man's existence in punctual time:

Constant smiled at that--the warning to be punctual. To be punctual meant to exist as a point, meant that as well as to arrive somewhere on time. Constant existed as a point--could not imagine what it would be like to exist in any other way. (p. 13)

Rumfoord becomes the symbol of the Deity existing in infundibulated time. His existence outside of linear time makes him "eternal" in the manner of Christian Deity, and his reference to the coexistent tenses of time sounds very much like the Christian statement of time, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end." Thus, through a kind of literary sleight of hand, Vonnegut invites his readers to accept the first of a series of "controller and controlled" relationships. He would have us believe at first that Rumfoord is in control of Malachi Constant's fate and that Malachi is totally without free will in the universe, but the theme of cosmic responsibility is later developed in an ascendant gyre-like movement to include extra-terrestrial powers in what appears to be an absurd universe. As David Goldsmith has noted:

At this point in the novel, it would seem that Vonnegut is expounding, through his agent Rumfoord, a cynical brand of Deism, simply manipulating his characters by means of Rumfoord's fantastic scheme, to prove his contentions. While this is true, if

the allegory stopped there it would not have the impact the author obviously intends. What makes this novel unique is that in the final chapters Vonnegut shows the reader that Rumfoord himself is but a dupe of a higher power--a messenger from another galaxy--and that the chain of unknowing does not stop even there, because the force that is pulling Rumfoord's strings is being guided by an equally meaningless power from above!⁶

Goldsmith's appraisal is accurate as far as it goes, but he seems to have overlooked the obvious in failing to carry his search for the "first cause" or origin of creation to the last two levels of responsibility suggested by Vonnegut in the narrative. Salo, the messenger from another galaxy, is shown to be the force "pulling Rumfoord's strings" in order to use the entire human race to deliver a replacement part for his disabled spaceship on the planet Titan. His fellow Tralfamadorians have elected Salo to carry a sealed message from "One rim of the Universe to the Other" (p. 269), and we eventually learn that the message is a mere dot which means "Greetings." This is as far as Goldsmith's interpretation reaches, and at first glance, it would appear that the human race has merely been the butt of a vast, absurd, cosmic joke. If we ignore Vonnegut's clues to the two other levels of cosmic responsibility, however, we are missing the entire point of The Sirens of Titan.

In answer to the question of who or what is actually "in charge" of all creation, Vonnegut suggests two agents or powers beyond the Tralfamadorians. Salo tells Rumfoord that he, like all Tralfamadorians, is a machine which has

been manufactured by other machines. The origin of the first machine is uncertain, but there is a legend about the beings who created it:

Once upon a time on Tralfamadore there were creatures who weren't anything like machines. They weren't predictable. They weren't durable. And these poor creatures were obsessed by the idea that everything that existed had to have a purpose, and that some purposes were higher than others.

These creatures spent most of their time trying to find out what their purpose was. And every time they found out what seemed to be a purpose of themselves, the purpose seemed so low that the creatures were filled with disgust and shame.

And, rather than serve such a low purpose, the creatures would make a machine to serve it. This left the creatures free to serve higher purposes. But whenever they found a higher purpose, the purpose still wasn't high enough.

So machines were made to serve higher purposes, too.

And the machines did everything so expertly that they were finally given the job of finding out what the highest purpose of the creatures could be.

The machines reported in all honesty that the creatures couldn't really be said to have any purpose at all.

The creatures thereupon began slaying each other, because they hated purposeless things above all else.

And they discovered that they weren't even very good at slaying. So they turned that job over to the machines, too. And the machines finished up the job in less time than it takes to say, "Tralfamadore." (pp. 274-75)

This excellent little parable has been largely overlooked by most of the critics, and that is unfortunate for it is quite literally packed with symbolic meaning. One of its more obvious functions is to trace human history from the Book of Genesis to the Atomic Bomb in the Tralfamadorian "creatures'" quest for purpose. A second function of the

legend seems to be to link The Sirens of Titan to the anti-technology theme of Player Piano in order to show the projected consequences of a machine age. Compare the legend to the following excerpt from the Ghost Shirt Society Letter extolling the virtues of imperfection, frailty, and inefficiency in Man as a creation of God:

. . . there must be virtue in brilliance followed by stupidity, for Man is alternately brilliant and stupid, and Man is a creation of God.

"You perhaps disagree with the antique and vain notion of Man's being a creation of God.

But I find it a far more defensible belief than the one implicit in intemperate faith in lawless technological progress--namely, that man is on earth to create more durable and efficient images of himself, and, hence, to eliminate any justification at all for his own continued existence." ⁷

Notice here that the reference to Man's alternate brilliance and stupidity seems to parallel the Tralfamadorian creatures' initial search for mere purpose and their later search for "higher" purpose which evolves into their grand stupidity of turning over to the machines the job of slaying each other. A more significant function of the legend, however, is that it offers proof of the existence of an agency or power antecedent to Salo's robot race on Tralfamadore. The last word of the legend reveals the identity of that power when we recall that "Tralfamadore" has been translated by Salo "as meaning both all of us and the number 541." (p. 268) While the all of us meaning may be easily linked with the power source for Salo's spaceship, UWTB, or the Universal Will to Become, the number 541 meaning is a bit more complex. The

Universal Will to Become is the life force of the cosmos that is in "all of us," and this is evident in the narrator's definition of it: "UWTB is what makes universes out of nothingness--that makes nothingness insist on becoming somethingness." (p. 138) The so-called "creatures" of Tralfamadore invented both UWTB and Salo's robot race. In the number 541, Vonnegut provides a mathematical puzzle for the reader to unravel. If we follow the logic of one of Kilgore Trout's titles, 2BRO2B, the 541 may be interpreted as five (senses?) four (for) one (individual?) which would call to mind the sensory experience of physical existence as well as the means for human perception of reality in the universe. The reference to the number 541, however, seems to be Vonnegut's invitation for a deeper search through mathematical formulas. The first to be examined is $5 + 4 + 1 = 10$ which suggests that 10 is the completion of a cycle or one step beyond the perfection symbolized by the number 9. Since there exists the possibility of reading too much into Vonnegut's penchant for complexity in word-play, perhaps the second mathematical formula will prove more useful when we assume that he is suggesting the simple subtraction of $5 - 4 = 1$. This formulation might be interpreted as the five senses minus the four dimensions of reality equals one isolated being in the universe. This aptly describes Rumfoord's ever-spiraling journey beyond time and space, and it underscores the book's central sense of Man's loneliness in an absurd universe. It is important

to remember that Salo has defined "Tralfamadore" as meaning both the number and the phrase which suggests that the search for meaning must include the concrete and the abstract knowledge of mankind.

Vonnegut is not satisfied to let the ultimate responsibility for the creation of the cosmos rest with the original Tralfamadorians (all of us) who manufactured Salo's robot people. He carefully ignores the question of who or what created them, but he employs a strangely omniscient narrator to tell us a tale of Earthlings, Martians, robot Tralfamadorians, and humanoid Tralfamadorians from an obviously higher perspective in the universe. In short, he pursues the destiny of mankind in a thoroughly circular argument until we humans are helplessly forced to conclude in the words of Malachi Constant, "I guess somebody up there likes me."

(p. 7) The message is repeated in the last five words of the book when Stony says to the entranced Malachi, "somebody up there likes you." (p. 319) The "somebody" is never identified because it is the search for that benevolent identity that is most important in our need to be "liked." Answers are irrelevant in an absurd universe where change is the only absolute certainty. Vonnegut presents this idea in the book's epigraph which serves to relate time, history, and eschatology to the movement of the universe. All of the book's major ideas are implied in this formal statement about progress: attributed to "Ranson K. Fern:"

Every passing hour brings the Solar System
 forty-three thousand miles closer to Globular Cluster
 M13 in Hercules--and still there are some misfits
 who insist there is no such thing as progress. (p. 5)

David Ketterer has noted the banal absurdity of Fern's concept of progress when he observed: "Had Fern stopped to consider the larger spiral form of this 'progress,' he might have substituted the less optimistically loaded word, 'movement.'"⁸ The word, "movement", is not only less optimistically loaded, it is much more appropriate for Vonnegut's purposes because it does not imply improvement, completion, or perfection as "progress" does. Vonnegut is, after all, one of those "misfits who insist there is no such thing as progress" in the universe; there is only change or constant "movement."

A universe in constant motion does not provide for "ultimates" of any kind, and therein lies the source of Man's desperate sense of cosmic loneliness. Like the creatures of the Tralfamadorian legend, mankind is obsessed by the idea that everything which exists must have a purpose. Karen and Charles Wood have noted that mankind is never satisfied with anything less than the pursuit of the highest purposes in the universe, and they view The Sirens of Titan as the most thorough questioning of the "ultimate destiny of the human race." The answer it provides is deliberately absurd and meaningless because

. . . on a real plane, man at this point on his way
 toward his ultimate destiny doesn't know what that

destiny is. Herein lies the idea of The Sirens of Titan--and herein lies the seed of Kurt Vonnegut's importance in modern literature. For a relativistic world, he sees no need for absolute answers. Irresolution needs no resolution, but should rather be appreciated as the ultimate reality. This penetration of man's bewilderment adds a dimension to Vonnegut's work which is missing in most of our previous literature.⁹

It would seem, then, that the reality which mankind faces is that there is no reality save the relativistic and pluralistic realities of an absurd universe which does not concern itself with "higher purposes" whether they be cosmic or human. The result, Charles B. Harris tells us, is that "we face a loss of self in a fragmented world of technology that reduces man to the operational and functional."¹⁰ Max Schulz carries this idea one step further by attempting to explain Vonnegut's rejection of absolutes as part of his "unconfirmed thesis" strategy as a Black Humorist. A major aspect of that strategy is what Schulz describes as "The Unsensing of the Self:"

In our century, particularly in the past two decades, the self as a verifiable, definable, even possible, entity has vanished in the ironic acceptance of a world without metaphysical center, one fragmented into multiple realities. Nor does the astounding advance in phenomenal knowledge of the universe offer us as yet an alternative set of beliefs. Rather, the sciences tend increasingly to answer our request for understanding of our world in terms untranslatable into words.¹¹

Schulz's theory is very useful when we consider the multiple realities experienced by Rumfoord in the chrono-synclastic infundibula and the difficulty of the robot Salo in his attempts

to answer Rumfoord's questions about Tralfamadore. "If you don't understand what I'm talking about, Skip, there's no sense in trying to explain it to you." (p. 269) The untranslatable hum of EPICAC XIV and the mechanical sounds of the Building 58 Suite in Player Piano are excellent examples of man's inability to comprehend the answers of science.

While Harris and Schulz have provided some insight by their classifications of Vonnegut as a novelist of the absurd and a Black Humorist, the most meaningful criticism for our purpose seems that offered by Thomas L. Wymer in his discussion of the Swiftian satire of Vonnegut. Wymer contends that the theme of The Sirens of Titan is not the meaninglessness of human life in the universe but

. . . the revelation of how human attitudes and the actions based on those attitudes create meaninglessness, of how outwardness paradoxically locks us within a nightmare of meaninglessness without end.... It is outwardness which cuts the self off from meaningful contact with any other. Outwardness involves a preoccupation with the notions of purpose, of knowing, of mastering, of knowing who masters. Man confronts the universe with a set of demands, all of which seem to be concerned with how man functions within or is controlled by a system. The universe does not answer these questions or answers them in ways that make man appear to be a mere mechanism, and we conclude that the universe is absurd and human life meaningless. Vonnegut's point is that the answers are meaningless because the questions are absurd. In seeking to answer them, we reduce ourselves to objects and contribute to our dehumanization, which is why our "solutions" typically intensify the problem.¹²

Wymer further contends that Vonnegut's perception of outwardness as the agent of man's isolation of the self places him in the company of such eminent philosophers as Heidegger

and Buber whose concepts are "among the most common terms in which modern man tries to assert his humanity."¹³ Wymer states the difference between outwardness and inwardness in philosophical terms as "the difference between epistemology and axiology, between the perception of fact and the perception of value."¹⁴

Wymer's distinction between outwardness and inwardness provides the most logical basis for Vonnegut's use of the fate versus free-will conflict in a novel which appears to be so concerned with the doctrine of determinism as to exclude any possibility of free-will. Man may factually know that he is being controlled by some superior force, but that knowledge does not prevent him from emotionally believing that he has free will in choosing the direction of his life. A prime example of this struggle between the inward and outward aspects of mankind in The Sirens of Titan is the fact that both Unk and Bee withstood the pain of the antennas in their heads in order to create significant works of literature while serving in the automaton army of Mars.

"Both the man and his mate were frequent visitors to the psychiatric wards of their respective hospitals. And it is perhaps food for thought," said Rumfoord, "that this supremely frustrated man was the only Martian to write a philosophy, and that this supremely self-frustrating woman was the only Martian to write a poem." (p. 163)

The difference between outwardness and inwardness would appear to be the difference between mere existence on the biological level and living on the intellectual and spiritual level.

As the omniscient narrator says of Unk's letter which he had written to himself before having his memory cleaned out for the seventh time: "It was literature in its finest sense, since it made Unk courageous, watchful, and secretly free. It made him his own hero in very trying times." (p. 132) While the theme of loneliness is inescapably present here, the chief effect is obviously affirmative.

Perhaps the best example of the fate versus free-will conflict is seen in the descriptions of the two space ship control panels in the novel. The first is the simplistic two-button system of the Martian invasion ships which are actually controlled by "fully automatic pilot-navigators" that have been pre-set by technicians on Mars.

The only controls available to those on board were two push-buttons on the center post of the cabin--one labeled on and one labeled off. The on button simply started a flight from Mars. The off button was connected to nothing. It was installed at the insistence of Martian mental-health experts, who said that human beings were always happier with machinery they thought they could turn off. (p. 167)

The second control panel is the intricately complicated system of Salo's grounded space ship which Malachi Constant does not dare to touch.

The controls of Salo's ship were far more complex than those of a Martian ship. Salo's dash panel offered Constant two hundred and seventy-three knobs, switches, and buttons, each with a Tralfamadorian inscription or calibration. The controls were anything but a hunch-player's delight in a Universe composed of one trillionth part matter to one decillion parts black velvet futility. (p. 303)

David Ketterer has observed that the first control panel is

analogous to the deadly efficient command system of Rumfoord's Martian army in which the actual controllers are not the officers but the ordinary soldiers like black Boaz, who "are equipped with control boxes that issue commands or inflict pain through the radio antennas implanted in the heads of the other soldiers." ¹⁵ More importantly, the first control panel represents man's perception of the universe on the most basic and axiological level because it provides the necessary illusion of free-will in the unconnected off button. Mankind finds value in the universe because he believes in his power to control his own destiny in it. His belief is one of "inwardness" and "faith" in his humanity. The second control panel represents man's perception of the universe on the most advanced and epistemological level because it allows for no illusion of free-will in its precisely numbered "two hundred and seventy-three knobs, switches, and buttons." Here, mankind finds only fact in the universe because he is forced to confront the "inscriptions" or "calibrations" of the scientific laws that control his destiny in a mechanical cosmos. His knowledge is of the "outwardness" and "motion" of the universe that is terrifying in its composition of one trillionth part matter to one decillion parts black velvet futility. It is little wonder that the protagonist, upon his return to Earth from Mars and Mercury, begins to feel that "All that kept him going was a wish that was more mechanical than emotional." (p. 217)

The word, "mechanical" is important here because it explains the affinity between the robot messenger, Salo, and the human messenger, Malachi Constant. Salo is an exceptionally "human" machine in his emotional response to Rumfoord, and Malachi is an exceptionally "mechanical" human being in his unemotional response to Rumfoord. The strongest link between Salo and Malachi is the good-luck piece which Chrono discarded on Titan. This piece of scrap metal, angrily snipped from "a spiral of steel strapping", is the replacement part for which Salo has been waiting for over two hundred thousand years. In a superbly ironic scene in the novel's epilogue, the omniscient narrator mentions in an off-handed manner that Malachi "tinkered" with Salo's ship in his curiosity to learn whether or not Chrono's good-luck piece actually fit into the power plant. Describing the ship's sooty engine compartment with its "smudged bearing and cams that related to nothing," the narrator casually remarks that

Constant was able to slip the holes in Chrono's good-luck piece onto those bearings and between the cams. The good-luck piece conformed to close tolerances and surrounding clearances in a way that would have pleased a Swiss machinist. (p. 303)

Here, in this brief but eloquent paragraph, is the single answer to most of the questions posed by The Sirens of Titan. The good-luck piece is the key to meaning in an absurd universe because it provides the purpose of mankind through Malachi's deliberate act of repairing Salo's space ship. Despite all of the elaborate stratagems of the Tralfamadorians

to use Earthlings and the entire Solar System as a means to supply Salo's replacement part, those "bearings and cams related to nothing" are only connected when a human being chooses to connect them in a moment of "tinkering." The good-luck piece becomes, in the hands of Malachi Constant, the link between man and machine, faith and fact, superstition and science, and inwardness (free-will) and outwardness (fate).

The reference to pleasing a "Swiss machinist" leads us to the answer of the book's ultimate question of cosmic responsibility because it is an allusion to man as the great watchmaker of the universe. Malachi Constant, in his identity as "Unk" which is the abbreviation for the "Unknown", is the father of Chrono and the mate of Beatrice just as Man is the father of Time and the lover of Beatitudes. The narrator tells us that the boy, Chrono, "did not have a sense of futility and disorder" and that he "participated fitly" in what he regarded as the perfect order of the universe. There is an important clue in the narrator's description of Chrono's discarding his good-luck piece on the beach of Titan:

He took his good-luck piece from his pocket, dropped it without regret to the sand, dropped it among Salo's scattered parts.

Sooner or later, Chrono believed, the magical forces of the Universe would put everything back together again.

They always did. (p. 301)

The implication seems clear here; the "magical forces of the Universe" encompass the human beings who impose a sense of

order and purpose on a chaotic and meaningless universe. Malachi, as the representative of mankind, not only repaired Salo's space ship, but he succeeded in putting Salo's dismantled body back together again in his "hobby" of puttering around. His exercise of free will rather than submission to fate directed his actions. From all of this, we may conclude that the ultimate responsibility for man's destiny in the universe must rest with man himself. The omniscient narrator carefully reveals the cyclical nature of that responsibility in the introduction of Malachi Constant whose name means faithful messenger. He is further described as a "speculator, mostly in corporate securities" who has inherited his vast fortune. In very specific terms, the narrator links Malachi to the mechanical Tralfamadorian messenger, Salo, by delineating mankind's sense of loneliness and lack of purpose.

. . . Constant pined for just one thing--a single message that was sufficiently dignified and important to merit his carrying it humbly between two points.

The motto under the coat of arms that Constant had designed for himself said simply, The Messenger Awaits.

What Constant had in mind, presumably, was a first-class message from God to someone equally distinguished. (p. 17)

This sounds very much like the mission of Salo, the awaiting messenger, who has been elected to carry a dignified and important message between two points "from 'One Rim of the Universe to the Other.'" (p. 269) Just as Malachi's pined-for message is poetically imagined to originate "from God", Salo's message

has been carefully prepared by the Tralfamadorian university in celebration "of a government 361,620,000 Earthling years old." (p. 268) The narrator explains that Salo's route spanning the Universe is deliberately symbolic. "The image was poetic, as was Salo's expedition. Salo would simply take the message and go as fast and as far as the technology of Tralfamadore could send him." (p. 269) Just as Malachi Constant's name fully describes his function as the faithful messenger in the novel, Salo's name, (Say Hello?), seems perfectly appropriate for the Tralfamadorian message, "Greetings," which he is carrying.¹⁵

The point of all of this is that both messengers fulfill their assigned missions by carrying their respective messages full cycle back to their points of origin. Malachi, as an Earthling, delivers the message of an amoral universe to Earthlings in his Messiah role in Rumfoord's Church of God the Utterly Indifferent. In the course of events in the novel, he experiences four different identities in moving from Malachi Constant to Unk to Space Wanderer to the "new and improved" Malachi Constant. In changing from Earthling to extraterrestrial Messiah and back to Earthling again, Constant delivered that desired message of importance from man to God and back to man again. In the case of Salo, there are no "rims" of the Universe for him to traverse, so he is constantly fulfilling his mission in saying "greetings" to all of us in the Universe as a representative of Tralfamadore

which, as we recall, is translated as "all of us." The narrator explains that "His instructions were to find creatures in it somewhere, to master their language, to open the message, and to translate it for them." (p. 270) The message is a cyclical one from "all of us" to "all of us" in the Universe.

Despite Salo's attempt to connect with his "greetings" and Chrono's belief in a cosmic coherence, the Universe remains rimless, and man continues alone as both sender and receiver of all messages. The letter Unk writes to himself on Mars is perhaps the strongest example of man's perpetual mission of delivering the message of loneliness to himself:

Dear Unk:--the letter began: They aren't much, God knows--but here are the things I know for sure, and at the end you will find a list of questions you should do your best to find answers to. The questions are important. I have thought harder about them than I have about the answers I already have. That is the first thing I know for sure: (1.) If the questions don't make sense, neither will the answers. (p. 124)

Everything in The Sirens of Titan points to the idea that mankind's constant questions do not make sense, and neither do his answers. Unk's letter encompasses most of the subjects mankind has studied for answers such as philosophy, gossip, history, astronomy, biology, theology, geography, psychology, medicine--"and even a short story." (p. 126) The most significant statement in the letter seems to be the one concerning "Theology: (15.) Somebody made everything for some reason." (p. 127) This idea is at the center of human conflict because mankind believes and accepts that

definition of theology so wholeheartedly that the quest for purpose is perpetual. Such a definition presents serious problems, however, because it seems to suggest both the question and the answer of human purpose. Such ambivalence does not resolve man's conflict, and he is left alone at the center of the universe. Man has only himself and the great Unknown in the indifferent cosmos. The resulting loneliness seems to be expressed in the complimentary close and signature of Unk's letter:

I remain faithfully yours--was the sentiment expressed above the signature.

The signature itself filled almost the whole page. It was three block letters, six inches high and two inches wide. The letters were executed clumsily, with a smeary black kindergarten exuberance.

This was the signature:



The signature was Unk's.

Unk was the hero who had written the letter.

(p. 132)

The message seems clearly to be that "Unk" is the abbreviation for the "Unknown." Man must remain faithful to himself, for he is paradoxically the only known and unknown quantity in his Universe. In short, he is a self-contained enigma engaged in constant study of his own "philosophy, gossip, history, astronomy," etc. for answers to the existential questions which continue to elude him.

The cyclical nature of man's enigmatic search for existential answers seems best suited to the quest structure of the prose romance which Vonnegut employs in The Sirens of Titan. This is not to say that the book conforms strictly to the prose romance form, but it does appear to follow it more closely than other forms while also incorporating some elements of the picaresque novel and adding satire to a general science-fiction framework. Among the many critics who have noted Vonnegut's attempts to avoid the limitations of the more conventional literary forms, Karen and Charles Wood have been most perceptive in regard to the science-fiction element of The Sirens of Titan. They consider the book's multi-faceted form to be both a "spoof on science fiction" and "perhaps the purest science-fiction novel Vonnegut has ever produced." They understand the book to be a science-fictionist version of the quest for human purpose when they explain its devices as part of Vonnegut's deliberate manipulation of the form:

Here we find time travel, space travel, alien life forms, and the theme of anti-Utopia. There is, in the incomprehensible chrono-synclastic infundibula, a fully conscious parodying of pseudo-science. But when all the parody and humor of the novel have been noted, there is more to be said. The Sirens of Titan deals with an idea, the ultimate destiny of the human race.¹⁷

David Goldsmith also sees that Vonnegut uses science fiction only as a framework upon which to stretch his ideas.

Beneath the surface interest and amusement generated by space ships, an invasion of Earth by Mars, a

sojourn in the caves of Mercury, and an exile on one of the moons of Saturn, Vonnegut is wrestling with nothing less than the cosmological question.¹⁸

Ironically, Vonnegut's fondness for such science-fiction "trappings" has resulted in critical mislabelling of his obviously anti-technological works. Vonnegut has explained that while he respects the sub-genre, he has been unhappy about being regarded as a science-fiction writer ever since the publication of his Player Piano in 1952:

I have been a soreheaded occupant of a file drawer labeled "science fiction" ever since, and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal.

The way a person gets into this drawer, apparently, is to notice technology. The feeling persists that no one can simultaneously be a respectable writer and understand how a refrigerator works. . . .¹⁹

While Vonnegut's work does make use of the superficial elements of science fiction, it is the prose romance which seems most useful for the inevitable quest structure in each of his books.

The Sirens of Titan employs the quest structure in Malachi Constant's search for the meaning of human existence in terms of cosmic responsibility. This quest seems to be a natural and universal one in that it is part of what sociologist Philip E. Slater calls the basic human desire "for dependence--the wish to share responsibility for the control of one's impulses and the direction of one's life."²⁰ In short, this is man's need for someone (God?) or something (Tralfamadorian robot?) to serve as the authority over the

universe which he inhabits. In addition to the quest, the book also employs characters that are bigger-than-life allegorical figures typically found in the prose romance, and the distinction between Malachi as the hero/victim and Rumfoord as the villain/master is clearly drawn. As the protagonist, Malachi is most frequently presented as a solitary figure isolated from his society. The plot of The Sirens of Titan, with its interplanetary travel and the Martian invasion of Earth, certainly emphasizes adventure, and it takes the classic form of the quest which Northrop Frye has termed the "major Adventure, the element that gives literary form to the romance."²¹ Winston Niles Rumfoord provides the basic outline of both the quest and the plot of the book in his explanation of how to "change the world for the better" in his Pocket History of Mars:

"Any man who would change the world in a significant way must have showmanship, a genial willingness to shed other people's blood, and a plausible new religion to introduce during the brief period of repentance and horror that usually follows bloodshed." (p. 174)

While his master plan sounds very much like a parody of Christianity, it also bears a disturbingly similar resemblance to Hitler's Third Reich. Rumfoord believed, however, that the "great and unforgettable suicide of Mars" would serve to make the people of Earth aware of the indifference of the Universe, to believe in an apathetic God, and to unite in a "monolithic Brotherhood of Man." The result of his grand design is the founding of the "Church of God the Utterly Indifferent" with its three million converts.

Rumfoord's plan also closely parallels the three main stages of the quest as it is described by Northrop Frye:

. . . the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero. We may call these three stages respectively, using Greek terms, the agon or conflict, the pathos or death-struggle, and the anagnorisis or discovery, the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proved himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the conflict. Thus the romance expresses more clearly the passage from struggle through a point of ritual death to a recognition scene. . . .²²

Malachi Constant is introduced to his agon by Rumfoord who informs him that he will undertake a perilous journey to Titan by way of Mars, Mercury and Earth, and the conflict is insured by Constant's knowledge that the journey will be made against his will. That sense of helplessness imposed upon the highly independent Constant serves to emphasize the element of loneliness in the journey stage of the quest in prose romance. Rumfoord's revelation of the involuntary journey comes in a moment of extraordinary showmanship (in more than one sense of the word) since it occurs during one of his materializations or "appearances" at his estate in Newport, Rhode Island. It is described in very dramatic terms:

There was a crowd.

The crowd had gathered 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. (p. 8)

In a different sense of the word, Rumfoord's showmanship is evident in his predictions or "glimpses" of what the future

holds in store for Malachi and Beatrice. There is a further sense of showmanship in Rumfoord's presentation of the hologram picture of the three excruciatingly beautiful "sirens" of Titan to Constant. On a higher level, there is showmanship in the omniscient narrator's highly visual description of the Rumfoord mansion with its Federal building appearance, spiral staircase, dry fountain, and the foyer mosaic "showing the signs of the zodiac encircling a golden sun." (p. 20)

In a more abstract sense, the narrator's opinion of Constant and Rumfoord reflects an element of showmanship when he compares them in dramatic terms:

To contrast Malachi Constant of Hollywood
with Winston Niles Rumfoord of Newport and Eternity:
Everything Rumfoord did he did with style,
making all mankind look good.

Everything Constant did he did in style--
agressively, loudly, childishly, wastefully--making
himself and mankind look bad. (pp. 28-29)

The references to Hollywood and Eternity lead the reader smoothly into another kind of showmanship when the narrator spoofs American fundamentalist preachers in the person of the Reverend Bobby Denton whose charisma "spitted his audience on a bright and loving gaze, and proceeded to roast it whole over the coals of its own iniquity." (p. 31)

That sense of human iniquity is important, for it figures strongly in the pathos stage of Rumfoord's version of the quest-romance. His genial willingness to shed other people's blood is evident in his premeditated staging of the war between Mars and Earth which is the crucial struggle

leading to the ritual death of Malachi Constant. His attempts to avoid the predictions of Rumfoord result in the loss of Malachi's vast fortune and cause him to join the Martian army in order to escape his creditors. There, on Mars, he loses both his lieutenant-colonel rank and his personal identity, and he becomes a private in the First Martian Assault Infantry Division with the personnel identity of "Unk." With his memory "cleaned out" for the seventh time and moving under the control of an antenna installed under the crown of his skull, Unk commits an act of the greatest iniquity by murdering his best friend, Stony Stevenson, in a military execution strongly reminiscent of Cain slaying Abel. This scene is symbolic of the man versus self conflict in The Sirens of Titan just as the suicidal Martian army's being comprised of transported Earthlings is representative on a grander scale of mankind's inhumanity expressed in terms of the warring impulse against itself. The war between the planets is merely the logical extension of the wars that have been fought between the three primary major races of humanity which anthropologists have identified as the Negroid, Caucasoid, and Mongoloid. This idea seems indicated by the message beamed to Earth by Martian radios after the war had begun: "Brown man, white man, yellow man--surrender or die." (p. 133)

Unk misses the invasion by becoming "the only deserter in the history of the Army of Mars" (p. 140) when he attempts to rescue his wife and son and to escape to what he vaguely

describes to Chrono as "some place good." (p. 147) His plan is thwarted by Rumfoord who sends Unk and Boaz to the planet Mercury where their automatically piloted space ship threads its way down through a system of chimneys and buries them alive in a cave "one hundred and sixteen miles below the surface." (p. 190) This is the ritual death of Unk as he and Boaz explore the cave and learn "that their tomb was deep, tortuous, endless--airless." Unk spends three years in the caves, and his experience parallels the Christian myth of Jesus' descent into Hell as well as the phase of pathos which Northrop Frye describes as the belly of the dragon where "the image is suggested of the hero going down the monster's throat."²³ The caves of Mercury are especially suited to the heroic quest because their tortuously winding system of chimneys suggests the labyrinth image which Frye deems important to the pathos stage. For Unk, the labyrinth has a different meaning:

His soul felt the pressure of the miles of rock above. And his soul felt the true nature of their predicament. On all sides and overhead were passages that branched and branched and branched. And the branches forked to twigs, and the twigs forked to passages no larger than a human pore.

Unk's soul was right in feeling that not one branch in ten thousand led all the way to the surface. (p. 193)

The allusion to a human pore introduces the psychological element of the search for meaning within the self so clearly stated in the very first sentence of the narrative. This is the terra incognita, the "inwardness that remained to be

explored" before human goodness and wisdom could be discovered.

(p. 8) It is no accident that Unk is trapped inside the planet Mercury, "the messenger of the gods, god of commerce, manual skill, eloquence, cleverness, travel, and thievery."²⁴ Malachi Constant, the faithful messenger and former rogue, fits the description of Mercury very well, and in his identity as "Unk," his expedition through the caves is a search for the meaning of life in the unknown self. Frye observes that the quest-romance is analogous to human dreams examined by Jung: "Translated into dream terms, the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality."²⁵ This could account for Boaz's presence in the caves of Mercury with Unk since he represents one of the two possible responses to mankind's self-imprisonment. While Unk responds with an active and aggressive struggle to return to the outer world of life and action, Boaz is passively and regressively resigned to remain in the inner world of death and inaction. The narrator tells us that Unk

was at war with his environment. He has come to regard his environment as being either malevolent or cruelly mismanaged. His response was to fight it with the only weapons at hand--passive resistance and open displays of contempt. (p. 200)

Boaz, on the other hand, is like an unborn child who refuses to experience birth:

"I don't know what's going on," said Boaz in his thoughts, "and I'm probably not smart enough

to understand if somebody was to explain it to me. All I know is we're being tested somehow, by somebody or some thing a whole lot smarter than us, and all I can do is be friendly and keep calm and try to have a nice time till it's all over." (p. 202)

The reference to being "smart" is significant here, for Rumfoord's "intelligence test" can only be solved by the active pursuit of human knowledge or aspiration to "higher" purpose. When Unk looks "up" in order to learn that the answer to the problem of escape from Mercury is to turn his automatically-piloted, depth-sensing space ship upside down, it is an indication that intelligence is that "one branch in ten thousand" that leads to the surface of man's awareness. In other words, there is a danger in limiting one's search for meaning to only the inwardness of the self. The unknown can become the known only if mankind searches for meaning both outwardly and inwardly on the most primitive and on the most sophisticated levels of existence. This is symbolically indicated by the two comic books Unk and Boaz have on board their space ship, "Tweety and Sylvester, which was about a canary that drove a cat crazy, and The Miserable Ones, which was about a man who stole some gold candlesticks from a priest who had been nice to him." (p. 177) The Tweety and Sylvester comic reflects the childlike simplicity of Boaz's mentality as he is seen leafing through it at the moment he tells Unk of his decision to remain in the caves of Mercury even though escape is possible. The Miserable Ones, a Classic Comic, reflects the more sophisticated understanding of Unk's

sensitive intelligence in its treatment of social injustice and its complex dissertations on philosophy, science, politics and religion. The allusion to this great extended melodrama with its historic scenes and its host of characters from all social levels is an excellent representation of the problems of man examined in The Sirens of Titan, for Les Miserables was once described by Victor Hugo as "a drama in which the hero is the Infinite, the second character is Man." The racial difference between Unk and Boaz seems to indicate not only a polarity of human responses but some degree of value judgment as well. Unk as a white "hero" seems to represent the success of a positive response to Rumfoord's challenge in the caves while Boaz as a black "hero" seems to represent the failure of a negative response.

Unk's success leads to his symbolic rebirth as he emerges from the womb-like caves of Mercury to become the resurrected Messiah returning to Earth. When his space ship lands in a New World country churchyard in "West Barnstable, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, U. S. A.," Unk enters the anagnorisis stage of Rumfoord's version of the quest-romance by fulfilling the first prophecy of the plausible new religion Rumfoord introduced following the war with Mars. The prophecy was that a lone straggler from the Martian Army would arrive naked at the Barnstable First Church of God the Utterly Indifferent--The Church of the Weary Space Wanderer--where he would put on a skin-tight, one piece, lemon-yellow, rubberized suit

with foot-high orange question marks signifying "that the Space Wanderer wouldn't know who he was." (p. 218) The question of his identity would not be answered until Winston Niles Rumfoord gave the world the Space Wanderer's name. Unk's return to Earth on a warm, rainy, spring day when everything is "green and watery" is strongly symbolic of the baptism of the reborn hero in the reviving waters of life. In a physical description of Unk, the narrator seems to be suggesting that his rebirth is an experience of archetypal loneliness shared by prehistoric man, Adam, Christ, technologically displaced modern man, or the more generally idealized "noble savage" of literary history:

A seeming wild man stood in the churchyard, wondering at the creamery air, at the green, at the wet. He was almost naked, and his blue-black beard and his hair were tangled and long and shot with gray. The only garment he wore was a clinking breechclout made of wrenches and copper wire.

The garment covered his shame.

The rain ran down his coarse cheeks. He tipped back his head to drink it. He rested his hand on a headstone, more for the feel than the support of it. He was used to the feel of stones--was deathly used to the feel of tough, dry stones. But the stones that were wet, stones that were mossy, stones that were squared and written on by men--he hadn't felt stones like that for a long, long time.

Pro Patria said the stone he touched.

The man was Unk.

He was home from Mars and Mercury. (pp. 216-17)

The phrase, Pro Patria, seems ironically intended here as the "country" for which all the people in the church graveyard have died is Earth. The water imagery in the passage is also significant, for it not only represents the symbolic

baptism of Unk as the individualized Messiah-figure, but also prepares us for the extended series of positive water images that follow. One example is the inverted firehose that formed "a shivering, unsure fountain," which drenched the crowd that came to greet Unk as the Weary Space Wanderer returning from Mars. The narrator says of this experience

That water should have played such an important part in the welcoming of Unk was an enchanting accident. No one had planned it. But it was perfect that everyone should forget himself in a festival of universal wetness. (p. 225)

We are also told of an abundance of water on the planet Titan with its "three seas," "a cluster of ninety-three ponds and lakes, incipiently a fourth sea," and "three great rivers." (p. 265) All of these images seem intended to suggest the forces of creation associated with water. Perhaps the most important function of such a "deluge" of water imagery is the role it plays in the epiphany scene that is the peak of action in the anagnorisis or discovery stage of the quest-romance.

The narrator tells us that "the springtime for mankind had arrived" (p. 220), and Rumfoord's revelation of the Space Wanderer's true identity is an updated Easter pageant. As the narrator reminds us, "When Rumfoord staged a passion play, he used nothing but real people in real hells." (p. 239) Peter J. Reed has explained that Rumfoord uses the revised Christian myth as a means of conveying his own cynicism because he is a man

who believes that people want circuses, and who will give them a Messiah and lies along with truths

to bring them to his desired end. To crown his efforts to make people believe in the indifference of the Universe, the apathy of God, and the need for brotherly love, Rumfoord takes his Space Wanderer through a parody of New Testament events, from glorious acclamation to the sermon of the panorama to rejection and expulsion into space.²⁶

Because Rumfoord's desired ends are so complex, his staged epiphany of the Space Wanderer contains a great deal of irony which, on close examination, seems to be a deliberate reversal of New Testament events. In his role as a Messiah, for example, the Space Wanderer does not bring a message of redemption to the people of Earth; he brings instead a message of mankind's loneliness and responsibility in the Universe. His answers to the two ritual questions of the prophecy underscore the loss of human identity through alienation and the absence of divine control of human events in the cosmos. When the people asked, "Who are you?", his reply was "I--I don't know my real name. . . . They called me Unk." When the crowd asked "What happened to you?" he answered "I was a victim of a series of accidents, as are we all." His responses reveal that even after the inward search for meaning represented by his three year internment in the caves of Mercury, Unk does not know or understand himself, and even after the outward search for meaning represented by his far-ranging space travels, Unk does not know or understand who or what controls the Universe. In short, the Space Wanderer's message is a declaration of mankind's ignorance instead of reconciliation with a Heavenly Father. This ignorance is, in turn, viewed as the key to

mankind's freedom by the followers of Rumfoord's new religion as the following excerpt from a sermon of the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent indicates:

"O Lord Most High, Creator of the Cosmos, Spinner of Galaxies, Soul of Electromagnetic waves, Inhaler and Exhaler of Inconceivable Volumes of Vacuum, Spitter of Fire and Rock, Trifler with Millennia-- what could we do for Thee that Thou couldst not do for Thyself one octillion times better? Nothing. What could we do or say that couldst possibly interest Thee? Nothing. Oh, Mankind, rejoice in the Apathy of our Creator, for it makes us free and truthful and dignified at last. No longer can a fool like Malachi Constant point to a ridiculous accident of good luck and say, 'Somebody up there likes me.' And no longer can a tyrant say, 'God wants this or that to happen, and anybody who doesn't help this or that to happen is against God.' O Lord Most High, what a glorious weapon is Thy Apathy, for we have unsheathed it, have thrust and slashed mightily with it, and the claptrap that has so often enslaved us or driven us into the madhouse lies slain!"

--The Reverend C. Horner Redwine (p. 215)

This thinly veiled questioning of God's existence reverses the myth of human guilt which resulted in Adam's expulsion from Eden by shifting cosmic responsibility from God to Man. The last sentence of the sermon also seems to contain an allusion to the dragon-killing theme of the quest-romance.

Rumfoord manages to bring together the three myths of Adam, Christ and Prometheus in the scene of the Space Wanderer's apotheosis. Of course, this is a reversed apotheosis which reveals the humanity of the Space Wanderer rather than any aspect of a deity. The scene begins with Rumfoord climbing a tree from which he delivers a serpentine sermon to the Space Wanderer, Beatrice, Chrono, and the vast crowd below

them all. In the sermon, Rumfoord reveals the true identity of the Space Wanderer to be Malachi Constant whom he describes as "disgusting, irksome, and hateful." In statements that could be interpreted as applicable to either Adam or Christ, Rumfoord explains Malachi's function as a symbol in the new religion.

"You have had the singular accident, Mr. Constant," he said sympathetically, "of becoming a central symbol of wrong-headedness for a perfectly enormous religious sect.

"You would not be attractive to us as a symbol, Mr. Constant," he said, "if our hearts did not go out to you to a certain extent. Our hearts have to go out to you, since all your flamboyant errors are errors that human beings have made since the beginning of time." (pp. 254-55)

Shortly after that explanation, Rumfoord tells Constant that he is going to climb a "long golden ladder" to a space ship that will take him and his family to Titan where he will live in exile. Constant is also told that the purpose of his being exiled is to provide "a drama of dignified self-sacrifice to remember and ponder through all time." (p. 255) He seems to allude to Christ as well as to the scapegoat in:

"We will imagine, to our spiritual satisfaction," said Rumfoord up in his treetop, "that you are taking all mistaken ideas about the meaning of luck, all misused wealth and power, and all disgusting pastimes with you." (p. 255)

Constant's response to this series of startling revelations is an obvious reaffirmation of mankind's ignorance when he says, "I'd still like to say that I haven't understood a single thing that's happened to me since I reached Earth." (p. 258)

While the myths of Christ and Adam seem to be intermingled throughout the scene, the Promethean myth is introduced more indirectly by Rumfoord's reference to Titan. Prometheus, the Titan who stole fire from heaven for the benefit of mankind, symbolizes the rebellious nature which causes man to reject all of the conveniently pat answers to the questions of meaning in his universe. The reference to Titan could also suggest that Man is himself the giant Deity for whom he searches in his eternal quest through the Universe. Just as the narrator appears to have used the planets Mars and Mercury in a precisely symbolic manner to represent Man as warrior and Man as messenger, Titan seems to represent Man as Deity. This idea seems to be borne out by the fact that the three sirens of Titan are white, gold, and brown women who lure Malachi Constant to engage in Rumfoord's quest, "begging him to come to them, to make them whole with love." (p. 38 Italics added)

The similarity to the Martian Army chant against the brown, yellow, and white men of Earth is unmistakable, and the three sirens seem to represent the three major races of mankind who should be searching for meaning and purpose in each other instead of engaging in introspection or space exploration. As Peter J. Reed has somewhat narrowly observed, "the sirens come to stand for man's looking for happiness and meaning somewhere outside of himself where such things are not found."²⁷ I would argue, however, that the sirens stand for a great deal more than that by providing a definite goal for

Man's quest. In short, the sirens are the realization that Man's search for meaning should extend beyond the two directions of the vertical plane to include the two-way direction of the horizontal plane between individual man and the races of mankind. The motto of Rumfoord's new religion is an eloquent statement of that realization: "Take Care of the People, and God Almighty Will Take Care of Himself." (p. 180) The motto seems to be a clarion call for Rumfoord's plan to establish an enduring brotherhood of mankind.

This brotherhood of mankind is the reward of the quest-romance which Malachi Constant achieves by delivering his message of human need "from one rim of the Universe to the other" by way of Earth, Mars, Mercury, Earth, Titan and Earth. His identity changes accordingly at each point of his journey. He leaves Earth as Malachi Constant, becomes Unk on Mars, changes to Space Wanderer on Mercury, reverts to Malachi Constant on Earth again, becomes Unk on Titan, and dies as Malachi Constant on Earth. In the course of his travels, Malachi/Unk/Space Wanderer learns three possible answers to his question of human purpose in the Universe. The first two answers justify the need for a brotherhood of mankind, and the third is a signal to renew the quest. On Titan, Beatrice writes in her book, The True Purpose of Life in the Solar System, the "worst thing that could possibly happen to anybody would be not to be used for anything by anybody." (p. 310) She died shortly after writing that, and Constant

tells Salo, the Tralfamadorian messenger, that "a purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved." (p. 313) These first two answers seem intended to bring us full cycle in our understanding of the need for mankind to believe in the value of the individual and collective self of humanity and the necessity for interaction with our fellow men.

The third answer to the question of human purpose would seem to negate, or at least weaken, the other two because it seems to imply that despite the proof offered by Rumfoord's religion, the majority of human beings need to go on believing that "somebody up there likes you." (p. 319) In other words, there is no purpose for human existence beyond that which Man creates through the power of his own imagination. This idea is conveyed by the sleeper metaphor introduced in the epilogue which concludes The Sirens of Titan. Salo returns Malachi to Earth and leaves him at a bus stop in Indianapolis where he freezes to death while waiting two hours in a snow storm for a bus. While Malachi is saying goodbye to Salo, "The complaint of a vaguely disturbed sleeper came from the open bedroom window nearby. 'Aw, somebody,' the sleeper complained, 'afo wa de-yah, ummmmmmmmmmmmm.'" (p. 317) And just as Salo is getting back into his space ship to leave, "'Sim-faw!' cried the sleeper menacingly, to anyone who might menace his sleep. 'Soo! A-so! What's a mabba? Nf.'" (p. 318) After Salo's ship has gone and Malachi is left alone in the

"perfectly white world" of Earth:

"Fraugh!" cried the sleeper, as though he suddenly understood all.

"Braugh!" he cried, not liking at all what he suddenly understood.

"Sup-foe!" he said, saying in no uncertain terms what he was going to do about it.

"Floof!" he cried.

The conspirators presumably fled.

More snow fell. (p. 318)

The allusion to Man as the sleeping giant (Titan) seems evident in this passage of symbolic action expressed in ironic language filled with hidden meanings. The cyclical function of the sleeper metaphor which begins and ends this "true story from the Nightmare Ages" has been carefully explained by Thomas L. Wymer:

The sleeper is mankind, locked within himself, complaining and vaguely disturbed, but angry at anyone who would wake him. Declaring his understanding of everything in nonsense syllables, he belligerently defends himself against imaginary foes, but remains asleep while something beautiful dies outside for the simple want of a warm place to sit.²⁸

Wymer has pinpointed the true nature of Malachi's quest as an internal one which denies Man's capacity to generate the external love required for Rumfoord's grand plan of brotherhood for mankind on Earth. We all sleep, unaware of the deaths of our fellow men in an indifferent Universe. We survive only by our illusions of divine control, for they offer Mankind the one possibility for happiness to be found in an imagined paradise. The connection between Man's happiness and his desire for structure and order is made by Stony Stevenson's reply to Constant's question about the nature

of Paradise in the post-hypnotic illusion he experiences at the moment of death: "Everybody's happy there forever," said Stony, "or as long as the bloody Universe holds together." (p. 319)

The final message of Malachi Constant to "be useful, love one another, and dream" might be condensed in the phrase, "be human" which seems very much like the single dot message of Salo. The result of Malachi's quest is the same as for all men, for each of us faces death alone but clutching our individually meaningful illusion to give us strength. As David Ketterer has expressed it, "What better form of consolation than the idea of a divine manipulator working in one's own interests?"²⁹ The truth of the matter cannot be avoided, however, and it must be remembered that Constant's dream was a post-hypnotic suggestion provided by a Tralfamadorian (all of us) which reminds us of Man's ultimately lonely responsibility for human life in the Universe. Man's acceptance of that responsibility calls for a sense of affirmation, for as Peter J. Reed has said, The Sirens of Titan

asserts that while an indifferent universe may confirm no purpose in our existence, we can give meaning to life by the way we lead it. This entails giving up the search for rationale in the incomprehensible workings of the Universe, the hunt for some answer from above, and turning to ourselves to provide meaning.³⁰

Thus, the "moral" of the book might very well be for mankind to be worthy of the name "Titan" by becoming his own deity. This is the implication of the words which begin The Winston

Niles Rumfoord Authorized Revised Bible and which are quoted in the chapter ironically entitled "A PUZZLE SOLVED": "In the beginning, God became the Heaven and the Earth. . . And God said, 'Let Me be light,' and He was light." (p. 196 *Italics added*) It is more than coincidence that the original version of this sentence is the one which Malachi's father, Noel Constant, used as the basis of his system of speculation which caused his fortune to grow from eight thousand, two hundred and twelve dollars into a corporation known as Magnum Opus worth three billion dollars. The message seems to be clear that mankind's acceptance of cosmic responsibility also entails his assumption of control of whatever aspects of the Universe are comprehensible. Hence, his concept of time in the cosmos frees him from fate because it permits him to structure given moments of his existence. His free will is better seen after we have stripped away the science-fiction trappings of space ships, time travel, and robots from the book and realize that in depicting Man's role and function in the Universe, it is still true that only people make choices; only people make progress, for the act of creation is that "Universal Will to Become" which is essentially human.

Thematically, The Sirens of Titan is far more complex than Player Piano. In the second novel, Vonnegut also makes significant technical advances. The use of acronyms such as UWTB for the Universal Will to Become seems fairly typical of Vonnegut's literary technique in The Sirens of Titan,

for it represents that tendency to encapsulate ideas which is so much a part of his style. David Goldsmith has noted that this economy of style actually began with The Sirens of Titan, which he regards as a significant advancement beyond Vonnegut's first novel. Goldsmith argues that the seven year interval of writing stories and magazine articles between novels taught Vonnegut to condense plot, exposition, and characterization so that even though "he sacrifices a certain amount of depth, he achieves succinctness and concentrated power."³¹ However, a resolution of Goldsmith's ambivalence might be found if he recognized the relationship between Vonnegut's economical style and the romance form in The Sirens of Titan. As Northrop Frye has explained, "The characterization of romance follows its general dialectic structure, which means that subtlety and complexity are not much favored. Characters tend to be either for or against the quest."³² Vonnegut's sharp, precise and brief characterizations are the results of his conscious effort to render allegorical characters who are free of the demands of conventional reality. James M. Mellard has interpreted this effort as part of Vonnegut's literary revolution against the realistic novel which he believes began with the chaotic plot of Player Piano:

The object of Vonnegut's literary technique in the novel. . . is the overthrow of the accepted literary conventions of visual imagery, continuous plotting, connected characterization, uniform point of view--all the mechanical aspects of pictorialism associated with Henry James and the mimetic novel.³³

I would add to the comments of Goldsmith and Mellard that economy is only one of the three major elements of Vonnegut's technique in The Sirens of Titan which provide the basis for his strongly individualistic prose style; the other two are language and imagery.

Economy would seem to account for the improvement of plot development in The Sirens of Titan, for it moves quite rapidly in exposition made up of brief, concise, and frequent segments which tease and encourage the reader's curiosity. This departure from the long and occasionally tedious narrative passages found in Player Piano indicates a certain degree of maturity in Vonnegut's style. Perhaps the best example of Vonnegut's economy may be found in those instances where he blends the serious and the comic into a singularly powerful sociological statement. This occurs in the descriptions of two of the life-sized statues which Salo has created on Titan while watching the Earthlings behaving "at all times as though there were a big eye in the sky." In Salo's opinion, the most elaborate performances were given by Earthlings who were terribly alone. The two most striking statues are the ones which Beatrice and Chrono are observed touching shortly after their arrival on Titan:

Beatrice, looking like a gypsy queen, smoldered at the foot of a statue of a young physics student. At first glance, the laboratory-gowned scientist seemed to be a perfect servant of nothing but truth. At first glance, one was convinced that nothing but truth could please him as he beamed at his test tube. At first glance, one thought that he was as much

above the beastly concerns of mankind as the harmoniums in the caves of Mercury. There, at first glance, was a young man without vanity, without lust--and one accepted at its face value the title Salo had engraved on the statue, Discovery of Atomic Power.

And then one perceived that the young truth-seeker had a shocking erection. (p. 288-89)

The statue which Chrono is attempting to deface with his good-luck piece is described in such grim terms that one might understand why Vonnegut has been classified as a black humorist:

The statue on which Chrono was working was of a family group--a Neanderthal man, his mate and their baby. It was a deeply-moving piece. The squat, shaggy, hopeful creatures were so ugly they were beautiful.

Their importance and universality was not spoiled by the satiric title Salo had given the piece. He gave frightful titles to all his statues, as though to proclaim desperately that he did not take himself seriously as an artist, not for an instant. The title he gave to the Neanderthal family derived from the fact that the baby was being shown a human foot roasting on a crude spit.

The title was This Little Piggy. (p. 289)

A third statue is described which depicts St. Francis of Assisi trying to befriend "two hostile and terrifyingly huge" Titanic bluebirds, but it is untitled. This is the one which Constant leans against while still wearing his Space Wanderer's bright yellow suit with the orange question marks.

In these highly compressed statements, Vonnegut has managed to cover human history from the prehistoric to the nuclear age while making a wry comment on the religious, scientific, and cultural progress of mankind. Additionally, he packs into these brief paragraphs the paradoxes of man's

condition in each stage of his progress. In the statue of the young scientist, science and sex are contrasted as dichotomous halves of man's destructive and creative nature by the references to atomic power and a shocking erection, and Beatrice smoldering at the foot of the statue like a "gypsy queen" is seen in sharp contrast to the "laboratory-gowned scientist" to further suggest the conflict of fantasy and fact in man's truth-seeking quest. In the statue of the Neanderthal family, primitive culture and modern culture are contrasted as anthropological benchmarks in the civilization of man by the references to squat, shaggy creatures of the paleolithic period and the "little piggy" nursery rhyme of contemporary society. Chrono's ineffectual attempt to inscribe a dirty Earthling word on the base of this "deeply-moving piece" with his good luck piece seems to suggest that time (Chrono) has had little effect upon man's basically bestial nature which caused him to engage in cannibalism then and now. There appear to be further implications of the conflict of superstition and science in Chrono's good luck piece actually being a precision-machined part for Salo's space ship engine. The reference to the primitive family as creatures "so ugly they were beautiful" should not be overlooked as another allusion to man's dual nature. In the statue of St. Francis and the giant bluebirds of Titan, religion and mythology are contrasted as rivals contending for man's belief, and Constant (faith) is the allegorical symbol of that belief. Taken

all together, these three statues represent three different but consecutive periods in the history of mankind. The Neanderthal family represents the earliest cultural period of mankind in the Stone Age, St. Francis represents the thirteenth-century beginning of the religious and cultural renaissance, and the scientist represents the modern age of technology.

Economy is closely related to Vonnegut's use of language as the second major element of his technique. His approach to language is radically different from the older pictorial mode of the traditional novel in that he tends to reject the "literal" aspects of human communication in favor of its expressive aspects. In short, he is not only concerned with brevity and compression, he carefully selects words, phrases, and sentences for their connotative and sensory values as well. James M. Mellard has said that The Sirens of Titan represents Vonnegut's introduction of a new fictional mode based upon that principle of selection. Mellard theorizes that Vonnegut is primarily concerned with the nonliterary, the inarticulate, and subliterate elements of language to be found in trite clichés, puns, alliteration, and aphorisms of vernacular speech which he terms the "artifacts of human expression."³⁴ Comparing Vonnegut to an anthropologist intensely examining every fragment of some dead culture, Mellard accuses him of cherishing every banality uttered by one of his characters because he is fully aware of its potential depth of meaning. Mellard explains the expansiveness of

chapter ten when church bells are heard to speak the appropriate message of "NO HELL!" (p. 222) A much deeper meaning may be found in the pronouncement of the Martian snare drum of chapter four which Mellard has called one of the most moving passages of The Sirens of Titan:

In the chapter's nine pages, this entire chant is repeated four times. By the end of the chapter this nonsense makes a perfectly sensible statement about freedom and bondage more powerfully than any oration. For those three words, representing the sounds of a single martial drummer, tell us what one man can be made to do under conditions not too far removed from the ordinary military experience: like Unk he may even murder his own best friend. The linguistic and experiential poverty of this ritualized chant therefore makes the best argument one can for the ultimate value Vonnegut posits in any human expression.³⁶

Vonnegut's use of acoustic language in the "rented a tent" phrase is quite similar to Chaucer's deliberate employment of the rhythms of language. Evidence of Vonnegut's conscious imitation of Chaucer is shown by his quoting from the prologue of The Canterbury Tales in chapter ten where the Reverend C. Horner Redwine

. . . listened to the rain, and imagined that it spoke Chaucerian English. He spoke aloud the words he imagined the rain to be speaking, spoke harmoniously, at just the noise level of the rain.

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droughte of Marche hath perced to the rote
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendered is the flour--(p. 220)

This particular passage of The Sirens of Titan becomes audiovisual when Vonnegut adds to its aural strength the visual imagery of such clauses as "the blooms of the lilac bowers

Vonnegut's new use of language by reasoning that

. . . Vonnegut may bring to this new mode of fiction any of the effects (and values) of the old oral, aural, acoustic "literature"--the naive, popular mode of Homer, Beowulf, folk tale, ballad. Where the uniform, visual, linear mode of the novel either absorbs human utterance into a single uniform prose style or draws a clear class line between styles, and the mode Vonnegut popularizes in The Sirens of Titan absorbs polyphonic, acoustic, and open forms into a mosaic of styles, each of which controls its own autonomous existence.³⁵

The result of this approach is that language becomes a more effective means of conveying human experience, for even the most commonplace statement has meaning beyond the literal level. In this technological age of multi-media, Vonnegut seems to be aware that language should assume new dimensions in order to meet the demands of man in an electronic society.

Chapters four through seven of The Sirens of Titan seem to be especially rich in examples of Vonnegut's innovative use of language. In the following nonsense chant which begins chapter four, he captures the "sound" of language in the oral tradition:

Rented a tent, a tent, a tent;
Rented a tent, a tent, a tent.
Rented a tent!
Rented a tent!
Rented a, rented a tent.

--SNARE DRUM ON MARS

Not only does this nonsense chant present an excellent parody of the military mentality, but it further implies the power of inanimate objects to "speak" in terms of their influence upon human lives. This particular device is repeated in

outside Redwine's church hung fatly, heavy as Concord grapes."
(p. 220)

Vonnegut also uses language in a highly unusual manner by incorporating non-narrative materials in order to advance the plot and develop character and mood. Goldsmith has noted this innovation in Vonnegut's style and points to The Sirens of Titan as the first of his works to use this device which has become a virtual trademark of Vonnegut's technique in subsequent books.³⁷ These non-narrative materials take the form of letters, journals, medical reports, cookbooks, sermons, bibles, and children's books with titles ranging from The Winston Niles Rumfoord Authorized Revised Bible to The Beatrice Rumfoord Galactic Cookbook or Sarah Horne Canby's Unk and Boaz in the Caves of Mercury. Vonnegut quotes from these materials quite frequently in The Sirens of Titan, and the reader is often taken in by the apparent authenticity of these "sources" cited by Vonnegut. This device proved so effective that Vonnegut later developed it to a fine art in his other books. Goldsmith has remarked that

In God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, the fifth novel, this technique is expanded to include quotations from songs, speeches, family histories, tabloids, and even graffiti, all created by Vonnegut. It comprises so much of his later novels that the traditional concepts of summary and scene are almost buried under the collage, much to the benefit of the reader.³⁸

A good example of his use of the non-narrative material to develop character and mood is Beatrice Rumfoord's parody

of John Donne's sonnet which she writes while teaching Army recruits how to breathe in a vacuum on Mars:

Break every link with air and mist,
Seal every open vent;
Make throat as tight as miser's fist,
Keep life within you pent.
Breathe out, breathe in, no more, no more,
For breathing's for the meek;
And when in deathly space we soar,
Be careful not to speak.
If you with grief or joy are rapt,
Just signal with a tear;
To soul and heart within you trapped
Add speech and atmosphere.
Every man's an island as in
lifeless space we roam.
Yes, every man's an island:
island fortress, island home. (pp. 152-53)

This sonnet appropriately reflects the character of Beatrice who was earlier described as withdrawn, cold, austere, and virginal. When we compare the tone of this sonnet to the description of an oil painting of Beatrice as a little girl dressed all in white and fearful of "getting the least bit dirty," we realize that Vonnegut is conveying the sense of isolation and rejection through non-narrative materials, and the primary function of Beatrice's character is to symbolically represent one of mankind's alternative responses to life. In a choice between engagement and detachment, Beatrice obviously represents the decision to remain detached and aloof from life, and the language of her sonnet points strongly to this in its references to "break, seal, fist, pent, trapped, island, lifeless, and fortress."

The tone of loneliness which pervades her sonnet connects her character to the book's overall theme of cosmic

responsibility. Very early in The Sirens of Titan, she responds to Rumfoord's simile that "life for a punctual person is like a roller coaster" by telling him of her childhood rebellion when her father had tried to force her to ride one.

"I took one look at the roller coaster," said Beatrice, "and it looked silly and dirty and dangerous, and I simply refused to get on. My own father couldn't make me get on," said Beatrice, "even though he was Chairman of the Board of the New York Central Railroad."

"We turned around and came home," said Beatrice proudly. Her eyes glittered, and she nodded abruptly. "That's the way to treat roller coasters," she said. (p. 63)

Beatrice treats life by simply refusing to "get on" and thereby absolves herself of any responsibility for the "silly and dirty and dangerous" roller coaster of life in the cosmos.

The irony of her decision is, of course, that through a series of wrong choices, she will become deeply involved with life on a gut level by experiencing everything from rape and involuntary motherhood to brainwashing and interplanetary warfare. These experiences contradict the philosophy of non-involvement expressed in her sonnet by disproving her assertion that

"Every man's an island as in / lifeless space we roam."

By her experiences, she shows that mankind must assume ultimate responsibility for the cosmos because man alone is both "island fortress, island home" with the diametric connotations of defense versus welcome in his dichotomous existence.

(Italics added.)

Her sonnet also illustrates the "soul and heart" conflict which her character helps to establish in the plot. On a

different level, Beatrice represents the "soul" or spiritual nature of mankind in contrast to the "heart" or sensual nature represented by Malachi Constant. Whereas Beatrice urges men to "Break every link with air and mist" in the physical world, Malachi is the Hollywood playboy who freely indulges in every physical pleasure available to him as the richest man in America. Just as Beatrice is forced to suffer physical indignities, Malachi is forced to experience spiritual enlightenment in his apotheosis as the Space Wanderer. Both characters move through their experiences to assume positions opposite to their original beliefs, and it seems significant that the major factor in uniting them at the end of the book is their son, Chrono (Time). James M. Mellard has observed the archetypal element in Vonnegut's development of these two characters in what he terms "the idiom of romantic adventure", and he says of their experiences that

What validates the language of Beatrice and Malachi is not the verbal artifact, but the experiences each accumulates like Castle's grains of sand. After their terrific, clearly archetypal suffering. . . they finally become lovers, though in a way presumably beyond the "bother" of the sensual; they become loving parents to a radically wayward son who at the end blesses them for their gift of life (p. 312); and ultimately they arrive at convictions diametrically opposed to their youthful attitudes.³⁹

It is only after these universally human experiences of "grief or joy" that Beatrice and Malachi are able to "signal with a tear" their realization that two of life's possible purposes are to "be used" or to "love whoever is around to be loved."

In short, they have made the journey from inwardness to outwardness and back to inwardness in order to understand life and to find meaning in it.

Their journey assumes the shape of a spiral which is the controlling image of The Sirens of Titan, and imagery is the third major element of Vonnegut's technique. Aside from the more obvious examples of Vonnegut's use of imagery in the tropical forms of metaphor and simile so inordinately praised and damned by Ketterer and Goldsmith respectively, Vonnegut employs imagery most significantly in the visual and symbolic forms.⁴⁰ Nowhere is this concept better illustrated than in Vonnegut's use of the spiral as the dominant thematic imagery in The Sirens of Titan. It is introduced early in the book in the brief explanation of chrono-synclastic infundibula which the narrator quotes from Dr. Cyril Hall's fourteenth edition of A Child's Cyclopedia of Wonders and Things to Do:

Chrono (kroh-no) means time. Synclastic (sin-class-tick) means curved toward the same side in all directions, like the skin of an orange. Infundibulum (in-fun-dib-u-lum) is what the ancient Romans like Julius Caesar and Nero called a funnel. If you don't know what a funnel is, get Mommy to show you one. (p. 15)

In a less literal explanation, the chrono-synclastic infundibula are called "places where all the different kinds of truths fit together as nicely as the parts in your Daddy's solar watch." (p. 14) Added to these explanations is the narrator's statement that a chrono-synclastic infundibulum is "a distorted spiral with its origin in the Sun and its

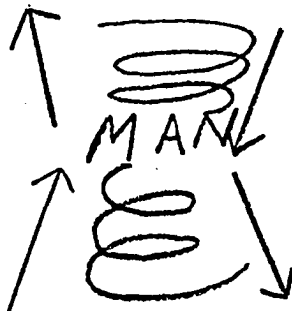
terminal in Betelgeuse." Taken all together, these explanations provide the literal, figurative, and universal meanings of the spiral imagery which reflects both plot development and theme in The Sirens of Titan. The first explanation translates the scientific jargon of "chrono-synclastic infundibula" into a "time-curved funnel", and it is into this funnel that all the "different kinds of truth" of the second explanation are dumped in order to travel up and down the path of the distorted spiral in the third explanation. The references to Mommy and Daddy in the first two explanations call to mind the involvement of both man and woman in this spiral journey, and the astronomical allusions to the Sun and Betelgeuse of the third explanation indicate the cosmic dimension of that journey. In brief, the fact that Winston Niles Rumfoord and his dog, Kazak, exist as pulsing wave phenomena in the spiral path of the chrono-synclastic infundibulum, is an indication that both man and beast are caught up in the motion of time and space in the universe. Even though this idea of universal movement has already been presented in Ransom K. Fern's epigraph cited earlier in this chapter, it might be helpful to understand how the spiral image of that movement dictates the plot development in the book.

While most of his critics have noticed the relevance of the spiral image to the symbolic level of meaning in the book, none of them seem to be aware of its full significance in terms of Vonnegut's technique. Only David Ketterer has

indicated a partial awareness of Vonnegut's larger purpose when he states:

It would seem that all the spirals in the book, and there are enough of them to be considered aspects of a "controlling" image--a fortuitous phrase--are symbolic of universal movement and--since the DNA spiral is surely relevant--of life itself.⁴¹

Ketterer supports this assertion with an impressive list of spirals to be found in The Sirens of Titan. In addition to the chrono-synclastic infundibula of Rumfoord, he mentions the fountain on the Rumfoord estate, Unk's rifle bore, and Beatrice's sweeping staircase as the most striking spiral images. Despite his critical insight that the "spiral movement implies an extremely indirect progress"⁴² and his perceptive comment that "Vonnegut's conception of wheels within wheels, plots within plots, is the structure of the universe itself."⁴³ Ketterer seems unaware of the specific design marked by Vonnegut's spirals. In brief, Vonnegut uses the spiral image as an ascending gyre, which has been noticed by several critics, but he also uses it as a descending gyre. In addition, each gyre moves forward and backward or inward and outward with man at the center of what might be described as an X-shaped figure. A visual representation of this figure is:



This figure plots the course of Malachi Constant in the Everyman role as he follows the book's announced plot of an outward and inward search for the meaning of life. Malachi begins his search on Earth, the third planet from the sun, and travels to Mars, the fourth from the sun, where he becomes "Unk." From Mars, he travels to the inner regions of Mercury, the planet nearest the sun, and significantly bypasses Earth (home or physical existence) and Venus (love or beauty) on the way. From Mercury, he returns to Earth where he becomes the Space Wanderer and departs for Titan, one of the nine moons of Saturn (sixth planet from the sun), where he becomes old Malachi Constant. He returns to Earth in the final turn of the gyre, and he dies there while believing in the same sustaining myth that began his search. His faith in the unknown or imagined "somebody up there" is stated in the first and last words of the book, and that affirmation of man's ultimate ignorance leads the reader full circle back to the question of meaning and responsibility in the universe with which the search began.

Even though there are several clues to indicate Vonnegut's intentional inversion of the spiral image, they seem to have gone unnoticed by other critics. Admittedly, some of these are not very obvious, but they are perceptible to the careful reader even when Vonnegut seems to be hiding them. Perhaps the most carefully concealed clue is to be found in the name of Rumfoord's dog, Kazak. While one critic has called

him the "irrelevant Hound of Space,"⁴⁴ it is my contention that Kazak is quite relevant as Vonnegut's intentional palindrome serving to deliver an anagrammatic message to the reader. The message is similar to the one encountered in the caves of Mercury when the harmoniums spelled out: "UNK, TURN SHIP UPSIDE DOWN." (p. 211) The fact that "Kazak" spelled backwards is "kazak" seems to suggest on one level the sameness of man's condition at the beginning and end of the book. On a deeper level of interpretation, the Kazak palindrome reflects the theme of cosmic responsibility by implying that the being responsible for man in the universe is the man in the universe responsible for being. The sense of cosmic loneliness derived from this inversion is increased by the separation of Kazak from Rumfoord near the end of the narrative which seems to be a further implication that man as the most rational creature in the universe must meet his responsibility alone. The narrator's comment on that separation is that "A Universe schemed in mercy would have kept man and dog together," (p. 295) and the point is clearly made that ours is not such a universe.

Three other examples of inverted spiral imagery are the Rumfoord fountain, Unk's rifle barrel, and Beatrice's sweeping staircase mentioned earlier. Rumfoord's fountain is described as a "cone" of many stone bowls of decreasing diameters, and it is contrasted with the inverted cone image formed by the volunteer fire department's nozzle turned straight

up to provide a "shivering, unsure fountain" greeting Malachi on his return to Earth as the Space Wanderer. The fountain is located near the Rumfoord mansion which is, incidentally, another example of inversion since the narrator says of it "Turned upside down, it would have looked exactly the same."

(p. 18) Inversion is even more obvious in the example of Unk's rifle barrel which he is so fascinated by while cleaning it on Mars. Putting his oily thumbnail into the open breech,

Unk put his eye to the muzzle and was thrilled by perfect beauty. He could have stared happily at the immaculate spiral of the rifling for hours, dreaming of the happy land whose round gate he saw at the other end of the bore. The pink under his oily thumbnail at the far end of the barrel made that far end seem a rosy paradise indeed. Some day he was going to crawl down the barrel to that paradise. (pp. 108-9)

Aside from the rather obvious implication that death exists at both ends of the rifle barrel, there is a further suggestion of the inherently destructive nature of man which causes him to kill himself as well as others in the universe. Unk holds the breech in his own hands as he looks down at the sirens he imagines living in that rosy paradise to be gained through the barrel of his rifle. In addition to the reference to suicide, there seems to be the suggestion of man's attack upon the self which is greatly magnified in the suicidal Martian army of transported Earthlings attacking their fellow beings on Earth. The concept of self is very much a part of the example of Beatrice's staircase because Vonnegut chooses to play with movement and character development in order

to relate the spiral image to the plot in this instance.

When she meets Malachi Constant for the first time, Beatrice is described as wearing

. . . a long white dressing gown whose soft folds formed a counter-clockwise spiral in harmony with the white staircase. The train of the gown cascaded down the top riser, making Beatrice continuous with the architecture of the mansion. (p. 40)

A few moments later in their conversation, Malachi manages to startle Beatrice so much that

. . . she took a step back from the head of the staircase, separated herself from the rising spiral. The small step backward transformed her into what she was-- a frightened, lonely woman in a tremendous house. (p. 42)

In these two views of Beatrice, Vonnegut establishes her rather frigid and sterile character while simultaneously depicting her dichotomous roles of insider and outsider determined by her movement. In the first view, she is presented as one who belongs in the setting of wealth because she is "continuous" with the mansion, but in the second view, she is terribly out of place in such opulence because she is "separated" from the mansion by her movement away from the "rising" spiral. The result of her movement is that her fear and loneliness has been sharply communicated to Malachi Constant, for when he left the house

. . . he sensed that the spiral staircase now swept down rather than up. Constant became the bottommost point in a whirlpool of fate. As he walked out the door, he was delightfully aware of pulling the aplomb of the Rumfoord mansion right out with him. (p. 42)

In this view of Constant, we are made aware of the inversion

of the spiral image by his sense of reverse movement in the staircase, and the reference to his position at the bottom of a whirlpool of fate ties his character securely to the conflict of the book. Throughout this scene between Beatrice and Malachi, the staircase as a spiral image serves an important symbolic function. It not only shows the low-to-high class relationship between Malachi and Beatrice, but it represents their respective responses to life. Beatrice's step backward from the spiral staircase is her withdrawal from life and her denial of human relationships. Malachi's sense of the downward sweep of the staircase is his involuntary engagement with life and his acceptance of human relationships. The staircase further shifts the emphasis of plot from both Rumfoords to Malachi by focusing the reader's attention upon him as he pulls the "aplomb" out of the Rumfoord mansion.

Pulling the "aplomb" out of things seems to be a favorite pastime of Vonnegut himself, and he does this most effectively through humor. One of the best examples of his blending humor with economy, language and imagery is the passage in The Sirens of Titan which describes the Tralfamadorian's method of sending messages to Salo by causing human beings to build certain structures on Earth as if it were a stupendous billboard. Peter J. Reed has noted that each of the Tralfamadorian messages is appropriately ironic in terms of the building used to spell it out for Salo:⁴⁵

Stonehenge: "Replacement part being rushed with all possible speed."
 The Great Wall of China: "Be patient. We haven't forgotten about you."
 The Golden House of Nero: "We are doing the best we can."
 The Kremlin: "You will be on your way before you know it."
 The Palace of the League of Nations: "Pack up your things and be ready to leave on short notice."
 (pp. 271-72)

Some of mankind's greatest achievements are thus reduced to the level of children's ABC building blocks serving to construct trite messages.

Much like the Tralfamadorians, Vonnegut attempts to reduce the great metaphysical questions of ontology, cosmology and theology to the simple-minded level of Salo's message of "Greetings." That message in the form of a "single dot", leads us to suspect that Vonnegut's vision is symbolically focused upon man as that "tiny spot, speck or mark" as the only positive reference point in an otherwise empty universe.⁴⁶ However positive that simple dot might seem, it remains as ambiguous as the cosmos it punctuates. Further implications of that dot seem to lie in its similarity to a "point" or a "period" to which Vonnegut attaches his characteristic ambiguity. As a "point", the dot could serve the purposes of Malachi Constant in his role as the Faithful Messenger who "pined for just one thing--a single message that was sufficiently dignified and important to merit his carrying it humbly between two points." (p. 17 Italics added.) Here, the cyclical nature of Malachi's search is suggested by a single dot marking the

points of departure and arrival. If interpreted as a "period", however, the dot could represent either the conclusion of man's search for meaning or the finality of death. The dot's additional connotations of compression and singularity might also reflect man's feeling of entrapment and loneliness in the incomprehensible cosmos. Perhaps it is this latter implication that has prompted critic Thomas L. Wymer to remark:

It tempts one to give up the struggle. But the "answers" of despair or mere laughter or retreat into fantasy are not Vonnegut's; they are among the responses of our time which he critically examines and discards. Essential to being human is the capacity to face oneself, to make moral judgements in the knowledge that one is without certainty, to create value through the agony of personal commitment.⁴⁷

Wymer's reference to man's essential humanity is especially important in approaching Vonnegut's vision, for this seems to be his primary concern in The Sirens of Titan. Vonnegut brings his protagonist to the point of realizing his own humanity and the incumbent responsibility for creating meaning in a godless universe. That realization forces him to become acutely aware of his loneliness. In the experiences of Malachi Constant, Vonnegut is dealing with the ego in crisis with the cosmos as he depicts man in his multifariously paradoxical roles of agent/victim, messiah/scapegoat, and native/alien. In the final analysis, Vonnegut presents man in confrontation with his own humanity in a Newtonian universe, and it might be as appropriately ironic to say of man as the narrator says of Salo, the Tralfamadorian robot, that

he is "not mechanically inclined." (p. 270) Vonnegut has examined man's loneliness on the cosmic level in The Sirens of Titan and on the societal level in Player Piano. In Mother Night, he begins to deal with loneliness on the psychological level through the theme of guilt.

CHAPTER IV

MOTHER NIGHT

Player Piano and The Sirens of Titan allow the central characters to avoid full responsibility. The sense in which they are not pawns makes them human, but the sense, arguably much larger, in which they are allows the reader to maintain a distance from them suitable to a comic romance. In Mother Night, however, Vonnegut confronts directly the theme of individual responsibility. In order to show the new depth and complexity of Vonnegut's handling of this theme, a comparison with one of the classics of American literature is useful, for in Mother Night, Vonnegut successfully echoes some of the ideas, themes and attitudes pursued in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, especially the themes of guilt and loneliness. I do not intend to imply that Vonnegut is in any way specifically indebted to Hawthorne. Parallels and analogues rather than indebtedness are more important for revealing the depth of Vonnegut's artistic vision and to increase our appreciation of his literary genius.

Mother Night is far more complex in structure than

Player Piano or The Sirens of Titan. Vonnegut has used many flashbacks, and he has deliberately contorted the chronology, which may be reconstructed as follows.

In 1938, the twenty-six year old Howard W. Campbell, Jr. was a successful American-born German playwright living in Berlin. He was newly married to Helga Noth, daughter of the Chief of Police of Berlin, and he was happily unconcerned about events involving Hitler and the Nazi party until one spring day when he was recruited by an American intelligence agent to serve as a spy for the United States War Department. Major Frank Wirtanen, the agent who recruited Campbell and was known to him as his "Blue Fairy Godmother", assured Campbell that he would be volunteering "to be a dead man" and that in order to do his job right, he would have to commit high treason against his own government as well as the Nazis. He also told Campbell that he would never be forgiven for his treason; America would never call him out of hiding with a cheerful "Ollly-olly-ox-in-free." Campbell nevertheless accepted the challenge and was successful in working his way up in the German High Command as a writer and broadcaster of Nazi propaganda which he used as a cover to deliver military information to the Allied Forces.

His capture by Lt. Bernard B. O'Hare of the American Third Army on April 12, 1945, was photographed by Life, but his disappearance from Germany at the end of the war was secretly arranged. He reappeared in Greenwich Village in New York

City where he lived alone in a depressing attic apartment for sixteen years, his name on a list of war criminals sought by Israeli agents. In 1960, he was betrayed by a communist agent named George Kraft alias Iona Potapov who lived in the apartment below him. Kraft had been the only friend Campbell had known since they had first met in 1958, but he sent anonymous letters to Bernard B. O'Hare's American Legion Post and to the publisher of The White Christian Minuteman, a "scabrous, illiterate, anti-Semitic, anti-Negro, anti-Catholic hate sheet." These letters brought a visit on November 10, 1960, from the publisher, the Reverend Doctor Lionel Jason David Jones, D.D.S., D.D., and a woman who claimed to be Campbell's wife, Helga, whom he had believed to be dead since 1945. The woman was, in fact, Helga's younger sister, Resi, who had become a communist agent. She had assumed her sister's identity after the war, and she and Kraft/Potapov had been assigned to get Campbell to Mexico City and then to Moscow for purposes of anti-American propaganda and execution.

Campbell's "Blue Fairy Godmother" thwarted their plan by means of an FBI raid on the headquarters of the Neo-Nazi group, the Iron Guard of the White Sons of the Constitution. In the course of the raid, Resi Noth confessed her love for Campbell just before she committed suicide, and Kraft was arrested and sent to the Federal Prison at Leavenworth where he became a world famous artist. Campbell returned to his apartment after the raid and found Bernard B. O'Hare waiting

to kill him. After beating O'Hare in a fist fight, Campbell was so stunned by all that had happened that he decided on November 11, 1960, to turn himself in to Israeli agents to be tried for his war crimes by the Republic of Israel. From a jail cell in Jerusalem, he wrote this book, The Confessions of Howard W. Campbell, Jr., just before he committed suicide by hanging himself on or about March 15, 1961. This American edition of his confessions was purportedly edited by Vonnegut in 1966.

The complexity of plot in Mother Night is but one of the important similarities to The Scarlet Letter. The most important elements of similarity between the two are setting, plot, theme, characters, and technique. The settings of both works reflect the psychological, social, and historical conditions of human existence developed in the plot to embody the theme of schizophrenia, resulting from guilt, which leads to human loneliness. The characters of both works are closely related to theme because they are highly symbolic representations of man's dual nature. The similarity of technique seems most evident in the authors' experimentation with form, structure, symbols and language.

Both works make use of internal and external landscapes while contorting time to fit the needs of psychological plot elements. The action of Mother Night begins with a flashback as the central character is first seen in the act of confessing sins already committed just as the entire plot

of The Scarlet Letter hinges upon an act of adultery which had occurred at least one year prior to the action beginning the novel. Both novels deal primarily with internal action of the mind instead of external action of the physical world in the dynamic sense. In short, nothing much "happens" in the conventional sense of the word as both works are written to illuminate the abstract world of man. This is quite evident in the statements of each work's respective "editor" as he reveals the source of his book. Hawthorne writes of his abstract symbol in The Scarlet Letter that it transcended mere attraction.

My eyes fastened on the scarlet letter, and would not turn away. Certainly, there was some deep, hidden truth of interpretation, and it seemed forth from the mystic symbol, finding itself to my sensibilities, a new analysis of my mind.¹

Vonnegut tells his reader that his book examines the abstract world by explaining that the title was taken from a speech by Mephistopheles in Goethe's Faust which he quotes at length:

I am a part of the part that at first was all, part of the darkness that gave birth to light, that supercilious light which now disputes with Mother Night her ancient rank and space, and yet can not succeed; no matter how it struggles, it sticks to matter and can't get free. Light flows from substance, makes it beautiful; solids can check its path, so I hope it won't be long till light and the world's stuff are destroyed together.²

It is not difficult to recognize here in Vonnegut's choice of his title the reverberations of Hawthorne's conscious and deliberate use of symbol and allegory.

In concrete terms, both works are set against a historical background of persecution of certain minority groups. The social texture of their respective periods is represented by the prison in which the first four chapters of each novel take place. Hawthorne's prison is a landmark in the "new colony" of Massachusetts, and Vonnegut's prison is a "nice new jail" in the "infant Republic of Israel." In narrowing the time frame within their respective periods, Hawthorne and Vonnegut specify the time of actions occurring in each work. The action of The Scarlet Letter begins in June, 1642, in Massachusetts, and this is Puritan New England with all of its rigid and confining doctrine of a theocratic government which will eventually experience the inhumanity of the witch trials. Hawthorne makes excellent use of his setting by emphasizing it and making it an integral element of his story. He points up the anxieties and inhibitions fostered by the Puritan society and uses the events of seventeenth-century Boston, a period to which he was ancestrally related by his great-great grandfather, Judge John Hawthorne, who served as one of the judges during the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692. Action in Mother Night begins in March of 1961, sixteen years after the end of World War II, and it shifts from modern Israel and New York back to wartime Germany to examine the insanity of the world in both wartime and post-war periods. This was the world which witnessed the execution of six million Jews, then followed with great interest the Nuremberg war

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My eyes fastened themselves upon the old scarlet letter, and would not be turned aside. Certainly, there was some deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind.¹

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trials. Vonnegut utilizes this setting very effectively by exaggerating conditions of rabid patriotism in a world that was divided into the three ideological powers of Nazism, Communism, and Americanism. Such a world refuses to allow the individual to feel any sense of belonging when he rejects ideology for the sake of self. This idea is brought home quite forcibly by Vonnegut's use, as an epigraph for a book of confessions by a condemned man who has declared himself "a nationless person by inclination", of the famous lines from Sir Walter Scott's "My Native Land:"

Breathes there a man, with soul so dead,
 Who never to himself hath said,
 This is my own, my native land?
 Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,
 As home his footsteps he hath turned
 From wandering on a foreign strand?³

While Vonnegut's use of this particular passage might at first appear to be an attempt at either humor or melodrama, the last six lines of Scott's poem, together with the first six, indicate a deeper thematic connection:

Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
 The wretch, concentr'd all in self,
 Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
 And, doubly dying, shall go down
 To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
 Unwept, unhonored, and unsung.⁴

In these lines which summarize the life and fate of Howard W. Campbell, Jr., the references to "titles, self, doubly dying, and unsung" are too obviously appropriate to be coincidental. The reference to a person "concentred all in self" is at the very core of the problem of alienation perceived

by Hawthorne and Vonnegut. Neither Hester Prynne nor Howard W. Campbell, Jr., feel that they belong to the human "community" in their respective worlds because of their individual guilt.

This sense of "community" is an essential element in the plots of Hawthorne and Vonnegut for it represents the climate in which their characters exist, and it is from this opposition of self to community that the basic conflict of each novel originates. Just as the opening chapters of The Scarlet Letter are primarily concerned with presenting the Puritan community, the first few chapters of Mother Night are aimed at presenting a world community that has been created through an international war. The second chapter of The Scarlet Letter, "The Market Place", portrays the Boston citizens who are present at Hester's emergence from prison, and he says of the crowd's reaction that it

. . . befitted a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and the severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful. Meagre, indeed, and cold, was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for, from such bystanders at the scaffold. (p. 50)

This is the self-righteous and godly Puritan community in which "iniquity is searched out, and punished in the sight of rulers and people." (p. 62) The moral climate in Mother Night is an enlargement of the Puritan community to an international scale, but it is still that sense of human "community" that provides the basis of conflict. The "iniquity" of Howard

W. Campbell, Jr., is "searched out, and punished in the sight of rulers and people" by agents of the Haifa Institute for the Documentation of War Criminals. His description of the post-war Nazi-hunters and the world community is very close to Hawthorne's view of the Puritan community:

The Republic of Israel stepped up its demands for me, encouraged by rumors that I wasn't an American citizen, that I was, in fact, a citizen nowhere. And the Republic's demands were framed so as to be educational, too--teaching that a propagandist of my sort was as much a murderer as Heydrich, Eichmann, Himmler, or any of the gruesome rest.

That may be so. I had hoped, as a broadcaster, to be merely ludicrous, but this is a hard world to be ludicrous in, with so many human beings so reluctant to laugh, so incapable of thought, so eager to believe and snarl and hate. So many people wanted to believe!

Say what you will about the sweet miracle of unquestioning faith. I consider a capacity for it terrifying and absolutely vile. (pp. 119-20)

Notice that Hester and Howard are both regarded as "transgressors" against the moral laws of their respective communities and are therefore to be punished by a kind of secular excommunication before any other form of punishment is administered by representatives of the law in the civil sense.

This exclusion from one's community is the basis for an archetypal conflict in American literature. The conflict of the individual and his society is one which evolved from the experiences of communitarian living which took place in the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay settlements. In A. N. Kaul's essay, "Cultural and Literary Background," the individual's search for an ideal community to which he may belong

is regarded as the essential American quest.⁶

A common theme of the American imagination has been the problem of reconciling individual freedom with a mode of social life to which the individual can give his allegiance without danger of impairing his moral, spiritual or psychological integrity. It is a theme of the utmost importance in our own day, and this may well be among the reasons why the nineteenth--century novelists' exploration of the values involved in the problem seems so vitally significant to the readers of the twentieth-century.⁷

This conflict in The Scarlet Letter comes into clearer focus when it is viewed as a kind of tension between character and setting as represented by Hester Prynne and the unforgiving Puritan community. Donald M. Kartiganer and Malcolm A. Griffith have said of Hester's conflict that

Hawthorne is able to suggest both the greatness of her character as well as its victimization by the forces which conspire against it. By these forces Hawthorne means not only seventeenth-century Boston but the entire fabric of a world that by its very nature must gain the subservience of its souls or crush them. . . . The paradox, and peculiar tragedy of the tale, is that Hester's supreme identity can only manifest itself in those stultifying conditions.⁸

This conflict in Mother Night is not only matched but enlarged in scope by Vonnegut in that his protagonist has been excluded by all human communities (nations) of the twentieth-century.

The concept of individual integrity is central to Mother Night. Howard W. Campbell, Jr., makes a conscious and purely voluntary decision to serve simultaneously as allied agent and as Nazi propagandist, and that decision causes him to engage in a desperate search for some kind of integrity in this obviously contradictory circumstance. This is the

challenge engaged by Campbell's romantic imagination, and it is, at the same time, Vonnegut's explanation of the schizophrenic modern world. Yet, as Klinkowitz argues,

The key to Vonnegut's vision . . . is not merely this clinical diagnosis of the illness of an age. The traditional desire to maintain the integrity of self in the face of a too chaotic world has always been a schizophrenia of sorts. Faced with the pressures of Nazi Germany, Campbell takes a solace not unusual in Western culture: he retreats first to art, and then to love. Crucial to this solace is that man has a self to flee to, a self which cannot be reached and abused by others.⁹

In fact, Hester also turns first to art and then to love in her search for solace. Hawthorne writes in "Hester at Her Needle" that his protagonist "possessed an art that sufficed" in her needle-work and that her own scarlet letter was a fine specimen of her "delicate and imaginative skill." In chapter eleven of Mother Night, Vonnegut describes the sudden burst of enthusiasm that moved his protagonist to break a thirteen-year self-imposed hermitage when he carved "a handsome set of chessmen" from a broom handle with a war-surplus wood-carving set he had purchased for three dollars. But neither an entire alphabet of ornately embroidered letters nor a bundle of broom-handle chessmen are sufficient to provide that solace sought by both protagonists. They each turn to their respective loves only to encounter failure there as well. Hester's plan to sail to the Old Worlds with Dimmesdale is thwarted by Chillingworth's booking passage on the same ship, and Howard's plan to fly to Mexico City with Resi

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"I am sorry I have nothing to live for," said Resi. "All I have is love for one man, but that man does not love me. He is so used up that he can't love any more. There is nothing left of him but curiosity and a pair of eyes."

"I can't say anything funny," said Resi. "But I can show you something interesting."

Resi seemed to dab her lips with a finger. What she really did was put a little capsule of cyanide in her mouth.

"I will show you a woman who dies for love," she said.

Right then and there, Resi Noth pitched into my arms, stone dead. (p. 166)

While there are no exact parallels between the characters of The Scarlet Letter and Mother Night, there are some very close approximations, especially in the characters of Hester Prynne and Howard W. Campbell, Jr. The similarities in theme are far clearer than those in situation. From the standpoint of theme, Howard W. Campbell, Jr., is best compared with Arthur Dimmesdale, for three reasons. First, as Henry James says, The Scarlet Letter is predominately concerned with Dimmesdale's moral conflict rather than Hester Prynne's pregnancy. He is the only half-repentant sinner in the entire book, and it is his guilt, like Campbell's which moves the action along. Second, both Campbell and Dimmesdale are traitors as well as sinners. In the theocratic government of the Puritans, Dimmesdale's adultery in 1642 was no less an act of treason than was Campbell's service as a Nazi propagandist against America in 1942. Moreover, the original dedication to Campbell's book of confessions, ("To Mata Hari.' She whored in the interest of espionage, and so did I."), might

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then it is, at the very least, an example of Hawthorne's use of Dimmesdale as a symbol of the dual nature of man expressed in terms of the ambiguity of good and evil. By this simultaneously subjective and objective attack upon the sin of adultery, Dimmesdale is able to represent both saint and sinner, government and citizen, and guilt and innocence.

Edward H. Davidson has noted Dimmesdale's conscious division of his own character, and he adds to the list mentioned above the distinctions of body and soul, and flesh and spirit.

Davidson believes this division of the self to be a very real one in the egocentric conviction of the distraught minister:

Dimmesdale habitually refers to himself only in the third person when he is exploring the possibility of his own sin; he conveniently establishes an "it" and "I" congruence between his spiritual being, which remains somehow apart from this condemnation, and that other self which must accept the normal consequences of man's life.¹⁰

Before we too readily accept the convenient explanation of Hawthorne's "ambiguity of the Romance" which has been offered by so many of the critics, I would insist that Dimmesdale's "words of flame" prove him to be as schizophrenic as Howard W. Campbell, Jr. In a slightly more rational tone than that of Dimmesdale, Campbell says of his own guilt: "I've always known what I did. I've always been able to live with what I did. How? Through that simple and widespread boon to modern mankind--schizophrenia." (p. 133) The key word here in his statement is the word "modern" because it represents a totally new perception of guilt discovered in this century.

Later in the novel, Campbell tells his readers that he had taught himself "never to feel guilt": the boon of schizophrenia permits one to be guilty without feeling so. This is a major concept in both Mother Night and The Scarlet Letter. Campbell's definition of schizophrenia depends heavily upon its context. Federal agents have just raided the basement headquarters of The White Christian Minuteman which is published by the Reverend Doctor Lionel Jason David Jones. The anti-Catholic and anti-Negro Reverend Lionel Jones is aided by Father Patrick Keeley and Robert Sterling Wilson (Black Fuehrer of Harlem) who wants to kill all whites. An FBI agent has just remarked that it seems incredible for Jones to have Keeley and Wilson as his two closest followers. Campbell says:

Jones wasn't completely crazy. The dismaying thing about the classic totalitarian mind is that any given gear, though mutilated, will have at its circumference unbroken sequences of teeth that are immaculately maintained, that are exquisitely machined.

Hence the cuckoo clock in Hell--keeping perfect time for eight minutes and thirty-three seconds, jumping ahead fourteen minutes, keeping perfect time for two hours and one second, then jumping ahead a year.

The missing teeth, of course, are simple, obvious truths available and comprehensible even to ten-year-olds, in most cases.

The willful filing off of gear teeth, the willful doing without certain obvious pieces of information--

That was how a household as contradictory as one composed of Jones, Father Keeley, Vice-Bundesfuehrer Krapptauer, and the Black Fuehrer could exist in relative harmony-- . . .

That is the closest I can come to explaining the legions, the nations of lunatics I've seen in my time. And 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. (pp. 162-63)

A genuine note of horror is sounded by this modern explanation of unfelt guilt when we recall Adolf Eichmann's response to Campbell's question of whether or not he felt that he was guilty of murdering six million Jews. "'Absolutely not,' said the architect of Auschwitz, the introducer of conveyor belts into crematoria, the greatest customer in the world for the gas called Cyklon-B." (p. 123) Pressed for a further explanation, Eichmann agrees with Campbell's facetiously stated assumption that he, Eichmann, was "simply a soldier. . . taking orders from higher-ups, like soldiers around the world." (p. 123)

This same kind of moral buck-passing allows Dimmesdale, "a false and sin-stained creature of the dust," to view his own death as a triumphant victory of God's own design when he shouts his final words:

God knows; and He is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, most of all, in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my own breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man, to keep the torture always at red-heat! By bringing me hither, to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Has either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost for ever! Praised be His name! His will be done! Farewell! (pp. 256-57)

Both Reverend Dimmesdale and agent Campbell admit their respective guilt, but it is, to them, a faultless guilt just as Eichmann's guilt was faultless (and therefore not felt) because

all three men in their schizophrenic vision felt that they were merely "taking orders from Higher-ups."

Hawthorne and Vonnegut share a vision of the world which underscores the essential paradox of man's existence. In the characters of Dimmesdale and Campbell there is a fine line to be drawn between good and evil, sanity and madness, reality and imagination, and innocence and guilt. The seventeenth-century Puritan world with its very real belief in the daily war between God and Satan is no more ludicrous than the twentieth-century world engaged in a global war between the representative forces of good (Allies) and evil (Axis). In the midst of both worlds is the individual battling for survival and searching for a sanctuary for the integrity of self. An essential element of that survival is the individual's escape into the romantic concept of the inviolate self. Jerome Klinkowitz explains that even Vonnegut realizes that belief in the possibility of escaping the chaos of the modern world is a necessary delusion somewhat akin to Ibsen's theory of the "vital lie." Of the traditional escapes into the inviolate self, Klinkowitz writes:

Art and love are two traditional ways of coping with the chaos of the outside world. Come what may, the self should be inviolate, and it is here that Campbell places his hope.

Vonnegut's point, however, is that in this modern world the self can indeed be violated, and is so at every turn. . . . Where lies the cause for the loss of self? Vonnegut answers that the very cause may be found in the traditional notion of the inviolate self. Because men have abandoned all else and have selfishly fled to selves as the romantic

center of the universe, when the self collapses, everything, quite literally, is lost. This is what Vonnegut's character (Campbell) finally realizes.¹¹

Klinkowitz concludes that Mother Night is Vonnegut's attempt to present "the destructive pretenses that make modern life a nightmare." This conclusion is equally applicable to the "nightmare" of Hawthorne's Puritan New England, for The Scarlet Letter is filled with examples of the "destructive pretenses" which dehumanize his characters. In his Journals, Hawthorne discussed these pretenses when he wrote that "Insincerity in a man's heart must make all that concerns him, unreal; so that his whole life must seem like a merely dramatic presentation."¹² Pearl's rejection of Dimmesdale in the forest is "Thou wast not bold!--thou was not true!" And Chillingworth's greatest crime is not his lust for revenge but his concealed persecution of Dimmesdale. Even the publicly recognized Hester Prynne is not totally honest when she permits Chillingworth to torture Dimmesdale by keeping silent about his true identity. Hawthorne reminds us that if Hester had been honest after her initial guilt, her scarlet letter "would fall away of its own nature." In contrast, Vonnegut informs us that "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be." (p. v.) This points to the powerful realization that one never escapes from guilt by turning inward to the self or by constructing a private reality. When Hester and Arthur plan to sail to England and when Howard and Resi plan their flight to Mexico City, all four must accept the

fact that there is never any escape from the mind. In short, despite what the humanists would have us believe, there is no safe refuge.

The contrast between inner truth and outer truth-- and Kurt Vonnegut's paradox that outer reality is inner truth-- pervades both novels. The conflicts in The Scarlet Letter are too well known to warrant discussion. They are no less central to Mother Night. Everyone from the hero to the casually and once-mentioned Israeli prison guards who chat with him has a dual nature. This duality is most important, however, in the central hero, Howard W. Campbell, Jr., who served seven years as a double agent for the CIA in Nazi Germany during World War II. Here again, Howard may be viewed as a counterpart to Arthur as a victim caught between forces over which he has no control. Vonnegut effectively inverts the pattern of the saint with hidden sin which is used by Hawthorne. In a chapter which "he later discarded" Vonnegut tells us that Campbell wrote the following dedication of his book of confessions:

I would prefer to dedicate it to one familiar person, male or female, widely known to have done evil while saying to himself, "A very good me, the real me, a me made in heaven, is hidden deep inside."

I can think of many examples, could rattle them off after the fashion of a Gilbert and Sullivan patter song. But there is no single name to which I might aptly dedicate this book--unless it would be by my own.

Let me honor myself in that fashion, then:

This book is rededicated to Howard W. Campbell, Jr., a man who served evil too openly and good too secretly, the crime of his times. (p. xii)

Howard, like Arthur, is in love with a fallen woman who holds for him the same ambiguous promise of redemption or damnation that Hester offered. Frank Wirtanen, the American intelligence agent, said that he had learned about Campbell before he decided to recruit him for the CIA "That you admire pure hearts and heroes. . . . That you love good and hate evil. . . . and that you believe in romance." (p. 41) These statements describe both Howard and Arthur before either of them had fallen from a state of naive innocence in their respective worlds. They also provide a basis for understanding how each met his downfall inasmuch as both Hawthorne and Vonnegut seem to conclude that innocence must be lost in order to gain knowledge of the world's reality rather than its romance.

As I have indicated above, the character of Helga/Resi Noth closely parallels Hawthorne's character of Hester Prynne/Chillingworth. In an apparent duality, Vonnegut allows Campbell's first wife, Helga Noth, to be replaced by her younger sister, Resi Noth, through an intricate intrigue of deception. When Campbell speaks of a book he had written about his love for Helga, we are somehow reminded of the discovery of sex in Eden:

It was called Memoirs of a Monogamous Casanova. In it I told of my conquests of all the hundreds of women my wife, my Helga, had been. It was clinical, obsessed--some say, insane. It was a diary, recording day by day for the first two years of the war, our erotic life--to the exclusion of all else. There is not one word in it to indicate even the century or the continent of its origin.

There is a man of many moods, a woman of many moods. In some of the early entries, settings are

referred to sketchily. But from there on, there are no settings at all. (p. 99)

Notice here the importance of a monogamous Casanova and the onionskin layers of roles originating from the Adam and Eve relationship. The allusion to Eden is further evident in Campbell's description of a play he had intended to write. It was to be entitled, "Das Reich der Zwei"--"Nation of Two." Campbell explains that "It was going to be about the love my wife and I had for each other. It was going to show how a pair of lovers in a world gone mad could survive by being loyal only to a nation composed of themselves--a nation of two." (p. 37) This description is quite similar to Hawthorne's description of the forest scene in The Scarlet Letter in which Hester and Arthur make plans to reject the Boston community and sail for England in order to establish a new life there.

George Kraft, alias Iona Potapov, is analogous to the character of Roger Chillingworth in that he is Campbell's "true friend" in all sincerity while he is also a communist agent who has been teamed with Resi Noth on a mission to get Howard on a flight to the city of Moscow where exploitation and death await him. This sounds very much like Hester and Roger maintaining the secret of Roger's true identity. Howard says of George's mission, very philosophically, that "It was typical of his schizophrenia as a spy that he should also be a true friend of mine, and that he should eventually think of a way to use me cruelly in advancing the Russian cause." (p. 32)

Moving from the particular to the general, it is notable that Vonnegut, in a very Hawthornian manner, allows his characters to assume a further allegorical dimension. In chapter thirty of Mother Night, he provides a painfully poignant moment of irony when Resi and Howard are fashioning their dream of escape to a new life and identity in Mexico:

Kraft came in at this point.

Resi asked him to suggest a pseudonym for me.

"What about Don Quixote?" he said. "That," he said to Resi, "would make you Dulcinea del Toboso, and I would sign my paintings Sancho Panza." (p. 127)

This reference to the displaced and medieval knight-errant on a romantic quest in the modern world is obviously appropriate to Campbell.

Vonnegut's characters also represent the major ideologies of the twentieth century. Here, Campbell represents Americanism while Resi Noth is Nazism, and Kraft is the symbol of Communism. In a brief but pointed lesson on patriotism, Campbell uses an excellently diagrammed over-simplification as he stands at a window and listens to Helga/Resi "weaving a biography on the crazy loom of modern history" in telling him of what had happened to her after her capture at the end of the war.

Drawn crudely in the dust of three window-panes were a swastika, a hammer and sickle, and the Stars and Stripes. I had drawn the three symbols weeks before, at the conclusion of an argument about patriotism with Kraft. I had given a hearty cheer for each symbol, demonstrating to Kraft the meaning of patriotism to, respectively, a Nazi, a Communist, and an American.

"Hooray, hooray, hooray," I'd said. (p. 69)

It is an exceptionally subtle touch by Vonnegut that Howard and Resi are reconciled and reunited on November 11th, designated as the original Armistice Day of truce for World War I and as the modern Veterans Day honoring all veterans of the American Armed Forces. Campbell had earlier claimed to be indifferent to patriotism, yet the news that Armistice Day has been changed to Veterans Day greatly upsets him as he rages about it:

"Oh, it's just too damn cheap, so damn typical," I said. "This used to be a day in honor of the dead of World War One, but the living couldn't keep their grubby hands off of it, wanted the glory of the dead for themselves. So typical, so typical. Any time anything of real dignity appears in this country, it's torn to shreds and thrown to the mob." (pp. 102-03)

His raving is to be taken seriously in that it reflects mankind's resistance to change and a desire for order and structure in the modern world.

In terms of literary structure, both Hawthorne and Vonnegut use the short chapter form, and each employs a three-part dramatic movement in developing their respective stories. Roy R. Male points out that The Scarlet Letter is divided into nearly equal thirds.¹³

Vonnegut uses a similar dramatic movement which parallels the scaffold scenes when he introduces Campbell's "Blue Fairy Godmother" (Major Frank Wirtanen) at three climactic points in the plot of Mother Night. Campbell explains that Major Wirtanen has been given the title of "Blue Fairy Godmother"

because of his relative invisibility to everyone but Campbell and his unavailability as the only witness who could save him in his war crimes trial in the Republic of Israel. The three-stage movement is especially obvious when Campbell recalls their three meetings at the climax of the story. To re-emphasize this three-stage dramatic element, Vonnegut later has Campbell and Wirtanen discuss death as one of these stages in proper development of a tragedy.

"We thought you'd kill yourself before the sun came up again."

"I should have," I said.

"I'm damn glad you didn't," he said.

"I'm damn sorry I didn't," I said. "You would think that a man who's spent as much time in the theatre as I have would know when the proper time came for the hero to die--if he was to be a hero." I snapped my fingers softly. "There goes the whole play about Helga and me, 'Nation of Two,'" I said, "because I missed my cue for the great suicide scene."

"I don't admire suicide," said Wirtanen.

"I admire form," I said. "I admire things with a beginning, a middle, an end--and, whenever possible, a moral, too." (p. 136)

Another element of structure used by both Hawthorne and Vonnegut is the setting or rather the "staging" of a particular scene for symbolic significance. The references to children and Eden found in the writings of both are good examples of this. In the chapter on Pearl in The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne remarks upon her natural innocence:

By its perfect shape, its vigor, and its natural dexterity in the use of all its untried limbs, the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of the angels, after the world's first parents were driven out. (p. 90)

Campbell, in Mother Night, sounds very much like a lonely Dimmesdale as he describes his idea of Eden while living in his self-imposed exile after World War II:

There was one pleasant thing about my ratty attic: the back window of it overlooked a little private park, a little Eden formed by joined back yards. That park, that Eden, was walled off from the streets by houses on all sides. It was big enough for children to play hide-and-seek in.

I often heard a cry from that little Eden, a child's cry that never failed to make me stop and listen. It was the sweet and mournful cry that meant a game of hide-and-seek was over, that those still hiding were to come out of hiding, that it was time to go home.

The cry was this: "Olly-olly-ox-in-free."

And I, hiding from many people who might want to hurt or kill me, often longed for someone to give that cry for me, to end my endless game of hide-and-seek with a sweet and mournful--

"Olly-olly-ox-in-free." (p. 30) 14

These brief scenes in The Scarlet Letter and Mother Night intensify the theme of guilt by the innocence of Pearl and the children playing in the park contrasted to the guilt of Dimmesdale and Campbell. The word of redemption which Dimmesdale seeks is echoed in the mournfully sweet cry of "Olly-olly-ox-in-free."

Although Vonnegut's theme is rendered with increasing complexity, there was no reason for him to abandon the romance form which he used in his first two books. One should not have to argue that Hawthorne was a romancer rather than a novelist,¹⁵ and one need not belabor the comparisons between the two books. However, Vonnegut introduced into Mother Night a new formal element which he may have learned from

Hawthorne: the persona of the editor. When Vonnegut labels his book as "the American edition of the confessions of Howard W. Campbell, Jr.," and precedes it with an "Editor's Note" signed by himself, we are immediately reminded of "The Custom House" introduction of The Scarlet Letter in which Hawthorne somewhat disingenuously asserts that his only reason for introducing his persona is to explain "how a large portion of the following pages came into my possession" and to offer "proofs of the authenticity of a narrative therein contained." Compare those statements to Vonnegut's insistence to his readers that:

In preparing this, the American edition of the confessions of Howard W. Campbell, Jr., I have had to deal with writings concerned with more than mere informing or deceiving, as the case may be. Campbell was a writer as well as a person accused of extremely serious crimes, a one-time playwright of moderate reputaion. To say that he 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. . . . My duties as an editor are in no sense polemic. They are simply to pass on, in the most satisfactory style, the confessions of Campbell. (pp. ix-x)

The irony implicit in both of these statements is that their originators are deliberately posturing in their attempts to provide an environment of authenticity for their fictions. We might do well to heed Vonnegut's warning here about the demands of art being sufficient to make a writer lie, for he is still speaking in the editor persona when he explains the ultimate function of some lies in art:

And now that I've said that about lying,
I will risk the opinion that lies told for the sake

of artistic effect--in the theatre, for instance, and in Campbell's confessions, perhaps--can be, in a higher sense, the most beguiling forms of truth. (p. ix)

Both editors are able to control the persona they project. The characters, as if to illustrate Campbell's warning about being careful what we pretend to be, are less fortunate. This concept is especially useful in explaining Campbell's frequent costume changes in Mother Night. Near the end of World War II, he makes his way out of Berlin by wearing a ridiculous-looking uniform which he had designed for a non-existent military unit which was originally to be an all-volunteer Nazi military force made up of captured American prisoners fighting on the Russian front. He wore "the blue and gold uniform of a Major in the Free American Corps" which he admits was a Nazi daydream. For fifteen years after the war, he wears nothing but olive-drab overcoat, raincoat, jacket, socks and underwear that were "all war surplus, like myself." When he is reunited with the woman he believes to be his wife, he discards his olive-drab clothing for a "fur-collared impresario's cloak and blue serge suit", and he carries a cane with which he performs "Charlie Chaplin twirls." The final costume that Campbell dons he describes as a harlequin-like uniform given to him in the basement headquarters of The White Christian Minuteman at the novel's climax. This uniform is comprised of the symbolic bits and pieces representing the three radical groups who are trying to use him to advance

their individual causes. He describes its absurdity as follows:

My clothes had been ruined in the beating I'd taken. So, from the resources of Jones' household, I was given other clothes. I was given a pair of shiny black trousers by Father Keeley [the defrocked Paulist], a silver-colored shirt by Dr. Jones [the Neo-Nazi], a shirt that had once been part of the uniform of a defunct American Fascist movement called, straightforwardly enough, "The Silver Shirts." And the Black Fuehrer [Robert Sterling Wilson] gave me a tiny orange sports coat that made me look like an organ-grinder's monkey. (p. 119)

The "monkey" reference is such an obvious reference to his being manipulated that nothing further need be said of it. The other three costumes, however, are neatly executed symbols of Campbell's state of mind at various points in his life. The conspicuously gaudy blue and gold "Free American Corps" uniform was simply another attempt by Campbell to be ludicrous in his role as a Nazi propagandist. The olive-drab costume of his sixteen-year "purgatory" was the necessary "habit" for his monk-like devotion to his memory of Helga when he professed to be a "death-worshipper." The impresario's costume, complete with cane, is the most pitifully ironic uniform because he is anything but the manager, director or organizer of his own life when his Helga (Resi) returns to him. In fact, he is under her complete control from the very first appearance, and his donning the costume may be seen as a useless attempt to reassociate his identity of self with the early days of his marriage to Helga when he was a successful playwright--an impresario. The use of the cane in "Charlie Chaplin twirls" suggests another possibility

of Vonnegut's delicately satiric touch when we realize that Campbell, while believing that he has just regained control of his life, is actually playing out the downtrodden "little tramp" role which has been assigned to him in the minor melodrama being produced and directed by Resi Noth and George Kraft. In short, Vonnegut has dressed his protagonist in costumes to convey the same dramatic effect which Hawthorne gave to the attire of Hester which, "modelled much after her own fancy, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity." (p. 53)

As in earlier Vonnegut (and, of course, Hawthorne) books, names as well as clothes may imply more than they state about their owners. The most obvious is the surname of George Kraft, the communist agent who is an excellent chess player and a gifted artist. The name "Kraft" here could represent "craft" as reference to his skill or artistic ability, or it could be interpreted as "crafty" in reference to his cunning and devious nature in bringing about the downfall of Campbell. Vonnegut's use of the name "Helga" is another example of symbolic implication as it means "Holy" in Teutonic, and that is in keeping with his stated symbolic reference to her as the "blindingly pure young maiden" in Campbell's play about the Holy Grail entitled "The Goblet." The most complex use of this kind of symbolism, however, may be found in the name of Vonnegut's hero, Howard W. Campbell,

Jr. The "Jr." added to his name would indicate the second generation to be involved in a world war. On the level of ironic interpretation, "Howard" is translated as "chief guardian" in the Teutonic language, and "Campbell" is French for the phrase "from a bright field" which would juxtapose Campbell's public role of Nazi spy with his secret role of American hero.

Further evidence of the importance of language in Vonnegut's experimentation is his use of such abbreviated and fatalistic cries as "So be it" and "Hi Ho" as commentaries upon the moment of death. As Tim Hildenbrand has pointed out, Mother Night was the first of Vonnegut's novels to introduce the literary device which he later used no less than one hundred times in Slaughterhouse Five.¹⁶ A less obvious use of language--here quite similar to Hawthorne's--is Vonnegut's play upon an extended metaphor. Just as Hawthorne refers to his symbolic letter "A" as the "tongue of flame" throughout The Scarlet Letter, Vonnegut refers to the "darkness" of Mother Night which provides a concealment of guilt while it also imposes the isolation of self separated from the human community. Vonnegut's hero underscores the night metaphor in the conclusion of his confession when he says, "I think that tonight is the night I will hang Howard W. Campbell, Jr., for crimes against himself. I know that tonight is the night." (p. 192) This summarizes the tragedy of Campbell and provides for the note of affirmation in his

death because, as Jerome Klinkowitz has said, "Howard W. Campbell, Jr., commits not so many 'crimes against humanity' as 'crimes against himself,' the latter which, once recognized, can be successfully and personally purged."¹⁷

Campbell recognizes and accepts his guilt in those crimes committed against the self, and his awareness indicates the increased depth of personal responsibility Vonnegut established in his third novel. At the conclusion of Mother Night, Campbell is no longer seeking an escape as he stands alone in his acceptance of guilt. His suicide is an affirmative act because it is his final rejection of art, love, and ideologies as the comforting lies by which modern man lives. His death is the ultimate acceptance of individual responsibility as he assumes full control of his own destiny.

The more serious sense of loneliness and alienation derived from Campbell's guilt caused Vonnegut to depart from the comic romance form of his first two novels. In Mother Night, his technique is much more complex as he mixes the elements of historical romance, black humor, and fantasy. This is his first novel to focus on the past and the first to feature the short chapter form. He places his literary blend into the subjective framework of a confessional journal in order to plumb the psychological depths of guilt experienced by his central character. These individual aspects of guilt and loneliness will be expanded greatly in his next novel, Cat's Cradle, as Vonnegut moves from the death of a responsible individual to the death of the responsible human race.

CHAPTER V

CAT'S CRADLE

Vonnegut concluded the first stage of his search for self-affirmation in Cat's Cradle (1963) when he shifted his attention from the psychological effects of loneliness upon a guilt-ridden individual to the ontological effects of loneliness upon an indifferent world. The suicide of Howard W. Campbell, Jr. in Mother Night is but a microcosmic foreshadowing of the genocide that occurs in Cat's Cradle. Campbell's personal schizophrenia in Mother Night is raised to the level of anthropological schizophrenia in Cat's Cradle as Vonnegut finally provides a resolution to his everyman protagonist's search for absolutes. Vonnegut's definitive answer to mankind's question of human purpose is illustrated by the Boknonist version of the Creation:

In the beginning, God created the earth, and he looked upon it in His cosmic loneliness.

And God said, "Let Us make living creatures out of mud, so the mud can see what We have done." And God created every living creature that now moveth, and one was man. Mud as man alone could speak. God leaned close as man sat up, looked around, and spoke. 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.¹

This a restatement of Vonnegut's premise of a man-centered universe which he first put forth in Rumfoord's religion of "The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent" in The Sirens of Titan, but Bokonon's religion differs significantly in that he warns his followers that "All the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies." (p. 14) This is also Vonnegut's warning to his readers, for his protagonist tells us that "Anyone unable to understand how a useful religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book either." (p. 14) While such contradictory statements might seem to indicate Vonnegut's return to a characteristic stance of neutrality and ambivalence, such is not the case in Cat's Cradle. In what critics have called his most pessimistic novel, Vonnegut says unequivocally that there are no more absolutes and that life has no meaning or purpose beyond that which man himself provides.

Acceptance of Vonnegut's premise of man's individual responsibility means that we must abandon the concepts of cosmic responsibility explored and rejected in The Sirens of Titan and of individual guilt found in Mother Night. Vonnegut urges us to accept the nothingness of human existence and and its resulting sense of alienation. His creation of the true-false religion of Bokononism leads us to the central

conflict of illusion and reality in Cat's Cradle as he uses the theme of alienation to examine loneliness in a different light. That central conflict branches off into several other forms such as fact versus fantasy, truth versus lies, and freeze versus flow, but it seems to be explored most often in terms of science versus religion in the novel. Both science and religion claim to have access to truth, knowledge, and absolute answers, but Vonnegut attempts to show that these so-called "ultimate" truths are nothing more than speculations about life. The cat's cradle as the central symbol of the novel is especially appropriate as a concrete example of the nothingness which underlies the "reality" of man's religion, science, life and hope because it is an absurd structure ready to disappear into nothingness at a moment's notice. It is an effective symbol to remind man of his own morality because it represents chaos molded into a form of order, but its significance depends entirely upon man's awareness.

The character representing that awareness in Cat's Cradle is John, the narrator, who establishes the tone of the novel with his opening statement:

Call me Jonah. My parents did, or nearly did. They called me John.

Jonah--John--if I had been a Sam, I would have been a Jonah still--not because I have been unlucky for others, but because somebody or something has compelled me to be certain places at certain times, without fail. Conveyances and motives, both conventional and bizarre, have been provided. And according to plan, at each appointed second, at each appointed place this Jonah was there. (p. 11)

This statement introduces the theme of alienation by virtue of its evocation of the images of Melville's Ishmael and the Biblical Jonah. Both are archetypal wanderers who become "strangers in a strange land" in the same sense of alien experience encountered by Heinlein's hero, Michael Valentine Smith. More importantly, this initial declaration of Jonah underscores the major illusion of fatefulness in the novel, and the references to three different given names without a surname suggests the loss of personal identity which accompanies the loss of self-determination and thereby intensifies the sense of alienation.

Vonnegut's allusion to Melville's Ishmael has been noted by most of the critics who have interpreted it with varying degrees of serious understanding ranging from Reed's view that it signals "the spoofing nature of the work"² to Scholes' belief that "Vonnegut is preparing us for a story on the Job theme, with the anti-Joblike conclusion."³ The only critic who seems to understand the deeper implication of Vonnegut's allusion, however, is Raymond M. Olderman who perceives that

Vonnegut is close to Melville in his vision of man's place in the cosmos--he indicates his awareness of this similarity in the opening line of Cat's Cradle, "Call me Jonah"--for he too asks us to lower our "conceit of attainable felicity," to concentrate on the quality of life and not our importance in the scheme of things, and most of all to share the thump on the back that life hands out.⁴

Olderman's point about the shared vision of Vonnegut and

Melville is important for an understanding of man's cosmic position, but I would argue that even Olderman fails to recognize the full significance of Vonnegut's invocation of Melville as his personal muse. It is my contention that Olderman and other critics have misunderstood or misinterpreted Vonnegut's purpose to the point that they have grossly underrated his general literary acumen and ignored his specific awareness of classic themes of American literature.

Literary allusions in Vonnegut's work are more often based upon premeditation than reliance upon inspiration. His "Call me Jonah," for example, does much more than indicate his "awareness" of similarity to Melville, and it certainly exceeds the function of being the seemingly "gratuitous though delightful parody of the opening of Moby Dick"⁵ suggested by Robert Scholes. I believe that opening line of Cat's Cradle to be Vonnegut's announcement of his deliberate intention to imitate Melville's themes, forms, and techniques of Moby Dick as he pursues the modern malaise of human loneliness. It is my opinion that the conscious parallels between Vonnegut and Melville have been so neglected by literary critics that extensive comparison is needed in order to clarify the message of Vonnegut in Cat's Cradle.

With his "Call me Jonah" allusion, Vonnegut, like Melville, is launching his reader on an Ahabian quest for the great white whale of cosmic truth in a vast universe consisting of questions and chaos instead of the answers

and order which mankind seeks. Vonnegut and Melville share the view of man as the uncomfortable center of that enigmatic universe. Mankind's quest for ontological meaning invariably fails, and the resulting sense of alienation is the central theme of Cat's Cradle and Moby Dick. This question of man's purpose in the Universe is a puzzle which Vonnegut and Melville have attempted to solve on a very personal level beyond mere literary curiosity. Each has approached the problem by an individual attempt to define the universe from his own perspective, and it is useful to our purpose to compare them. Vonnegut makes a very direct statement of what he perceives the universe to be:

Here is my understanding of the Universe and mankind's place in it at the present time.

The seeming curvature of the Universe is an illusion. The Universe is really as straight as a string, except for a loop at either end. The loops are microscopic.

One tip of the string is forever vanishing. Its neighboring loop is forever retreating from extinction. The other end is forever growing. Its neighboring loop is forever pursuing Genesis.

In the beginning and the end was Nothingness. Nothingness implied the possibility of Somethingness. It is impossible to make something from nothing. Therefore, Nothingness could only imply Somethingness. That implication is the Universe--as straight as a string, as I've already said, except for a loop at either end.

We are the wisps of that implication.

The Universe does not teem with life. It is inhabited at only one point by creatures who can examine it and comment on it. That point is the planet Earth, which is forever at the exact center of the implication, midway between tips.

All the twinkles and glints in the sky might as well be sparks from a cowboy's campfire, for all the wisdom they contain.⁶

Vonnegut's definition of the universe seems to echo the one Melville postulated in a letter to his friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne:

We incline to think that the Problem of the Universe is like the Freemason's mighty secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out, at last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron,--nothing more! We incline to think that God cannot explain His own secrets, and that He would like a little information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us. But it is this Being of the matter; there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As soon as you say Me, a God, a Nature, so soon you jump off from your stool and hang from the beam. Yes, that word is the hangman. Take God out of the dictionary, and you would have Him in the street.⁷

Both attempts to explain the nature of the Universe must ultimately return to man as the center of meaning. All attempts to justify man's existence must hinge upon man's power of reason, for he is the creature of creation who questions, and the answers are the only means of imposing order upon chaos. Mankind demands purpose in his existence whether it be the Freemason's terrible secret or a wisp of implication. The answer to this question of purpose is sought by individuals and groups, and some will find it in religion while others discover science, and a third and larger group will be forced to create a belief which has the structural organization of science and the ritual faith of religion. In short, this group will seek the flexible belief to be found in mythology. Captain Ahab creates his own antagonist in this manner by assigning to an indifferent creature of the sea a malignity of

character which exceeds the limits of reason and logic, and Bokanon, in Cat's Cradle, creates a pagan "religion" based upon his perception of man's need for a balanced tension between good and evil in the universe. The basic motivation of man's search for purpose usually arises from a sense of alienation in his own culture. That alienation is felt most intensely in periods of vanishing absolutes such as the ones in which Moby Dick and Cat's Cradle were written. The nineteenth century intellectual struggle for meaning, which caused Melville to reject any sense of polarity in the universe and to opt instead for his famed "ambiguities", has been thoroughly analyzed by Tyrus Hillway and others.⁸ There were no clear-cut divisions between good and evil or truth and falsehood in a world of endless contradictions. Ishmael's paradoxical statement in the "scientific" chapter on cetology is highly appropriate as he declares his purpose to be nothing less than "the classification of the constituents of a chaos."⁹

That chaos of the nineteenth century remains with us in the twentieth as we continue to struggle with the problems of classification. While it is certainly an understatement to say that this century has been a period of incredibly rapid scientific advance, it must be admitted that a strong sense of nineteenth century romanticism has persisted in the literature of this century. Max Schulz has interpreted that romanticism as part of the cause of the pluralistic view of the universe which Melville detected and which is still operative

in our modern literature. "The romantics," says Schulz, "are men reflecting in unconscious ways a pluralistic vision of the world, while still holding doggedly onto a unitive conception of man and the world." ¹⁰ This vision leads to a certain kind of optimism peculiar to our own era which is based upon man's need to believe in his own control of his destiny despite all logical and scientific evidence to the contrary. Vonnegut's optimism, like Melville's in his century, has been deeply shaken by the new truth which science revealed to him in the 1940's. Because his older brother, Bernard, is a scientist, Vonnegut was "very enthusiastic about science for a while" until he lost his naiveté in 1945:

I thought scientists were going to find out exactly how everything worked, and then make it work better. I fully expected that by the time I was twenty-one, some scientist, maybe my brother, would have taken a color photograph of God Almighty--and sold it to Popular Mechanics magazine.

Scientific truth was going to make us so happy and comfortable.

What actually happened when I was twenty-one was that we dropped scientific truth on Hiroshima. We killed everybody there. And I had just come home from being a prisoner of war in Dresden, which I'd seen burned to the ground. And the world was just then learning how ghastly the German extermination camps had been. So I had a heart-to-heart talk with myself.

"Hey, Corporal Vonnegut," I said to myself, "maybe you were wrong to be an optimist. Maybe pessimism is the thing."

I have been a consistent pessimist ever since with a few exceptions.¹¹

Perhaps because Vonnegut once thought his pessimism to be of the second generation kind; he told an interviewer that the "bone-deep sadness" he had learned from his parents was due

to their "thinking the wrong things" when they believed "that the planet they loved and thought they understood was destroyed in the First World War."¹²

When progress reaches the point of destroying absolutes and creating wastelands, it means that "things fall apart; the centre cannot hold," and the result is man's sense of alienation in a universe he no longer understands. This theme of alienation is central to the vision of Melville and Vonnegut. In Moby Dick, alienation is the basis for Ishmael's decision to go to sea, and in Cat's Cradle, it is the motivation of Jonah's collecting "material for a book to be called The Day the World Ended." Both characters suffer from a vague feeling of separation which Ishmael describes as a "damp, drizzly November" of his soul, and Jonah speaks wistfully of when he was a "younger man--two wives ago, 250,000 cigarettes ago, 3,000 quarts of booze ago. . . ." Many other examples of alienation may be found in both novels as Melville and Vonnegut utilize it to shape their literary characters. Captain Ahab's monomania, Pip's insanity, Father Mapple's religious frenzy, and Ishmael's melancholy are manifestations of separation from human society in Moby Dick, and in Cat's Cradle, it gives rise to Felix Hoenikker's indifference to humanity, Bokonon's theory of "Dynamic Tension," Dr. Vox Humana's improvised Christianity, and Jonah's conversion to Bokononism.

A closer examination of one of these examples should illustrate the importance of the alienation theme to both authors. In the case of Melville's Ahab, it seems obvious

that he has sacrificed most of his humanity for the sake of his quest for Moby Dick. Ahab's isolation causes Captain Peleg, the Pequod's co-owner, to recognize Ahab as "a grand, ungodly, god-like man."¹³ Ahab's separation becomes even more evident with his declaration of moral exemption from ordinary human destiny in the dramatic chapter, "The Quarter Deck." The conflict of man's will against the full but indefinable power of the universe is clearly stated when Ahab responds to Starbuck's charge of madness and blasphemy with the arrogant "Who's over me? Truth hath no confines."¹⁴ His rebellious attitude here is not directed toward God, as some critics have maintained, but toward all conventional attempts to explain an impersonal universe. The object of Ahab's search then is not an actual whale but a new symbol by which he might gain an understanding of the "Powers" of the enigmatic universe. Viewed from this standpoint, Moby Dick becomes a metaphorical truth presented in tangible form.

In Cat's Cradle, the tangible form of metaphorical truth is the "ice-nine" invention of Felix Hoenikker which brings about the end of the world by changing all water to ice. This doomsday device is the end result of Felix Hoenikker's search for order, truth, knowledge, etc., and it provides that frighteningly ultimate "structure" which Felix found so desirable that he kept a framed photograph of stacked cannonballs on his desk instead of his family. It is more than mere coincidence that Moby Dick and ice-nine are both white symbols,

for the absence of color suggests the infinite. Both symbols suggest limitation of the infinite as well because Ahab seeks to stop the motion of the universe by killing Moby Dick, and Felix brings it to a halt by freezing all the living "mud" inhabiting the universe. Both characters die soon after their attempts to arrest the motion of the universe as Melville and Vonnegut show the futility and destructiveness of human efforts to control the cosmos.

Felix's effort takes the form of a Faustian quest for knowledge which becomes his particular monomania isolating him from the rest of humanity like the lonely Ahab. His son, Newt, is the first to explain Felix's isolation when he tells Jonah:

He was one of the best-protected human beings who ever lived. People couldn't get at him because he just wasn't interested in people. I remember one time, about a year before he died, I tried to get him to tell me something about my mother. He couldn't remember anything about her. (pp. 18-19)

Newt tells a seemingly humorous anecdote about his father and mother which reveals more than is intended about their relationship. On the day they were leaving for Sweden to accept the Nobel Prize, Mrs. Hoenikker had cooked a big breakfast for the famous man, and "then, when she cleared off the table, she found a quarter and dime and three pennies by Father's coffee cup. He'd tipped her." (p. 18) The most positive appraisal of Felix's isolation is the one voiced by the wife he had treated so indifferently. She said she married

Felix because "his mind was tuned to the biggest music there was, the music of the stars." (p. 53) The most negative statement on Felix's separation from humanity is made rather ironically by Marvin Breed, the memorial salesman, who said of him:

"I suppose it's high treason and ungrateful and ignorant and backward and anti-intellectual to call a dead man as famous as Felix Hoenikker a son of a bitch. I know all about how harmless and gentle and dreamy he was supposed to be, how he'd never hurt a fly, how he didn't care about money and power and fancy clothes and automobiles and things, how he wasn't like the rest of us, how he was better than the rest of us, how he was so innocent he was practically a Jesus--except for the Son of God part. . . but how the hell innocent is a man who helps make a thing like an atomic bomb?" (pp. 52-53)

Marvin's brother, Dr. Asa Breed, was the supervisor of Felix Hoenikker, and he was of the opinion that anyone who actually supervised Felix was ready to "take charge of volcanoes, the tides, and the migrations of birds and lemmings." We are reminded here of Peleg's estimate of Ahab's being "above the common" and "used to deeper wonders than the waves." Ahab's own boast of striking the sun and Melville's personal insistence "upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis" seem to be echoed in the opinion of Dr. Breed as he says of Felix, "the man was a force of nature no mortal could possibly control." (p. 23)

The "force of nature" Dr. Breed refers to seems more specifically to be the force of innocent curiosity operating in human nature. In fact, the most striking parallel between

Captain Ahab and Felix Hoenikker seems to be the amorality of their characters. Ahab is described as a "grand, ungodly, god-like man" who is neither moral nor immoral in his intellectual quest for truth to satisfy his ego. Felix Hoenikker's amorality seems to be much more child-like than that of Ahab, and that facet of his personality provides an ultimately more terrifying element to his character when it is realized that this truly innocent man contributed the atomic bomb and ice-nine to his fellow man while pursuing truth.

The innocence of Felix Hoenikker as the Adam of the nuclear age is brought out in his son's anecdote about Felix's response to the first test of the A-bomb:

After the thing went off, after it was a sure thing that America could wipe out a city with just one bomb, a scientist turned to Father and said, "Science has now known sin." And do you know what Father said? He said, "What is sin?" (p. 21)

The question is an important one, for the concept of sin is valid only to the man who accepts and believes in a system of good and evil polarities, and Dr. Hoenikker was not such a man. As Dr. Asa Breed explained to his secretary, Miss Faust, "the main thing with Dr. Hoenikker was truth." Miss Faust is skeptical of the value of truth, however, when she tells Jonah that she has "trouble understanding how truth, all by itself, could be enough for a person." Later, when Jonah asks her to recall any conversations she had had with the great Dr. Hoenikker, her recollection illustrates not only the real value of truth to Felix but it reveals the primary

conflict of the novel as well. The conversation is reported in chapter twenty, ironically entitled "What God Is", where Miss Faust reports:

"There was one where he bet I couldn't tell him anything that was absolutely true. So I said to him 'God is love.'"

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'What is God? What is love?'"

"Um."

"But God really is love, you know," said Miss Faust, "no matter what Dr. Hoenikker said."
(p. 44)

It is important to remember exactly what Felix said because his reaction was not the negative one Miss Faust inferred it to be. His two questions do not deny the values of God or love; they simply ask for definitions of the two concepts. His questions reveal his scientific concern with the search for truth rather than attainment of it, for he recognizes the absence of absolutes in a man-centered universe while Miss Faust seizes upon religion as something to regard as "absolutely true." An aspect of this conversation which has gone unnoticed by other critics is Jonah's response to it. His noncommittal "Um" is the properly neutral one of modern man caught between the conflicting systems of science and religion.

Vonnegut manages to remind his reader of this old conflict between science and religion by means of an irony which moves from discrete subtlety in the early chapters of the novel to sledgehammer bluntness at its conclusion. An example of his early subtlety is found in the scene between Jonah and Dr. Asa Breed at the research laboratory of the General Forge

and Foundry Company in Ilium, New York. It is Christmas Eve in the research center where Felix Hoenikker had worked to create the atomic bomb, and a secretary is hanging a Christmas banner which reads "Peace on Earth! Good Will Toward Men!" while girls from the typing pool incorrectly sing the last line of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" as "The hopes and fears of all the years are here with us tonight." We later learn that Felix Hoenikker completed his experiments with ice-nine on Christmas Eve of 1957 and died the same day. There is also a gentle parody of Dickens' Christmas Carol in the research center scene in which Dr. Breed says of the dull normal people who work there, "They serve science, too, even though they may not understand a word of it. God bless them, every one!" (p. 34) One of those dull normal workers accuses Dr. Breed and all scientists of thinking too much. This accusation emphasizes the basic dilemma of the novel, for modern man is alienated by his uncontrollable urge to think. When all of his traditional "absolutes" vanish, the question then arises: what does man do in order to find a purpose and justification of existence in the universe? Max Schulz answers that mankind should do what the characters of Vonnegut do--they re-invent themselves and their universe, and by doing so, they decide upon what constitutes reality in that universe. Schulz explains that a Vonnegut character is content to do away with the why and to substitute for it a what. This new conception of reality gives rise to a new kind of novel, Schulz tells us.

Novels which are the product of such thought as often as not become outrageous re-creations of history--paradigms of reality, which cheerfully admit to being products of imaginative play without compromising their serious intentions of being the best enlargement and control of one's environment available.¹⁵

The most important implications of Schulz's statement are those found in his reference to "re-creations of history--paradigms of reality", for that seems to be precisely what Melville and Vonnegut are attempting to establish in their novels. Both authors have set about re-creating history with the result that each has constructed rather complex systems of reality.

Melville and Vonnegut appear to use the same basic methods of re-creation and construction in coping with the enigma of man's role in the universe. Both attack the problem by dividing the universe into three parts representative of the three basic levels of human existence. Each examines the body, soul, and mind as symbolically representing the physical, spiritual, and intellectual aspects of individual man while science, religion, and myth are viewed as the collective systems which serve mankind's gregarious need for structure.

Most scholars are aware that Melville originally intended to write a factual account of whaling before he changed his mind and produced Moby Dick, and in Cat's Cradle, Vonnegut's protagonist also intends writing a factual book, The Day the World Ended, "an account of what important Americans had done on the day when the first atomic bomb was dropped

on Hiroshima, Japan." (p. 11) He begins his research with the usual documentary and mundane questions about Dr. Felix Hoenikker, inventor of the bomb. His letter to Hoenikker's son, Newt, seems very real ("I will, of course, submit the final version to you for your approval prior to publication,").

(p. 15) While the character of Dr. Hoenikker is fictitious, the date of August 6, 1945, is undeniably factual, and Vonnegut uses the bombing of Hiroshima in much the same way that Melville used Owen Chase's factual Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Ship-wreck of the Whale-Ship Essex which described the actual sinking of a ship by a huge Sperm whale. In short, both authors use fact to form a fiction which is more real than life as we ordinarily experience it.

Vonnegut alludes to Melville in order to go beyond science to the realms of religion and myth in the description of Mount McCabe in "The Highest Mountain:"

It was in the sunrise that the cetacean majesty of the highest mountain on the island, of Mount McCabe, made itself known to me. It was a fearful hump, a blue whale, with one queer stone plug on its back for a peak. In scale with a whale, the plug might have been the stump of a snapped harpoon (p. 142)

This whale-shaped mountain seems to be an obvious reference to Moby Dick and his landlocked condition in the unromantic twentieth-century. Mount McCabe becomes a key symbol in the novel as Vonnegut uses it to bring together several significant ideas concerning the structures and institutions of mankind. As Ahab remarks in Moby Dick, "There's something ever egotistical

in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things." The whale imagery in Cat's Cradle is certainly grand and lofty, and Vonnegut associates it with mankind's egotistical bent in "The Highest Mountain" chapter when Jonah prophetically announces his intention to climb Mount McCabe. The reader is also told in this chapter that Jonah has agreed to become the next President of San Lorenzo. The strongest evidence of human egotism in this meaning-packed chapter is Frank's answer to Jonah's question about Bokononism:

"What is sacred to Bokononists?" I asked
after a while.
"Not even God, as near as I can tell."
"Nothing?"
"Just one thing."
I made some guesses. "The ocean? The sun?"
"Man," said Frank. "That's all. Just man."
(p. 143)

All of this is meant to prepare the reader for the dramatically poignant conclusion of the novel when Jonah's idealistic dream of climbing Mount McCabe to plant "some magnificent symbol there" is undercut by Bokonon's common sense acceptance of man's alienation in the face of destruction caused by scientific madness. Jonah, the egotistical everyman, believes he is destined to carry out some monumental task assigned to him by a higher power. He tells Newt Hoenikker that his destiny has been "working day and night for maybe half a million years" to get him to the peak of Mount McCabe, but he doesn't have an appropriate symbol for the occasion.

The answer is provided by Bokonon is the last sentence of The Books of Bokonon which is also the final sentence of

Cat's Cradle. An intense feeling of loneliness pervades the scene described by Bokonon's conclusive suggestion to the human race:

If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity; and I would climb to the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes statues of men; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who. (p. 191)

In this brief and typically economical passage, Vonnegut brings together mankind's three equally futile collective answers to his search for meaning as he presents mythology (Bokonon) defying religion (You Know Who) while facing the cold reality of science (ice-nine) in the only reasonable response to the ultimate end of the world. The image is unmistakably Melvillian as Bokonon's self-created statue calls to mind a vision of Ahab lashed to the back of an enraged Moby Dick thrashing wildly about in the uncontrollable violence of nature gone mad in chaos. The resolution of Jonah's search for a magnificent symbol appropriate for the occasion of cataclysm is found in that terribly isolated but defiant figure lying atop the whale-shaped Mount McCabe. The myth-creating characters of Captain Ahab and Felix Hoenikker are sculptors of "man and his history" statues as each provides the final symbol of human loneliness. Melville and Vonnegut seem to agree with Bokonon that the statue on the "highest mountain" should be Man, the "one thing" sacred in the universe.

The emphasis is upon the word, "one," here, for after man has failed in all attempts to escape his loneliness, he is forced to accept the reality of alienation. That acceptance leads man to the brink of disaster, and Moby Dick and ice-nine are invested symbols of the self-destruction which man brings upon himself in his loneliness. Just as Captain Ahab creates a myth of malevolence for Moby Dick which is beyond the natural scope of the mortal mammal, Felix Hoenikker creates a myth of multiplicity for ice-nine which is beyond the natural scope of mutable matter. In short, these two symbols are mythical in the truest sense of the word in that neither of them has ever existed outside the realm of imagination. But "myth", we must remember, is to be considered a form of ultimate truth to Melville and Vonnegut, and although an ice crystal carried to the ninth power has not been invented at this point in history, we should recall the other invention of Felix Hoenikker. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima eighteen years before Cat's Cradle was published did exist within the realm of imagination. The self-destructive evil of man which Melville tried to present in abstract terms of an ambiguous symbol has been recognized by Vonnegut in the twentieth-century destruction of two Japanese cities. Bokanon's earlier reference to ice-nine as a substance "that makes statues of Men" takes on a rather sardonic connotation when we realize that it could either refer to the several monuments to Felix Hoenikker mentioned in the book, or it might be Vonnegut's subtle comment upon

the grisly accounts of the outlines of human shapes "photographed" on walls and buildings of Hiroshima by the "flash" of the atomic bomb. One of those monuments to Dr. Hoenikker reminds the reader that "The importance of this one man in the history of mankind is incalculable" (p. 45), and the reference to "one man" underscores the theme of loneliness once more. But "one" also implies the power of the individual for good or evil, and Vonnegut uses Felix Hoenikker's childish, unconsidered intellect to bring about the destruction of the human world. It is as if he felt a cataclysm was necessary to purge the world of its "history of human stupidity" in order to resolve the problem of alienation. The survivors of the catastrophic ice-nine on San Lorenzo are only temporary survivors, for Hazel Crosby is the only woman among them, and she is well beyond the age of child-bearing. In effect, Vonnegut's survivors seem to share the feeling of Ishmael after the sinking of the Pequod when he described himself in Moby Dick as only "another orphan."

The reference to orphans also conveys the message in both Moby Dick and Cat's Cradle that man is an orphan in the universe because he has either forgotten or rejected the family of human interdependence. Felix possesses the inquisitiveness of childhood, and he is as insensitive to the needs of others as a child would be. He is most interested in the games and structures he can impose upon life through his scientific "toys." Ahab admits to living in "desolate solitude,"

and he refers to his quest of Moby Dick as a form of cosmic hide and seek. Both men are "orphans" in the sense that they are "parent seekers" in their respective quests for ultimate authority. Paradoxically, they simultaneously reject the very authority they seek by assuming personal responsibility for their own individual fates. Ahab chooses to pursue Moby Dick on every occasion possible even at the expense of commercial success of his whaling voyage, and Felix wills his own fate by choosing to worship order and knowledge at the cost of isolation from all ordinary human relationships. Neither of these men is a true "victim" of forces beyond his control because each is consistently capable of choice and responsibility. The most authentic "victims" in both novels are the "Jonah-figures" of Ishmael and John who are the definite outsiders constantly seeking to cast off their loneliness in an experience which they do not fully understand but which they continue to narrate to the very end. If there is a common moral to the narrations of these two characters, it may well be the lack of any possible understanding of the incomprehensible universe. As Albert Camus once stated:

I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has meaning and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one. This world has at least the truth of man, and our task is to provide its justification against fate itself. And it has no justification but man; hence he must be saved if we want to save the idea we have of life.¹⁵

In Cat's Cradle, the same attitude is succinctly expressed

in one of Bokonon's characteristic calypsos:

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. (p. 124)

That, as Bokonon views it, is the purpose of science and religion as well as all other systems of order invented by man.

Man's invention of order is at the very heart of Moby Dick and Cat's Cradle because it provides the essence of their literary form. Both works are fables giving shape to the myth of "true" reality similarly dealt with by Melville and Vonnegut. In the tradition of Aesop, Chaucer, and Swift, these two books make almost the same proverbial comment upon the alienation of man brought about by his failure to feel and accept his role in the universe rather to think and question the cosmic forces beyond his ken. The incapacity for love and acceptance separates Captain Ahab and Felix Hoenikker from their respective "Jonahs" representing the rest of mankind. Both men have sacrificed the ability to love for the sake of the quest of ultimates. Just as Ahab believed he had found in Moby Dick a final symbol of "all evil," Felix believed he had discovered in ice-nine the final symbol of controllable order--in short, the Cat's Cradle of the Cosmos. The cat's cradle is most significant here because it represents a meaningless game based upon the tension of opposing forces applied to string held taut by human hands.

To deal with these abstract issues, Melville and Vonnegut chose to write fables rather than conventional novels,¹⁷ and both Moby Dick and Cat's Cradle may be said to evoke the dual interest of the reader which is characteristic of the allegory. The extra-ordinary characters, events and settings of both works have their own dramatic interest, but they also direct the reader's awareness to the larger-than-life ideas and meanings they represent on a deeper, abstract level. We are thus able to view Ahab and Felix as epic figures, Ishmael and Jonah as representative men, Moby Dick and Ice-nine as mythic forces of nature, and the Pequod and San Lorenzo as microcosms set in an ocean of cosmic alienation and isolation. This deeper level in both works permits Melville and Vonnegut to deal with religious, moral, political and satiric meanings from an allegorical stance.

Despite much discussion concerning the literary form of Moby Dick and Cat's Cradle, they defy strict categorization. They are not exactly prose romances, and they are not pure allegories. The very nature of their unique form seems to have been an underlying cause of negative critical response, for Moby Dick prompted the London Athenaeum to describe it as "so much trash belonging to the worst school of Bedlam literature", and Cat's Cradle caused one critic to label it an "anti-literary novel." If one were forced to label both of these works, perhaps the most appropriate term would be Northrop Frye's "anatomy" or the more roundabout and descriptive

"anti-realistic novel based upon fantasy, illogicality, and absurdity which attempts to avoid conventional forms." Both works seem to share some common features with John Hawkes and Joseph Heller. On the broadest level, the most useful terms for discussion seem to be myth and fable. Newton Arvin's description of Moby Dick seems equally applicable to Cat's Cradle:

Moby Dick is [Melville's] endeavor to construct his own myth. The personages of the fable, ordinary as they begin by seeming, very soon take on the large outlines and the poetic typicality of figures in legend or Edda. They are engaged, moreover, in an action that is profoundly archetypal--that is, in a voyage by sea that is also a hunt or a quest, and that reaches its culmination in an all but complete catastrophe.¹⁸

The element of catastrophe seems best conveyed by the literary form of myth or fable, for it allows the fullest range of imaginative play on the part of the author.

Melville and Vonnegut are most innovative in their use of myth, however, in their refusal to direct it toward a final resolution of human ambiguities. Traditionally, myth has served to explain some of the phenomena of nature or the origin of man or the exploits of heroes or deities beyond the scope of human comprehension. Myth in the hands of Melville and Vonnegut serves only to insist that truth in reality or in fable is never clearly defined.

To illustrate this point wryly and indirectly, Vonnegut has deliberately fragmented Cat's Cradle. He has referred to his works as "mosaics made up of many little chips; each chip is a joke." He has explained that each short chapter

of Cat's Cradle "is a joke constructed with some skill . . . the way a comedian would construct a joke."¹⁹ The mosaic form seems especially appropriate to his purpose of conveying the theme of alienation and loneliness, for it aptly demonstrates the fragmentation of the modern technological world. Like Melville, who seemed to be concerned with the effects of the industrial revolution upon life in his century, Vonnegut explained that industry has created

a lonesome society that's been fragmented by the factory system. People have to move from here to there as jobs move, as prosperity leaves one area and appears somewhere else. People don't live in communities permanently anymore. But they should: communities are very comforting to human beings.²⁰

Vonnegut's use of the mosaic form seems to bring the problem of human communities into sharper focus.

The form also illustrates Vonnegut's belief that in the modern world "There just seems to be too much information to process."²¹ Vonnegut has resorted to the use of short phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters in order to illustrate the compressed nature of language in our fast-paced technological society. Many of his paragraphs consist of one sentence, and some of his sentences consist of one word in a kind of linguistic shorthand reflecting the clipped and coded speech of today. In sharp contrast, of course, Melville's paragraphs and sentences are long and poetic in an elevated prose seeking to bear the epic quality of his great and visionary theme.

As this contrast indicates, Vonnegut drew upon Melville's techniques without trying to imitate them. For example, he has drawn upon the opening movement of Moby Dick, especially the scenes in chapel and inn, with their reminders of mortality and of the alienation of "the highest truth" found in landlessness. Like Melville, Vonnegut begins his novel two days before Christmas, but in landlocked Ilium, where Dr. Felix Hoenikker had been "captain" of the atomic bomb research team. Jonah stays at the Del Prado (the fields) Hotel whose bar, the Cape Cod Room, with its nets and seashells, recalls Ishmael's description of the Spouter Inn in New Bedford. In the relative comfort and security of the bar, Jonah and a whore named Sandra conversationally resolve all of the world's problems by talking about the Pope and birth control, Hitler and the Jews, phonies, truth, gangsters, business, poor people, rich bastards, and religious people who had perversions. They and the bartender are even able to remember reading in the newspaper that science had discovered that the basic secret of life was "Protein." Science is here equated with the orderliness and safety of land (knowledge), and superstition is equated with the chaos and danger of the sea (ignorance) which mankind mistakenly believes to be the lesser element of human existence. In short, Vonnegut's reporting of the bartender's glib revelation of the basic secret of life suggests that mankind is unaware that his ignorance is much greater than his knowledge. Ilium is a "city of knowledge" due to the

presence of the General Forge and Foundry Research Laboratory there, and Vonnegut ironically reminds us that Ilium, much like Nantucket, was once regarded as the "jumping-off place" for the Western migration. Vonnegut also reminds us of our fears and our mortality by Jonah's visit to a cemetery on a morning when "sleet was falling through a motionless blanket of smog." He too is stunned by the odd monuments above the graves of Emily and Felix Hoenikker. Jonah, like Ishmael, is depressed by awareness of his own fate when he recognizes his own last name on the base of a stone angel in a tombstone salesroom near the cemetery. His response is much like Ishmael's, for he says that he had a "vision of the unity in every second of all time and all wandering mankind, all wandering woman-kind, all wandering children." (pp. 55-56) Jonah also receives a sermon on truth, but it is preached by Dr. Asa Breed and placed in the context of twentieth-century economics. Dr. Breed tells Jonah that "New knowledge is the most valuable commodity on earth. The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become." (p. 36) Jonah also receives a warning from an insane prophet in the character of elevator operator Lyman Enders Knowles. Knowles suggests the futility of both Felix's and Jonah's quest for truth when he says:

This here's a re-search laboratory. Research means look again, don't it? Means they're looking for something they found once and it got away somehow, and now they got to research for it? How come they got to build a building like this, . . . and fill it with all these crazy people? What is it they're trying to find again? Who lost what? Yes, Yes! (p. 47)

The major setting throughout the remainder of Cat's Cradle is the microcosm of the 20 by 50 mile island of San Lorenzo, a kind of stationary Pequod, and the sense of alienation is created by the actions of the visitors to the island. A kind of primordial loneliness is expressed in a poem written by one of those visitors when Bokonon reports his own arrival on San Lorenzo after being shipwrecked:

A fish pitched up
By the angry sea,
I gasped on land,
And I became me. (p. 77)

This and the next quoted Bokonon calypso accomplishes several purposes at once, for they not only remind the reader of the Jonah theme, but they lead directly into the story of Lionel Boyd Johnson's rebirth as Bokonon. Vonnegut even manages to correlate science and religion by his subtle allusions to Darwin and Christ in these respective calypsos. As Jonah states it, Bokonon

resolved to see just how far a man might go, emerging
naked from salt water.

It was a rebirth for him:
Be like a baby,
The Bible say,
So I stay like a baby
To this very day. (p. 77)

The Christian allusion is even more obvious in Vonnegut's use, like Melville, of "Merry Christmas" in a chapter title. Both chapters are ironic, for they point to the isolation and loneliness of their narrators and the other characters. Furthermore, in both books, the narrator encounters the previously

"unseen" major character on Christmas day, and each narrator discovers calamity one year later on Christmas day. Ahab tried to kill Moby Dick one year from the Christmas day beginning of his voyage, and Felix Hoenikker bequeathed the world-destroying ice-nine to his children on Christmas day. Both men died at the point which they regarded as one in which they had imposed some order upon chaos, and in so doing, they succeeded in removing hope, peace, and good will from the face of the earth.

Christmas also serves as a point of departure from and return to the world of reality as Ahab and Felix pursue their respective quests for knowledge and order. Both narrators are involved in "voyages" as each attempts to chronicle the events leading up to the final catastrophe. These chronicles assume an episodic form as Melville and Vonnegut utilize short chapters with epigrammatic titles. Perhaps the most striking similarity of structure is the device of telling a tale-within-a-tale. In both instances, the author introduces a narrator who introduces the major characters. Each narrator seems to exist alternately within and without the narrative tale he is recording. Melville introduces Ishmael who sketches Ahab and his white whale, and Vonnegut introduces Jonah who sketches Felix Hoenikker and his ice-nine. Both narrators also seem to be author personae appropriate to engage in an etymological search for meaning by retracing human history. However, in both novels, learning and science are less important

than something very like fate. Both narrators connect the forces of fate to the voyage motif and the accompanying image of isolation (the microcosm) that underscores man's loneliness. Ishmael remarks that he doesn't know why the "invisible police officer of the Fates" had influenced him to embark upon a whaling voyage as part of a "grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago," but he does realize that he has been cajoled into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from "free will and discriminating judgment." Jonah declares that something had compelled him, according to plan, to be "certain places at certain times, without fail." That "something" led him to the little island in the Caribbean Sea, the Republic of San Lorenzo, where, as a Bokononist, he learned to believe that "humanity is organized into teams, teams that do God's Will without ever discovering what they are doing." The voyage provides the necessary episodic structure held together by the exploits of the narrator/hero as he engages in picaresque adventures. Ishmael and Jonah eventually reach the equatorial regions of the world by a series of "fated" steps placing them at the center of catastrophe on the Pequod and San Lorenzo. The authors' concentration upon the equatorial regions in each book seems to suggest the symbolic division of man's nature in a Manichaeian universe.

The concept of man's multi-faceted and complex nature is further developed by Melville's and Vonnegut's use of characterization. Ahab and Felix as major characters are

thoroughly delineated by their respective narrators, and the characters of the narrators themselves are sharply defined by what each says and does in the unfolding quests for the truth of man's existence. The protagonist and narrator in each novel are further developed by deliberate contrast to a veritable gallery of unique minor characters in supporting roles. Melville's three mates, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, represent "right-mindedness" (Starbuck), "a base mechanical" (Stubb), and "ignorant unconscious fearlessness" (Flask). Vonnegut exhibits a similar depth of human understanding in his creation of the consciously superficial characters of Felix Hoenikker's three children, Angela, Newton, and Franklin. Although they are described by the deranged elevator operator, Lyman Enders Knowles, as "babies full of rabies," the Hoenikker children seem to represent an updated version of Ahab's three symbolic mates. Angela, for instance, is the right-minded idealist who functions as both defender and victim of her father's particular monomania. A major difference, however, is that whereas Starbuck opposes but dutifully assists Ahab in his destructive quest, Angela consistently praises her father for his work on the atomic bomb. "Little Newt", the midget son of Felix, seems comparable to Stubb both in the allusion to diminutive size in their names and in their extremely pragmatic natures. The difference here seems to be that Stubb's calmly optimistic acceptance of death as an expected hazard of the whale-killing profession has been displaced by Newt's

pessimistic belief in the absolute meaninglessness of everything. The third child of Felix, Franklin, corresponds to Flask, the third mate of Ahab, in that both are willing abdicators of responsibility. In short, both are seen as passive receivers or "containers" into which the decisions and influence of others are poured. One rather striking parallel between these two characters is their commonly held attitude toward danger. Melville tells us that Flask had no reverence for the "majestic bulk and mystic ways" of whales and that they were, to him, "but a species of magnificent mouse, or at least water rat, requiring only a little circumvention and some small application of time and trouble to kill and boil." This sounds very much like Franklin's attitude in the patient rebuilding of San Lorenzo to match his perfect, miniature table-top creation in the basement of Jack's Hobby Shop. The primary difference between the inventive Franklin Hoenikker and Flask seems to be Franklin's lack of pugnacious determination. As Jonah says

I realized with chagrin that my agreeing to be boss had freed Frank to do what he wanted to do more than anything else, to do what his father had done: to receive honors and creature comforts while escaping human responsibilities. He was accomplishing this by going down a spiritual oubliette. (p. 151)

The reference to escaping human responsibilities seems to apply to all three Hoenikker children. Angela plays "heavenly music" on her clarinet in order to escape the reality of her ruined marriage, Newt paints nihilistic pictures of

nothingness, and Franklin retains his office of Minister of Science and Progress in the Republic of San Lorenzo by foisting the presidency on Jonah.

Cat's Cradle owes many other debts to Moby Dick.

Dr. Vox Humana's Christian motto of "Make religion live!" echoes Father Mapple's exhortation to "Make the Bible live!" Bokonon and Fedallah are dark prophets living in hidden places until the climactic point in each book. Although of different genders, Queequeg and Mona Aamons seem to have a great deal in common by virtue of their innocent and loving paganism. Both are described as sensual and physically beautiful beings of simple but highly moral attitudes in the tradition of primitivism. These two "noble savages" are used by their respective authors/creators as the basis for some of their most serious and significant attacks upon Christian religion. Mona, the adopted daughter of the President of San Lorenzo, also rejected Christianity in favor of the pagan religion of Bokononism which preaches that "it is very wrong not to love everyone exactly the same." Both characters come from noble or prominent families and practice pagan rituals which serve to point out the selfishness and isolation of Christian religion. Mona performs Boko-maru, the meeting of two "souls" by pressing together the "soles" of their bare feet, as a means of spiritual uplifting rooted in tactile experience. Queequeg rubs noses with a small idol named Yojo. The religious ritual practiced by Queequeg prompts Ishmael to make an ironic and negative observation concerning all religions. In Cat's Cradle,

Mona calls the Christian Jonah a "man-with-no-religion" because he proves himself to be a sin-wat which is a "man who wants all of somebody's love." Mona's totally selfless love expressed through her propensity for Boko-maru footplay seems very similar to Queequeg's great capacity for brotherly love expressed by the customary greeting of pressing his forehead to Ishmael's in an affectionate gesture. This action would seem to represent a "meeting of the minds" between Ishmael and Queequeg just as Boko-maru represents a "meeting of the souls" between Jonah and Mona. The underlying idea in both cases seems to be an indictment of Christianity for its lack of love. Melville and Vonnegut seem to be implying that while Christianity may preach the doctrine of universal love for all mankind, the majority of Christians do not seem to be capable of practicing it. In short, the Christians in both works appear more savage than the simple pagans who teach them the meaning of brotherly love.

Beyond their function as symbols of unselfish love sharply contrasted with the self-isolation of Ahab and Felix, the characters of Queequeg and Mona also serve to define and measure the growth of personal humanity in the characters of Ishmael and Jonah. The reader is given very little in the way of personal history of either character. Both names allude to wanderers and outcasts. Both are vicarious experiencers searching the world about them while recording the thoughts and actions associated with other men's accomplishments.

Neither has a last name known to the reader because that helps them to lose their individual identities and to share in the overall identity of mankind. Each begins his Everyman journey from the most negative point of his wasted personal life as indicated by Ishmael's contemplation of suicide and Jonah's reference to two divorces and vast amounts of cigarettes and alcohol consumed. As a result, both are fascinated by death. Ishmael goes to sea in a moment of suicidal-melancholy, and Jonah decides to write a book about the atomic bomb. Both are initially caught up in the destructive egos of Ahab and Felix, but through the positive influences of Queequeg and Mona, their characters are altered from misanthropic to philanthropic.

The character development of Ishmael and Jonah reflects the central meaning of their respective novels. Both begin as philosophical malcontents denouncing society and all authority figures and grow to love individual humans and to respect the dignity of man. Each gains a great deal of insight into the human condition and therefore begins to look upon all men with greater sympathy and an appreciation of the need for brotherhood. The alienation of the exaggerated figures of Ahab and Felix is not resolved in either novel, but Ishmael and Jonah gain knowledge of man's self-responsibility. The message may best be understood in the following quotation from The Books of Bokonon:

"Today I will be a Bulgarian Minister of Education," Bokonon tells us. "Tomorrow I will be

Helen of Troy." His meaning is crystal clear:
Each one of us has to be what he or she is. (p. 178)

The characters of Ahab and Felix become more understandable if we view them in the light of that statement and we realize that both men are merely being what they were naturally meant to be in terms of what their author/creators intended for them. Both represent the extreme to which man goes in his quest for understanding his universe. In short, they are mock-heroic figures representing the inhuman element of man's curiosity. Each is drawn as a symbol of loneliness because of his single-minded search for answers. Their dramatized quest for self is illustrated by Ahab's cry near the climax of Moby Dick:

Is Ahab Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errandboy in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I.
(p. 445)

In Cat's Cradle, Felix Hoenikker's major statement on human curiosity was made in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech:

Ladies and Gentlemen. I stand before you now because I never stopped dawdling like an eight-year-old on a spring morning on his way to school. Anything can make me stop and look and wonder, and sometimes learn. I am a very happy man. Thank you.
(p. 17)

In both instances, knowledge is sought in terms of some unknown power. For Ahab, Moby Dick becomes the symbol of that power; for Felix, ice-nine. Of the two, Felix proves to be the more destructive not only through his world-freezing

invention but through the horrifying innocence of his lonely quest. It would seem that Vonnegut might be suggesting through Felix that the twentieth-century villain cast in the role of the "mad scientist" is ultimately more evil than the easily grasped romantic concept of the diabolical vengeance of the mad Sea Captain pursuing his nemesis.

In sharp contrast to the conscious and unconscious villainy of Ahab and Felix, is the deliberate balance of good and evil in the characters of Ishmael and Jonah. As the most obvious spokesmen for their respective authors, they move from innocence to experience in the manner of true protagonists. Each shows himself to be as capable of baseness as he is of nobility, and both men seem to mature enough to accept their dual natures. Despite their newfound wisdom, however, they are still symbols of human loneliness at the conclusion of their separate searches. Both consider themselves to be sole survivors of catastrophes.

Although, as the names Ishmael and Jonah indicate, Cat's Cradle resembles Moby Dick in its use of proper names, physical descriptions, puns, and other signals of meaning, it is clear from his practice in earlier novels that Vonnegut needed little assistance from Melville. In the names of Felix Hoenikker, Jonah, and Bokonon, Vonnegut manages to bite deeply with his use of irony. Just as Ishmael finds himself confused by the contrary messages of the crazy prophet Elijah and the idolatrous Ahab, Vonnegut's Jonah is torn between the

conflicting ideas of the crazy, pagan prophet Bokonon and the agnostic scientist, Felix Hoenikker. The symbolic connotation of Felix's name is multi-faceted. On first glance, "Felix" would seem to suggest only the Latin word for "fortunate," as in the Fall, and "Hoenikker," according to one critic, is found in Jobe's dictionary of symbols as the name of deity in Norse mythology noted for his weak judgement. If we note, however, the frequent references to Felix as a happy man even to the point of his personal reference to it in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, and put "happy" with his surname, the expression of "Happy Hanuka" comes to mind immediately with its ironic sense of temple dedication. In the case of Felix, the temple was the one dedicated to the cause of science at the General Forge and Foundry Research Laboratory. Jonah's name seems intended to invoke the Old Testament image of the character of ill omen and misfortune, but most of Vonnegut's critics have overlooked the fact that "Jonah" also means "peace" in Hebrew. Furthermore, Jonah's real name is "John" which means "God's gracious gift" and thereby provides an additional level of irony to Cat's Cradle. The final level of irony is not fully recognized until we recall that Bokonon's real name was Johnson or "son of John." Add to that the information that John was the name of the biblical apostle who wrote the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse in the New Testament, and the role and scope of Bokonon becomes complex indeed. There also seems to be a deliberately negative connotation

imbued in the name of Bokonon caused by its formation from the nonsense language of the Republic of San Lorenzo.

Other characters are even more striking in their physical appearance than in their names, for in Cat's Cradle Vonnegut has used caricature to an unprecedented degree. For example, he projects the appearance of Felix in a larger-than-life view given from the perspective of his midget son, Little Newt, when Felix got down on his hands and knees to show him the cat's cradle he'd made.

His pores looked as big as craters on the moon. His ears and nostrils were stuffed with hair. Cigar smoke made him smell like the mouth of Hell. So close up, my father was the ugliest thing I'd ever seen. I dream about it all the time.

And then he sang. "Rockabye catsy in the tree top"; he sang, "when the wind blows, the cray-dull will rock. If the bough breaks, the cray-dull will fall. Down will come cray-dull, catsy and all." (p. 18)

A final touch of symbolism is added to the image of Felix in Jonah's description of his favorite picture of Dr. Hoenikker which

showed him all bundled up for winter, in an overcoat, scarf, galoshes, and a wool knit cap with a big pom-pom on the crown.

This picture, Angela told me, with a catch in her throat, had been taken just about three hours before the old man died. A newspaper photographer had recognized the seeming Christmas elf for the great man he was. (p. 82)

The allusions to Christmas and winter link Felix appropriately with the conflicting forces of religion and science or myth and reality as the sources of the icy destruction of the world.

In contrast to the images of sterility and destruction are those of rebirth and duality. Mona's "delivery" of Jonah from the womb-like oubliette after the destructive ice-nine storms subsided in Cat's Cradle may be compared with Queequeg "delivery" of Tashtego after he fell into the head of the Sperm Whale. Their dual natures are seen in terms of the contradictions they represent to others in the novels. Queequeg for example, confounds Ishmael by saving a man from drowning just minutes after he had soundly beaten the man. Mona puzzles Jonah by her contradictory behavior as his "heavenly Mona" and as a sensual and promiscuous sex goddess. He attempts to resolve the conflicting ideas of her as both Madonna and Mary Magdalene figure when he says of her:

As I ponder now the meaning of that girl--
recall her indifference to "Papa's" collapse, to her
betrothal to me--I vacillate between lofty and cheap
appraisals.

Did she represent the highest form of female
spirituality?

Or was she anesthetized, frigid--a cold fish,
in fact, a dazed addict of the xylophone, the cult
of beauty, and boko-maru? (pp. 156-57)

In both instances, society's standards of normalcy are tested by these characters' great capacity for human love and understanding.

To social standards of normalcy are opposed the ironic simplicity of Bokanon's philosophy, which accepts the problematic status of man in the universe. This philosophy is encapsulated in the words that Bokononists always say when they are about to commit suicide, "Now I will destroy the world."

It is a simultaneous confession of loneliness and an assertion of self. To the Bokononists, who believe man to be the only sacred thing in the world, the destruction of the self is world destruction. Without mankind, the world is as undefined and meaningless as the cat's cradle that requires human hands to stretch it tautly into order.

The destruction of the microcosm as well as the macrocosm by ice-nine is the final stage of human alienation and loneliness, but it can be avoided if man chooses to avoid it. As Raymond Olderman has observed:

The final dark implication, which Vonnegut shares with a great many other writers, is that we too are headed for cataclysm unless we find something to live by. Vonnegut does offer two possibilities--we can learn to love each other, or we can create our own illusion, some mythology that will help us learn to live together. Neither possibility makes life meaningful, but both do offer a way to stay alive, and maybe even have some fun.²²

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Despite the unifying thread of loneliness found in each of his first four novels, the process involved in Vonnegut's quest for self has become increasingly complex. The distance that Vonnegut has traveled may best be measured by the various shifts of theme and technique from Player Piano to Cat's Cradle. Player Piano was basically an anti-machine novel written in relatively conventional form with some elements of science fiction and comic romance included. Man's fear of automation serves to explain the frustration of individual loneliness in a technological society. The Sirens of Titan focuses on fate as a theme in an absurd parody of science fiction. Man's search for a controller of his destiny raises human loneliness to the cosmic level in a highly romantic "space opera" embellished by heavy doses of humor. Mother Night represents an extreme shift in theme as Vonnegut forces his central character to confront individual responsibility for the first time and in the appropriate form of a confessional journal. Whereas the first two novels had allowed man to

indulge in superficial answers in order to avoid human loneliness, Mother Night is unrelenting in its examination of guilt through human action. It is so much more complex than the comic romances that preceded it that comparing it to Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter was useful in illustrating its darkly satiric depth of understanding in terms of loneliness and alienation derived from guilt. Cat's Cradle concentrates on the theme of alienation as the result of loneliness. It is the most ambitious work of Vonnegut's first four: he consciously imitates Melville's use of the fable form, and he insists that man accept the lack of external values. Like Melville, he has determined that science and religion are unavailing in man's search for self and for an answer to loneliness.

Cat's Cradle marks the end of a major phase of Vonnegut's career. With the cataclysmic ending of that novel, he abandoned loneliness as a unifying theme in his writing and turned instead to love as a possible solution to human loneliness. The total destruction in Cat's Cradle seems to have been Vonnegut's means of cleansing the world in preparation for the utopia he tries to introduce in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965). The theme of love as a remedy underlies all four of Vonnegut's subsequent novels, a departure significant enough to require separate study.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater not only introduces Vonnegut's new thematic direction, it also serves as a warning that love

may be as destructive as loneliness if not held in check. The specific theme of the novel is uncritical love for one's fellow man, and it is presented with great originality in epistolary form which creates a montage effect. He followed with Slaughterhouse Five (1969) and effectively used an anti-war theme to point up mankind's love of existence. His major point here seemed to be that war is the end result of mankind's failure to love. In support of this idea, he returns to a technique used in The Sirens of Titan with the Tralfamadorian concept of time and allows the central character to avoid death by becoming "unstuck in time" during moments of extreme hatred or danger. Breakfast of Champions (1973) represents almost as significant a shift in his recent novels as did Mother Night in his earlier ones. Vonnegut uses the theme of schizophrenia to point up the importance of self-love. A new premise he introduces is the theory that chemical imbalances cause schizophrenia, and he relates this to drug abuse in the modern world. His greatest innovations in this novel are highly visual felt-tip pen illustrations which emphasize his literary concepts. He also revives the science-fiction element in this novel with the character of Kilgore Trout, a science-fiction novelist, as a creator of several subplots. Breakfast of Champions is perhaps his best work of satire. Slapstick (1976) uses the theme of community to illustrate the importance of family love. The point, once again, is that love should be uncritical and that it would probably

best succeed in a less technological society. In Slapstick, all of the characters are related by means of an artificial extended family system with 1,000 members in each family, and all of the cities are decaying as mankind reverts to a simpler, more primitive level. We can see several of Vonnegut's major ideas brought together in this novel as he includes some elements of satire, science fiction, anti-war, anti-technology, love and loneliness. The subtitle of Slapstick is "Lonesome No More" which I perceive as Vonnegut's announcement that he has found strong, communal love to be a satisfactory solution to human loneliness.

The catalyst in most of Vonnegut's works is very often some kind of accident, and the characters he chooses to react to or to be affected by these accidents are little people, average people like you and me. The success of his works seems to be based on this appeal to the average man because his novels engage our sympathy with a very real situation clothed in fiction. Vonnegut is able to demonstrate to us that loneliness and love are two very human conditions.

Nevertheless, his early period remains the most important. He was most innovative during that period, and I find his treatment of loneliness to be more significant than his more recent concern with love as a unifying theme because loneliness is perhaps the most universal human experience. Unlike his predecessors, he treats this theme in comic fashion. Furthermore, he is able to create characters who engage

our sympathy. In blending significant contemporary theme with popular methods, he has achieved a synthesis which makes him one of the most interesting and significant contemporary writers.

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⁷Reed, p. 40.

⁸Slater, p. 6.

⁹EPICAC is Vonnegut's advertent transposition of "Ipecac." the emetic, which humorously emphasizes the computer's limited ability to vomit back only that information fed into it by its human creators. There is implicit irony in the "EPIC" portion of the computer's name which underscores the machine's lack of response to anything heroic while also suggesting the imposing aspect of the computer on the grand scale of national automation.

¹⁰Max F. Schulz, Black Humor Fiction of the Sixties, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1973), pp. 57-58.

¹¹James M. Mellard, "The Modes of Vonnegut's Fiction," The Vonnegut Statement, edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973), p. 187.

¹²Slater, pp. 12-13.

¹³Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Reed, p. 50.

¹⁷Slater, p. 5.

¹⁸Reed, p. 42.

¹⁹Tony Tanner, City of Words, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 182.

²⁰Slater, p. 26.

²¹Reed, p. 51.

²²David H. Goldsmith, "The Novels of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr." (Ph. D. dissertation, Bowling Greens State University, 1970), p. 22.

²³Reed, p. 52.

²⁴Vonnegut, Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloons, p. 261.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 3rd Ed., (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 112.

²⁸Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 304-305.

²⁹Ibid., p. 306.

³⁰Ibid., p. 187.

³¹Ibid., p. 193.

³²Ibid., pp. 193-94.

³³Ibid., p. 187.

³⁴Ibid., p. 186.

³⁵Reed, p. 30.

³⁶Tanner, p. 182.

³⁷Webster's Biographical Dictionary, (1951), "Charles Proteus Steinmetz," p. 1403.

³⁸Karen & Charles Wood, "The Vonnegut Effect: Science Fiction and Beyond," The Vonnegut Statement edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973), p. 138.

³⁹Reed, p. 56.

⁴⁰Slater, p. 27.

CHAPTER III

¹Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Happy Birthday, Wanda June, (New York: Delta-Dell, 1970), pp. viii-ix.

²Ibid., p. ix.

³Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., The Sirens of Titan, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959), p. 7. All quotations are from this edition of the novel, and page numbers will be indicated parenthetically.

⁴Peter J. Reed, Writers for the 70's: Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., (New York: Paperback Library, 1972), p. 59.

⁵David Ketterer, New Worlds for Old, (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974), pp. 325-26.

⁶David H. Goldsmith, "The Novels of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr." (Ph. D. dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1970), p. 28.

⁷Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Player Piano, (New York: Avon, 1952), pp. 285-86.

⁸Ketterer, p. 327.

⁹Karen and Charles Wood, "The Vonnegut Effect: Science Fiction and Beyond," The Vonnegut Statement edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973), p. 149.

¹⁰Charles B. Harris, Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd, (New Haven: College and University Press, 1971), p. 17.

¹¹Max F. Schulz, Black Humor Fiction of the Sixties, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1973), p. 52.

¹²Thomas L. Wymer, "The Swiftian Satire of Vonnegut," Voices for the Future: Essays on Major Science Fiction Writers, Vol I. edited by Thomas D. Clarison, (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1976), pp. 252-53.

¹³Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁵Ketterer, p. 317.

¹⁶This meaning of Salo's name is suggested by Tony Tanner in City of Words, p. 185.

¹⁷Wood, p. 148.

¹⁸Goldsmith, p. 24.

¹⁹Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloon: Opinions, (New York: Delta-Dell, 1975), pp. 1 & 2.

²⁰Philip E. Slater, The Pursuit of Loneliness, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p.5.

²¹Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 187.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 190.

²⁴Webster's New World Dictionary, second college edition, p. 889.

²⁵Frye, p. 193.

²⁶Reed, p. 82.

²⁷Ibid., p. 85.

²⁸Wymer, p. 252.

²⁹Ketterer, p. 322.

³⁰Reed, p. 86.

³¹Goldsmith, p. 118.

³²Frye, p. 195.

³³James M. Mellard, "The Modes of Vonnegut's Fiction," The Vonnegut Statement, edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973), p. 180.

³⁴Ibid., see pages 190 and 194 of The Vonnegut Statement.

³⁵Ibid., p. 194 only.

³⁶Ibid., p. 197.

³⁷Goldsmith, p. 34.

³⁸Ibid., p. 35.

³⁹Mellard, pp. 198-99.

⁴⁰Ketterer, see pp. 315-16 for lengthy discussion of Goldsmith's charge of "flashy" use of imagery in Vonnegut's work and Ketterer's defense of Vonnegut.

⁴¹Ketterer, p. 309.

⁴²Ibid., p. 310.

⁴³Ibid., p. 308.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 330.

⁴⁵Reed, p. 83.

⁴⁶Definition of "dot" in Webster's New World Dictionary, second college edition, 1974, p. 419.

⁴⁷Wymer, p. 262.

CHAPTER IV

¹Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Centenary Edition of The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. William Charvat, vol. 1: The Scarlet Letter, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962), p. 31. All quotations are from this edition of the novel, and page numbers will be indicated parenthetically.

²Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Mother Night, (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1966), p. xi. All quotations are from this edition of the novel, and page numbers will be indicated parenthetically.

³Sir Walter Scott, "My Native Land," in the Anthology of Romanticism, 3rd ed., edited by Ernest Bernbaum (New York: Ronald Press, 1948), p. 421.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Scott's poem was used in a similar manner to emphasize the lonely plight of Philip Nolan in Edward Everett Hale's The Man Without A Country.

⁶A. N. Kaul, "Cultural and Literary Background: The Type of American Experience," Theories of American Literature, edited by Donald M. Kartiganer and Malcolm A. Griffith, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 33.

⁷Ibid., pp. 68-69.

⁸Malcolm A. Griffith and Donald M. Kartiganer, eds., Introduction to Theories of American Literature, (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 7.

⁹Jerome Klinkowitz, "Mother Night, Cat's Cradle, and the Crimes of Our Time," The Vonnegut Statement, edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 164-65.

¹⁰Edward H. Davidson, "Dimmesdale's Fall," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Scarlet Letter, ed. John C. Gerber, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 83.

¹¹Klinkowitz, The Vonnegut Statement, p. 165 and p. 168.

¹²The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals, ed. Newton Arvin, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), p. 31.

¹³Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision, pp. 97-98. Chapters I to VII concern Hester's limited ascension wherein she openly accepts her guilt; Chapters IX to XVI concern the shifting of the burden of guilt from the woman to the man in the question of where it should reside; and Chapters XVII to XXIV treat Dimmesdale's complete ascension through his revelation of his guilt on Election Day.

¹⁴This is reminiscent of a scene described in Hawthorne's short story, "Rappaccini's Daughter", where the young hero, Giovanni Guasconti, stands at his window and gazes down into the beautiful garden of Dr. Rappaccini as he wonders, "was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world?"

¹⁵Male, p. 19. "Hawthorne was not a great novelist in the strict sense of that term. His grasp of the actual surface of life was firm but quite limited in comparison to Dickens or Stendhal or Balzac. . . . He did merge poetry and fiction, the imaginary and the actual, the universal and the particular.

¹⁶Tim Hildenbrand, "Two or Three Things I Know About Kurt Vonnegut's Imagination," in The Vonnegut Statement, eds. Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973), p. 122. This piece provides convincing evidence that Vonnegut draws much of his material for his novels from documented facts about our American culture.

¹⁷Klinkowitz, The Vonnegut Statement, p. 175.

CHAPTER V

¹Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Cat's Cradle, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), p. 177. All quotations are from this edition of the novel, and page numbers will be indicated parenthetically.

²Peter J. Reed, Writers for the 70's: Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., (New York: Paperback Library, 1972), p. 124.

³Robert Scholes, The Fabulators, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 51.

⁴Raymond M. Olderman, Beyond the Wasteland: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 195.

⁵Scholes, p. 51

⁶Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloons: Opinions, (New York: Delta-Dell, 1975), pp. xxii-xxiii.

⁷The Letters of Herman Melville, edited by Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 125-25.

⁸Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1963), preface.

⁹Herman Melville, Moby Dick, (New York: W. W. Norton Co., Inc., 1967), p. 117.

¹⁰Max F. Schulz, Black Humor Fiction of the Sixties, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1973), p. 44.

¹¹Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloons: Opinions, pp. 161-62.

¹²Ibid., p. 255.

¹³Herman Melville, Moby Dick, p. 76.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁵Schulz, p. 51.

¹⁶Albert Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, Translated from the French and with an introduction by Martin O'Brien, 1st American Edition, (New York: Knopf, 1961), p. 28.

¹⁷See pp. 153-54 of Newton Arvin's Herman Melville, (New York: Sloan, 1950); reprinted New York: Viking Compass Books, 1957, and pp. 10-11 of Robert Scholes' The Fabulators for their respective arguments for the fable element in the works of Melville and Vonnegut.

¹⁸Arvin, p. 184.

¹⁹Film Interview with Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., 1975.

²⁰Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloons: Opinions, p. 241.

²¹Robert Scholes, "A Talk with Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.," The Vonnegut Statement, edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer, (New York: Dell Publinshing Co., 1973), p. 112.

²²Olderman, p. 191.

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