THE MAN WHO WANTED TO GO HOME: ESTRANGEMENT AND STRUCTURE IN THE FIRST SIX NOVELS OF KURT VONNEGUT, JR.

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

---

by

Gorman Lee Frederickson

May 1974

John L. Homer

Approved for the Major Department

Harold E. Durst

Approved for the Graduate Council

PREFACE

Between World War I and World War II there existed a time when many Americans believed that the world was finally at peace and that technology was something which should be respected. People, especially the younger ones, were taught that the entire world was committed to achieving a goal of peaceful and harmonious coexistence. Most people even believed General Electric's slogan which boasted that "Progress is Our Most Important Product."

Suddenly, in 1941, Americans were forced to re-examine their sets of values which had been so firmly ingrained over the course of the previous two decades. What had become of peace and tranquility? And more importantly, what had happened to progress? Progress and technology, the two factors which had so greatly contributed to man's comfort, had suddenly turned against him and caused almost intolerable agony. By the end of World War II Americans, as well as the entire world, had either felt or seen the full impact of what technology could do. Most of Europe had been destroyed or severely damaged, 76,000 people had been incinerated in the atomic holocaust which had taken place in Japan, and the scars of war had cut deeply into the mainstream of America's way of life.

The end of the second World War did not turn out to be the end of just another bad time in America's history.

It turned out to be the threshold of what may even be considered worse times. There was the Korean War of the early 50's, the "Beatnik" generation of the middle 50's, the Vietnam War which dominated most of the 60's, the "God is dead" movements, the drug, violence, riot and general escapism syndromes of the 60's and 70's.

During this period of "readjustment" in American history, many new novelists came into literary prominence, but none, perhaps, as important as Kurt Vonnegut. Vonnegut is important not only because he, like many other novelists, was able to define man's discontent, but he was able to prescribe a remedy for it. Between 1952 and 1969, Vonnegut wrote six novels which represent him as being not only a master humorist and satirist, but also a dedicated artist. This thesis studies Vonnegut's growth as an artist. It is especially concerned with the changes that Vonnegut made in the way he structured novels so they could adequately reflect his slowly evolving vision.

I would like to extend my appreciation to Douglas Mailen, who first told me to read Vonnegut, and Dr. John Somer, whose expertise in and love for Kurt Vonnegut motivated this study and whose much appreciated patience and many useful suggestions have helped in the writing of the text. Dr. Charles E. Walton is also gratefully acknowledged for his help in the preparation of this paper. I would also like to thank my wife, Faie, who encouraged

me through this entire project.

Peabody, Kansas G. L. F.

May, 1974

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

HUMPTY DUMPTY OR THE FALL

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,
All the King's horses and all the King's men
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again"
Children's nursery rhyme

Joseph Frank has suggested in The Widening Gyre, that "If there is one theme that dominates the history of modern culture . . . , it is precisely that of insecurity, instability, the feeling of loss of control over the meaning and purpose of life amidst the continuing triumphs of science and technics."[1] Perhaps those feelings of insecurity, instability and alienation had been most dramatically registered in many American soldiers who came home from the Second World War, questioning the concept of progress and the method of technology. Whether or not man can spiritually survive the instabilities of modern culture depends upon our artist's ability to create an aesthetic

---

[1] Joseph Frank, The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature, p. 55.

that can order our experience of life. One soldier who returned to question America's future is the artist, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

When Vonnegut returned from the war, he had to resolve the problems of adjusting to a system that had drastically changed and of placing the war into perspective. Too much of an optimist to surrender, he was determined to restore the world he had lost. When Vonnegut arrived home, he was admitted to the University of Chicago to study anthropology, in which discipline he intended to study man. He was soon disillusioned with the scientific approach to the past and withdrew from the university. Convinced that man could not be studied objectively, under the influence of one of his professors, Dr. Redfield, he decided that man could be best understood in relation to folk societies, close knit groups of people who believed that behavior is personal not impersonal, that communication should be accomplished by word of mouth, that change should be minimal, and that what one man believes is what all men believe. Folk societies were groups wherein a man could feel a sense of personal worth. The attitudes and actions of one folk society, moreover tended to be reflected in all other folk societies. According to Vonnegut, " . . . there aren't any folk societies for us anymore."[2]

---

[2] Kurt Vonnegut, "The Happiest Day in the Life of My

Because there are no folk societies today, and because World War II destroyed Vonnegut's world, he felt an artist's responsibility to create a new sensibility which could exist successfully in an impersonal and chaotic society. With the close of World War II, many artists confronted this problem. Writers like Heller, Kesey, Salinger, McCullers, and Sylvia Plath all had one thing in common: they successfully depicted man's discord with himself and his world. In spite of their diagnosis, however, they stopped short and failed to offer a remedy for the cracked spirit of man. No contemporary novelist has been as successful as Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., in offering a concrete response. His unique vision not only dramatizes the transformation through which man has gone, but, more importantly, it shows him the way to go home, again.

Vonnegut knew, that like man, the novel had reached a period in which it too was becoming dehumanized. The linear concept of time with its attendent implication of cause and effect that had structured the novel during the nineteenth century seemed inadequate as a structuring principle in a space age. In the nineteenth century, the American novel had maintained the English tradition that literature is a

---

Father," address to the Wilbour Blashfield Foundation. This address was given on May 26, 1971, to the Ceremonial of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

time-art. Joseph Frank believes that time is the natural unifying element for fiction. He also says that, when man feels comfortable in a world which he considers to be natural, he tends to create art which is naturalistic. Cause and effect tends to be the unifying element in naturalistic art.[3] Melville, Hawthorne, Emerson and even Mark Twain stand as classic examples of American novelists whose attempts to recreate life in terms of the cause-and-effect tradition reflect the nineteenth-century notion that art does indeed mirror man and his ways. In the twentieth century, however, the novel needed a new flexibility to match the changes of an age which was moving and expanding so fast that man could no longer even begin to understand his world.

Alvin Toffler, in Future Shock, believes that "culture shock" is an appropriate name for the syndrome into which many twentieth-century Americans have fallen. "Culture shock" is used to describe man's reaction to his vision of the world to which he still thinks he belongs. Toffler further believes that because of such rapid and haphazard change in contemporary values, "The culture shock phenomenon accounts for much of the bewilderment, frustration, and disorientation that plagues Americans in their dealings

---

[3] Frank, p. 55.

with other societies."[4] Any person who is concerned with literature and believes that it exerts a positive force on society would probably agree that, if man is to rise from the quagmire of alienation, literature will have to assume an important role. Kurt Vonnegut was one such person. When asked, "why do you write," Vonnegut replied, "I think . . . writers should be--and biologically have to be--agents of change. For the better, we hope."[5] The change that Vonnegut envisions is a movement from the chaos of contemporary life to the ordered patterns of a folk society, from a sense of alienation to a sense of community. The psychiatrist, R. D. Laing, an authority on schizophrenia, describes the human implications of such a vision: "My behavior is an experience of the other. The task of social phenomenology is to relate my experience of the other's behavior to the other's experience of my behavior. Its study is the relation between experience: its true field is interexperience."[6] As an artist, Vonnegut needed a way of dramatizing the "field of interexperience." This is no small problem because the way of structuring literary experience during the twentieth century is influenced by

---

[4] Alvin Toffler, Future Shock, p. 11.

[5] "An Interview with Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.," "Playboy", July 1973, p. 58.

[6] R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, p. 17.

current notions of time. The experience of events is no longer seen in terms of linear time. As Joseph Frank, the first critic to study the implications of time and space in modern art, has noted, all events "Maintain a continual juxtaposition between aspects of the past and the present so that both are fused in one comprehensive view."[7] Frank continues, "Time is no longer felt as an objective, casual progression with clearly markedout differences between periods; now it has become a continuum in which distinctions between past and present are wiped out."[8] But Frank's statement of the problem also furnishes a clue to Vonnegut's development as a novelist. Since Vonnegut wanted to lead his characters to Laing's "field of interexperience," it is only natural that he would eventually use Frank's "time continuum" as a means of structuring his novels, as a symbol for his goal. Because Vonnegut realized that linear time could no longer represent man's experience of reality, he needed to spatialize time.

According to Sharon Spencer in Space, Time, and Structure in the Modern Novel, the spatialization of time occurs when " . . . the time-flow of the narrative is halted: attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the limited time area. These relationships are

---

[7] Frank, p. 59.

[8] Loc. cit.

juxtaposed independently of the progress of the narrative; and the full significance of the scene is given only by the reflexive relations among the units of meaning [emphasis mine]."[9] In linear time, experience seems to flow; events grow out of cause-and-effect relationships. In spatial time, experience of time is shattered. Past, present, and future are no longer recognizable as valid concepts of reality. Events seem to be related as points on a map that is slowly turning before the reader so he may see it from various angles. As Frank has argued, the use of spatial time, or a non-naturalistic mode of order, is the only way, perhaps, to structure the experience of a life that lacks the consolations of a folk society.[10]

The structural mode of a novel does more than order the plot; it also informs the consciousness of the novel's protagonist. A character whose experience of reality is essentially linear will acquire a similar identity. The reverse is also true. A character whose experience of reality is essentially spatial will develop a spatial consciousness. It is slow adoption of spatial consciousness, then, that enables Vonnegut's characters to come to terms with the world of their creator. The slow movement from

---

[9] Sharon Spencer, Space Time and Structure in the Modern Novel, p. 156.

[10] Frank, p. 56.

the linear consciousness of Paul Proteus in Player Piano to the spatial consciousness of Billy Pilgrim in Slaughterhouse-Five is the subject of this thesis.

Because Vonnegut's development of spatial consciousness extends over twenty years and because its development is so complex, a device, such as Joseph Campbell's monomyth, is necessary to control and to clarify a discussion of it. In the monomyth, a hero emerges (as he does in Player Piano) who desires to revivify life. He undergoes a transformation which allows him spontaneously to generate new myths that tend to have a new and profound influence on him and his particular society. He views himself as a messanger charged with transcending his temporal world and ascending to a high spiritual dimension through which he is able to " . . . retreat from the desperations of the waste land to the peace of the everlasting realm that is within." Campbell continues:

> " . . . the first task of the hero is to retreat from the casual zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case and break through to the undistorted, direct experience . . . of . . . the archetypal images."[11]

The result of a successful monomythis experience is a hero able to overcome his personal and local historical limitations and arrive at generally valid, normal human

---

[11] Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces, p. 17.

forms. In the beginning, the hero leaves his ordinary world and enters the door of adventure where he is challenged. The outcome of this battle determines whether he continues in life or finds death. His journey takes him through a world "unfamilar yet strangly intimate." He encounters "forces" that test or help him reach "the nadir of the mythological round," where "he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward." His final problem is to return with the boon to the world and, thereby, restore it to life and vitality.[12]

The monomyth, then, accentuates the mythic density of Vonnegut's struggle to create a character with spatial consciousness. The six characters who proceed Billy Pilgrim, in effect, function as barometers of Vonnegut's own explorations into the nature of reality. With a little exaggeration, one can say that it is Vonnegut, himself, who is on a monomythical journey, who is attempting to find an order that can survive the twentieth century. He, like his contemporary writers, must answer T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land. But in addition to this cultural duty, Vonnegut bears the psychological guilt of living through a real waste land, the bombing of Dresden where so many died. Perhaps, this additional burden focused Vonnegut's energies and made his response more inclusive and meaningful than the responses of

---

[12] Campbell, p. 245.

his contemporaries. Vonnegut not only analyzes the problem; he proposes a definite answer, spatial consciousness, an answer that suggests to the world the harmony inherent in the last folk societies.

In Player Piano, Vonnegut dramatizes the nature of the waste land as he sees it, a cultural schizophrenia created by technology. The setting of the novel, Ilium, New York, is divided; the managers live on one side of the river and the common people live on the other in a community called Homewood. Symbolically, Vonnegut's task is to eliminate the division in Ilium's society and allow all of its members to live in harmony in Homewood. Home, finally, is the goal of Vonnegut and his heroes. Before Vonnegut created Billy Pilgrim, a character who could go home and who could take his creator with him, Vonnegut explored the implications of his problem in four novels, Sirens of Titan, Mother Night, Cat's Cradle and God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater.

While the monomyth focuses one's vision on the subtle changes in character from novel to novel and structures one's comprehension of them, it does not clarify the exact nature of the process the characters undergo as they suffer their transformations. In order to understand what happens when Vonnegut's characters descend into the void, one must use R. D. Laing's study of schizophrenia, his pattern of the "Ten Day Voyage." In The Politics of Experience, Laing

explains that the experiences of the schizophrenic is much like the experiences of the shaman mystic; Laing's treatment of schizophrenics has convinced him that schizophrenia is an orderly and structured act of the mind to heal a psychic wound. Laing argues that psychiatrists who treat the psychosis with electric shock actually retard a natural healing process of the mind. In those patients where Laing has allowed the illness to evolve to its natural conclusion, he found the confirmation of his theories.[13] Schizophrenia, he says, is like " . . . a voyage into time, a sense of timelessness through which one experiences a loss of ego."[14] The voyager may actually believe that he is traveling in strange lands as a new character who has transcended his old identity. There comes a point in the voyage when the hero feels frozen between two levels of consciousness. The hero experiences two or more levels of awareness, both of which appear to be real. The hero becomes aware that he must come to terms with a workable, definitive concept of reality, an acceptance. Eventually, the voyager can not take the stresses of his psychic journey and decides to come back. The return is based on a very simple principle: the

---

[13] For a complete discussion of an actual case history of a schizophrenic experience which leads Laing to believe that schizophrenia is, in fact, an orderly and structured act of the mind for the purpose of healing a psychic wound, see The Politics of Experience, pp. 146-68.

[14] Ibid., p. 150.

need to accept a conscious psychological level of reality as being just that: reality. In Vonnegut's case, the reality is schizophrenia, the condition through which one can assume a new identity and still be in touch with his own. The new identity discovers truths which provide for the psychological stability of the real self. Thus, Laing's theories of schizophrenia will provide insight into human process underlying Vonnegut's development of spatial consciousness.

The thesis of this paper, then, is that Vonnegut's use of shorter and shorter narrative units, from the solid chapters of Player Piano to the mosaic pattern of Slaughterhouse-Five, is the way that Vonnegut discarded linear consciousness and created spatial consciousness. In his attempt to create a character who could live fully in the twentieth century--that is, to regain the harmony of the lost folk societies or the harmony of the world before the war--Vonnegut was forced to define clearly the nature of his age and to offer a concrete response to it. The chaos of life negated the conventional order of linear time and forced him spatially to structure reality. Vonnegut's success in creating Billy Pilgrim, or spatial consciousness, enabled him to complete the mythic and psychic journey defined by Campbell and Laing and allowed him to go home again.

CHAPTER II

THE LINEAR CONSCIOUSNESS OF PLAYER PIANO

In 1952, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., wrote his first novel, Player Piano, in which he expresses western man's discontent with modern technology. As Peter Reed contends, in Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Player Piano expresses the " . . . notion that, the present being grim and the future holding little promise, the past must somehow have been better. Throughout the novel, there runs the feeling that . . . good things have been lost."[15] As Vonnegut writes in the "Foreward" to Player Piano, "This is not a book about what is, but a book about what could be" [vii].[16] The story is about Paul Proteus, Ilium and a revolution, but Vonnegut says that that is not what the story is about. He says it is "about what could be." In Player Piano, Vonnegut, believing in man's spiritual perfectibility, makes his first attempt at trying to reunite man with some kind of spiritual connection.

---

[15] Peter J. Reed, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., p. 25.

[16] Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Player Piano, Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1952, Delta-Dell, 1952. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis within the text of this chapter.

Set somewhere in the future, Player Piano is about Paul Proteus, who feels vaguely discontented with his role in an expanding machine age. Proteus is manager of the Ilium Works, an organization whose computers control the lives of most of the population of Ilium. The entire country is full of such computer centers that control the lives of the people; hence, the story of Ilium is the story of the modern world as depicted by the novel. Inspired by a group of pseudo-militant, social drop outs, Proteus is hoodwinked into taking part in a revolution which has been designed to overthrow the computers and restore a sense of humanism. Ironically, Proteus is never able to come to grips with the nature of his discontent; his rebellion is mainly directed against his father who had also risen high in the organization. Proteus' father was the nation's first National Industrial, Commercial, Communications, Foodstuffs and Resource Director, "A position approached in importance only by the presidency of the United States" (2). The revolution is haphazardly executed, even though it is designed by managers, and fails. The end of the novel is basically pessimistic with the bulk of the population " . . . eager to recreate the same old nightmare" (295).

The primary theme of this novel is the fate of man caught in a technological age that victimizes its members. Man is cutoff from spiritual nourishment. In effect, he has

become a machine. The only way to put the machine age in its proper perspective is to attain a new level of spiritual or psychological consciousness. In Player Piano, the Shah of Bratpuhr provided at least a "primitive" form of that consciousness, but Vonnegut could not bring Proteus and Bratpuhr together. Because Proteus is locked deeply within the confines of his impersonal society, he is unable either literally or figuratively to escape from it, although he does make attempts to do both. At the end of the novel, he remains basically unchanged except that he realizes a need for something in which to believe. This unhappy resolution suggests that Vonnegut himself is dissatisfied with the present and is as confused as his hero about a proper code of action. Paul Proteus, in his quest to find purpose in a world in which technology has reduced man to a sense of purposelessness, is unable to establish any relationships which may exist between himself and his world. Because Proteus cannot escape the confines of his existence, he is unable to perceive his life in any other perspective than the one which governs it, the one with which he is so dissatisfied. One needs only to examine the structure of Player Piano to understand why Proteus is unable to come to grips with himself and his world.

In Player Piano, there are two plot lines that dominate the narrative. The first and most important is

that of Paul Proteus and his discontent with the role of machines in society. The second is that of the Shah of Bratpuhr, who has come from a "primitive society" to observe the functions of a more advanced one. These two plots are developed simultaneously with the focus of the narrative jumping back and forth between the two. It appears as though Vonnegut is trying to bring the two societies together with the hopes of reaching some kind of compromise, but he is unable to do this in Player Piano.

Throughout the plot of Player Piano lie large segments of narration which deal with the story of Paul Proteus and his dissatisfaction with the machine age. The most striking characteristic about the development of Proteus' story is that it appears not to be a straightforward narrative development as one might find in a traditional time-structured novel like Tom Sawyer, for example. Instead, there are several stories or sub-plots woven in and around the Proteus plot. While the first chapter contains the traditional elements of the novel like the introduction of the main characters, major symbols and conflicts, the second chapter is not a chronological development of the first. Vonnegut, instead, devotes the entire second chapter to the introduction of the Shah of Bratpuhr, spiritual leader of millions. In the early chapters of the novel, it is difficult to determine exactly where Vonnegut intends for his major

emphasis to lie. The story of Player Piano, then, is a series of juxtaposed scenes that suggest Vonnegut's early dissatisfaction with linear time.

The structural pattern of Player Piano clearly anticipates Vonnegut's future structuring devices. The pattern is this: Vonnegut seldom develops more than one thematic thread continuously for very long. He, instead, develops them simultaneously. In Player Piano, as in his other novels, the major plot lines are presented in brief episodes, dropped, and picked up again. The major plots tend to be interwoven. In short, the plots are presented in brief or episodic units. Even sentences and paragraphs are brief or episodic units. Even sentences and paragraphs are brief, characteristic of Vonnegut's style. This structural pattern is evident in Player Piano but in this first novel Vonnegut uses much larger narrative units. In Vonnegut's later novels, the narrative units tend to become shorter. In Slaughterhouse-Five, seldom does Vonnegut expand an idea for more than two pages.

Player Piano, however, contains thirty-five chapters which span a total of 295 pages. Each chapter averages, then, eight-and-one-half pages, which, incidentally, is almost twice the length of the chapters in Mother Night written nearly ten years later. Caught in such bulky narrative chunks, Vonnegut is forced to use the cause and effect nature of linear time. In order to alter chronology

and to change scene, Vonnegut must interject the chapters dealing with the Shah among the chapters dealing with Proteus. Vonnegut devotes twenty-seven chapters to Proteus and his involvement within the system, other people, and the revolution, and only six chapters to the Shah of Bratpuhr. The Shah's function in the novel is mainly that of an observer. The Shah is on a visit to America to visit with and observe various characters who are either in or out of the system. The Proteus and Bratpuhr chapters total thirty-three with only two chapters remaining. These two chapters involve both Proteus and Bratpuhr, but the characters are never able to meet. They do not come together. The following is a breakdown of the chapters which deal specifically with Proteus, followed by a breakdown of the chapters concerned with the Shah of Bratpuhr:

Proteus: Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35.

Bratpuhr: Chapters 2, 7, 11, 17, 20, 24.

The two chapters which do not deal specifically with either character but, are, instead, concerned with both are chapters 28 and 33. It is in these units which are close to the end of the novel that Vonnegut made an attempt to bring Proteus together with the Shah, who represents some form of primitive spiritual insight. Even though Vonnegut understood the necessity for man's need for spiritual connections, he

did not know what they should be nor how to unite man with them. Because the Shah is an embodiment of some primitive form of spiritual energy, he is the very thing for which Proteus is searching, but cannot find. The very existence of the Shah in the novel, however, indicates that Vonnegut did have at least a glimmer of hope for man whose existence would have to depend on the spiritual or inner self rather than the physical or external self. The Shah, then, becomes a symbol of Vonnegut's own optimism. In Player Piano, Vonnegut's optimistic voice is obviously present but barely heard amidst an age of such overwhelming insensitivity and impersonal attitudes among men.

In Player Piano, Vonnegut is attempting to invent a literary structure by which he could explain the chaos and destruction he saw in the war, but failed because he tried to explain what he had seen and experienced in terms of traditional cause and effect literary conventions. It did not work because what he was trying to explain, or maybe even rationalize, was not conventional. What Vonnegut had actually done was taken the linear consciousness that he had known in life and tried to place that same consciousness in the structure of Player Piano. As a result, Paul Proteus ends up levelling the same violence at the system that had been wrought upon Dresden. Even though Proteus is the most brilliant person in Ilium, he is unable to escape a linear

consciousness with its notion of a cause and effect concept of order. By the end of Player Piano, one realizes that Paul Proteus is just a protagonist. He never really becomes a hero.

As Joseph Campbell points out, " . . . a hero is one who has undergone a transformation of some kind and emerges as one who possesses a higher level of insight."[17] This qualification can not be accorded to Paul Proteus, who is a static character. He is also a modern Everyman whose vision of himself and his world is so limited that he is able to make only limited headway in understanding either one. What Vonnegut next needed was a hero. A hero, as Campbell states:

> . . . ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.[18]

Paul Proteus neither ventures forth nor realizes any boons to bestow on his fellow man. It is not until Vonnegut departs from the structural limitations of linear time that he is able to construct a viable structure in which a hero can survive.

Player Piano, then, is a novel in which Vonnegut employs large chapters, or narrative units, which compliment

---

[17] Campbell, p. 17.

[18] Ibid., p. 30.

chronological time and cause and effect. Player Piano, also initiates a very long voyage across five more novels through which Vonnegut develops his notion of a protagonist. Beginning with Paul Proteus, Vonnegut launches on a voyage through six novels and space and time into a schizophrenic condition and finally back home, again. Only when Vonnegut finally brings his protagonist-turned-hero home, does his hero achieve a new level of consciousness which allows him to understand himself and his world.

Before Vonnegut could come to terms with subjects as big as Dresden and the displacement of modern man, he needed to create a new sensibility. It is in his next novel, The Sirens of Titan (1959), that he is able to depart from the traditions of linear consciousness and create a new sensibility in which the seed of a hero emerges. The new consciousness is a departure from reality, at least from the reality of life as manifest in such contemporary problems as Ilium, and an arrival into a fantasy realm which more accurately reflects the working of modern man's mind in the face of the stark realism of the twentieth-century technology. Malachi Constant, the hero of The Sirens of Titan, is, unlike Proteus, able to transcend the limitations of his Earthly existence and gain a new perspective on an old problem. To examine that new perspective, one must turn to The Sirens of Titan.

CHAPTER III

CRISIS: THE VOYAGE

Presented in this chapter is an extensive discussion of the development of the structure of Kurt Vonnegut's next four novels, The Sirens of Titan through God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater. Although separate discussions are devoted to The Sirens of Titan, Mother Night, Cat's Cradle and God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, the emphasis of this chapter will be on the fact that there exists a definite development of structure as well as hero throughout these works.

This chapter will analyze Vonnegut's break from the linear consciousness of Player Piano and his adoption of the spatial form, beginning in Sirens, in which he employs a type of mythic/space structure which allows his hero, Malachi Constant to transcend the limitations of his Earthly existence which, in turn, allows Vonnegut to escape the cause and effect implications of temporal order. Malachi Constant, even though he ends up understanding little more about his world than did Paul Proteus, is finally able to come to terms with himself which prepares Vonnegut for Mother Night.

In Mother Night, Vonnegut creates Howard W. Campbell, an American Nazi, who remembers his role in the atrocities of the Second World War while he awaits trial in an Israli jail. The story of Howard W. Campbell is actually an extension of the monomythic journey as initiated by Malachi Constant in Sirens. In Mother Night Vonnegut takes Malachi's boon learned on Titan and applies it to Campbell who is then able to "remember" his role in the war. Campbell, who tries a self-imposed psychological exile, finds that the "real world" keeps creeping in on him. At the end of Mother Night, Campbell, unlike Proteus or Malachi, understands both himself and his world, but cannot stand the thought of either one. Consequently, he commits suicide. Ironically, the last line in the novel is the German "Auf wiedersehen?" for "we will meet again?" One does, indeed, meet Campbell again as John, the hero of Cat's Cradle. The death of Howard W. Campbell dramatizes the death of Vonnegut's hero in the real world of cause and effect as manifested in linear time and marks the entrance of John into the spatio-temporal world of Cat's Cradle. John attains a much higher state of spiritual perfection than did either Paul Proteus or Malachi Constant.

The entrance into Cat's Cradle from Mother Night is the entrance to the fantasy world of spatial consciousness. John has dismissed the reality of the world; he has learned from the experiences as Howard W. Campbell not to be

victimized, John ends up a Bokononist, a member of a new religion whose "foma", harmless lies, have replaced the horrible reality of his old life. Cat's Cradle is the first novel in which Vonnegut has perfected a hero who can live harmoniously with both himself and his world. Because Vonnegut's world is tainted with guilt over the Dresden massacre, John's spatial vision allows the novelist to approach his central subject, Dresden. In Cat's Cradle, Vonnegut creates a hero who has learned to live independently of man's foolishness and, therefore, feels no guilt about that foolishness. After Cat's Cradle, Vonnegut is finally able to create a hero who can directly confront the Dresden experience.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater is about a hero, Eliot Rosewater, who attempts to live at the same time in both the cause and effect temporal world and the psychic world of spatial consciousness. Because Eliot is victimized into thinking that living in both worlds is socially unacceptable, he becomes a schizophrenic. Schizophrenia, is discovered in Slaughterhouse-Five, to be the ultimate boon to the human condition. Because of Eliot's assumption of the Schizophrenic condition, Vonnegut is able to create a new hero who can confront Dresden and rationalize his role in that atrocity in a manner which allows him to assume a guilt free attitude toward it.

This chapter, then, is indicative of the transition in the literary career of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Its emphasis is on the idea that Vonnegut is a twentieth-century author who has learned how to dismiss the nineteenth-century attitude toward the linear concept of time in the novel and actually invent a new awareness which successfully compliments a space-age sensibility.

THE SIRENS OF TITAN: THE DEPARTURE

The Sirens of Titan (1959), Vonnegut's second novel, is the story of Malachi Constance, a modern Everyman, who looks everywhere for answers to life except within himself. It is not until the end of the novel that Malachi learns that he is the embodiment of life's meaning.[19] His insensitivity to himself is a symptom of his age; it is what Reich call "the lost self." In The Greening of America, he says that "man is deprived of his own being, and he becomes instead a mere role, occupation, or function. The self within him is killed, and he walks through the remainder of his days mindless and lifeless, the inmate and instrument of a machine world."[20] This "cog-in the-wheel" concept of modern man is the idea that Vonnegut is concerned with in Sirens. This novel, unlike Player Piano does not confine itself to the question, "Why?," but is in reality a study of man's quest for meaning and purpose in a universe which appears to be silent on such issues. In Sirens, "The future provides the setting, but this time . . . the travel in space and time serves to explore the existential questions

---

[19] Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., The Sirens of Titan, Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1959, Delta-Dell, 1959. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis within the text of this chapter.

[20] Charles A. Reich, The Greening of America, p. 141.

only touched upon in Player Piano."[21]

Nevertheless, Vonnegut's target is the present as well as the past, even though he has adopted a science fiction technique to project man's present dilemma somewhere into the future, a "Nightmare Age, falling roughly, give-or-take a few years, between the Second World War and the Third Great Depression" (8). Vonnegut is still trying to come to terms with the horrors of Dresden and purge himself of the guilt associated with it. In Sirens, he feebly attempts to write about Dresden by dramatizing it in the guise of a Martian invasion on unsuspecting Earthlings, with the result being little more than a commentary on the absurdity of war. While Vonnegut's encounter with the present does not bring him to a confrontation with Dresden, it does enable him to succeed in creating his first real hero, Malachi Constant.

Sirens manifests the journey of the hero who departs the realm of Earthling reality, experiences a transformation, and returns to that same reality. Upon returning, the hero has acquired new insights about his own psyche which enable him to understand better the reality of his existence. Malachi, "a notorious rakehell," who is chosen by the Tralfamadorians to be a savior for all mankind. Malachi Constant, or "faithful messenger," has waited all of his life for a message important enough to take from one point

---

[21] Reed, p. 58.

to another. It is not until the end of the novel that the reader or Malachi discovers what that message is. Ruined by excessive self-indulgence, Malachi abandons hope for himself and agrees to join the Martian army which is apparently controlled by Winston Niles Rumfoord. After having his memory "removed" and being physically and mentally tormented for nine years, Malachi is placed on a pre-controlled flying saucer which takes him to Mercury where he remains in exile for two years, enough time for Rumfoord to prepare Earth for Malachi's return as the new messiah. Upon returning to Earth, Malachi is exiled to Titan where he lives the remainder of his life with Beatrice, his mate and Chrono, his son. On the last day of his life, Malachi returns to Earth where he dies waiting for a bus in Indianapolis.

From this brief plot summary, it is clear that the novel's overall structure is linear, i.e., events follow one another in a meaningful sequence. Because the story is set on various planets and moons, however, the temporal advances of the plot are registered by journeys through space. Following is a chapter-by-chapter analysis on the novel's temporal-spatial structure:

Chapter 1. Earth: the Rumfoord estate at Newport
Chapter 2. Earth: Hollywood and Newport
Chapter 3. Newport and Magnum Opus
Chapter 4. Mars
Chapter 5. Mars
Chapter 6. Mars
Chapter 7. Earth and Mercury
Chapter 8. Mercury

Chapter 9. Mercury
Chapter 10. Newport
Chapter 11. Newport
Chapter 12. Titan
Epilogue. Titan and Earth

Because Vonnegut is not concerned with the implications of Dresden in Sirens, and because he has filtered the disconcerting aspects of society through irony, he does not need to spatialize totally this novel. Joseph Frank discusses this general point in "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," noting that in good times, orderly times, man produces a naturalistic art. A novelist, for example, would use time as the organizing principle for his work. In bad times, however, when man feels threatened by his environment, he tends to create art which is non-naturalistic or abstract. A novelist, for example, tends to discard the convention of cause and effect implicit in chronological time and employ space as a structural principle. Events no longer influence one another through cause and effect relationships, but exist in spatial patterns. This type of arrangement of events, not only allows two events to occur simultaneously, but attempts to depict a feeling of simultaneity in the texture of the narrative.[22] Because Vonnegut was attempting to confront non-naturalist events such as the bombing of Dresden and modern man's feelings of estrangement he could

---

[22] Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Criticism, eds. Mark Schorer et al. pp. 379-92.

not employ a conventional structural principle for such unconventional subjects. Thus, Vonnegut uses a modified spatial form as the unifying structural device of The Sirens of Titan.

One of the non-naturalistic features of Sirens is Vonnegut's penchant for fantasies, almost hallucinagenic fantasies, which tends to obscure and render useless cause and effect relationships between scenes and events. Thus, linear time is subtly undermined by such things in the novel as the Harmoniums, Titantic Bluebirds, the descriptions of Mars, Mercury, and Titan which are indicative of the fantasy realms of the inner recesses of man's mind. Vonnegut, however, has gone into those recesses, extracted some of those fanciful, almost nightmarish, images, and dramatically converted them into reality.

The most important fantasy of the novel, though, is Winston Niles Rumfoord's theory of time, which is a symbol of Vonnegut's attempt to spatialize his narrative style. Rumfoord, the "mastermind" behind the Martian invasion of Earth, and one of the richest men in America, is unstuck in chronological time because he flies his private spaceship into a chrono-synclastic infundibulum which causes him to become " . . . scattered far and wide, not just through space, but through time, too" (15). Rumfoord has become spread through a time spiral which has its origin in the Sun

and its terminal in Betelgeuse. Every fifty-nine days, the spiral intersects with the Earth's orbit causing him to materialize at his estate at Newport, Rhode Island. It is at one of these materializations that Rumfoord invites Malachi to attend. Malachi is the only person ever to be invited to witness such an occurance.

Rumfoord explains to Malachi that he knows everything that ever has happened and everything that ever will happen. Rumfoord says, "When I ran my space ship into the chrono-synclastic infundibulum, it came to me in a flash that everything that ever has been always will be, and everything that ever will be always has been" (25-26). He has seen everything that ever has taken place and is able to see time spread out like a stretch of the Rocky Mountains. He can see the whole "mountain range" at once, or he can focus on one "peak" and examine it for as long as he wants. He says that one advantage of being in the chrono-syclastic infundibulum is that he does not have to ride life's roller coaster. He further says that he does not decide who rides or for how long.

The first chapter of Sirens is basically expository, giving important information about the main characters and explaining Rumfoord's concept of spatialized time in relation to Earthling reality. In the remainder of the novel, the events are scattered around the universe, reflecting the protagonist's aimless but directed wanderings. Even though

Rumfoord is not a captive of linear time (Rumfoord exists in all moments of time simultaneously), he, like Malachi, is controlled by forces which he cannot understand. Because the focus of the narrative is not on the wanderings of Rumfoord, but upon Malachi, who is not able to escape in linear time, the spatial events of the narrative tend to be informed by it. It is Malachi's job as "space wanderer", then, to wander through the structure of the novel and fulfill Rumfoord's prophecy which, in effect, foreshadows the novel's circular plot.

Because Malachi begins his journey on Earth and ends it on Earth, The novel's structure illustrates Vonnegut's concern for returning home and to all that home suggests. Unfortunately, however, Malachi's illumination into life on Titan fails to sustain him on his return to Earth where he dies waiting on a bus in Indianapolis. His ultimate failure is suggested by his former two contacts with Earth. Before going to Mars, he squanders his money and talents, and after his stay on Mars and Mercury and before he is sent to Titan, he is completely alienated on earth. He is more effectively, as what the Rev. C. Horner Redwine calls him, the Space Wanderer. He not only wanders literally through space, but becomes a wanderer through the spatial form of the novel, much like a pointer used to point out mathematical equations on a blackboard. All things are already written down; some

kind of indicator is needed to point them out. Malachi like the pointer is manipulated by another hand which allows for no personal control over the situation.

The effect of Malachi's being trapped intellectually in linear time and emotionally and physically serving spatial influences makes him aware that there is not any real purpose behind the workings of the world other than the rescue of a Tralfamadorian messenger stranded on Titan. As a result, Malachi looks to himself rather than to his world for the meaning of life.

What Malachi learns about himself on Titan is that he needs to learn how to love and that " . . . the worst thing that could possible happen to anybody . . . would be to not be used for anything by anybody" (310). But more importantly, Malachi learns that he cannot give up the quest of going on. At the end of his life he still feels a need to deliver a message. It is not until the end of his life that Malachi finally comprehends his role as messenger and the significance of the message which he is carrying.[23] In

---

[23] Malachi--unlike Salo, the Tralfamadorian messenger--wants to be a messenger but never really receives a message to carry. Salo, like Malachi, is on a fool's mission and neither Salo or Malachi recognize the impact or the importance of either themselves or their mission. Salo begins to "come apart" when he starts to question the worth of what he is doing, but at the same time Malachi becomes aware of a faint glimmer of a reason for living or going on anyway. He becomes aware that he has begun to discover something about himself, some truth. That truth is that Malachi becomes aware that <u>he</u> is the message, the single

a sense, then, The Sirens of Titan emphasizes the negative way in which man is controlled by forces beyond his comprehension. The positive aspect of the novel is that salvation for man lies in his power to comprehend and believe in himself. This mental act, finally, leads to spatial consciousness. While the structure of Sirens is not totally governed by spatial principles, it is a step in the right direction of creating spatial consciousness. What Vonnegut accomplishes in Sirens is a dramatization of man's need for a sincere belief in himself because there exists little hope in trying to find answers to questions that remain purely existential. As Reed suggests, "The Sirens of Titan emphasizes the need to recognize the apparently indifferent, frequently adverse Universe as the shared environment of all men, and to perceive that this makes concern, compassion, and love imperative."[24]

---

dot. Before then, he had been too busy looking outward to look inward. It turns out that the message is not important, but, instead, what one does with the message. Probably because Malachi and Salo are both machines in a sense, at least in the sense that they both have been used, Malachi can more easily identify with Salo than any other character in the novel. It is Salo's giving up the "quest" that causes Malachi to re-examine his own actions, ambitions, etc. Because Malachi perseveres in trying to restore Salo, Salo also decides that "going on" is the only answer.

In a sense, all of humanity becomes an urgent message, but the important thing is that Malachi realizes that he is an embodiment of the message and must resume the role of messenger. The fact that Malachi comes "down to Earth" indicates that he still wants to be a messenger, and this fact points ahead to Vonnegut's next four novels.

[24] Reed, p. 86.

Having come to terms with the idea that human beings need to function completely, Vonnegut next needed a context into which he could place a hero who could unite his understanding of himself along with an understanding of the world. In his next novel, Mother Night, Vonnegut dismisses the trappings of science fiction and creates a hero who is able to come to terms with a world which focuses on World War II and its atrocities as a frame of reference.

MOTHER NIGHT: THE PSYCHIC EXPERIENCE

After a voyage through two futuristic novels, Vonnegut acquired an understanding of the present, which allows him to confront the world that he had been trying to face since World War II. The fact that this novel deals with the atrocities of World War II indicates that Vonnegut is attempting to move closer to his target: Dresden. But more importantly, Vonnegut is studying the effects of the universe on an individual, the protagonist of the novel, Howard W. Campbell. As Peter Reed suggest, " . . . in the earlier space fantasy [Sirens] Vonnegut uses the telescope to show us the expanse of an Absurd Universe, he now uses the microscope to show us not just the immediate context of the workings of such a cosmos, but an interior view of their operation upon one man."[25]

Vonnegut dramatizes this "interior view" through the structure of the novel, which depicts a sense of simultaneity in the texture of the narrative. Like The Sirens of Titan, Mother Night employs space as the principle structural element, and to effectively explore the mosaic of Howard W. Campbell's consciousness, Vonnegut develops the narrative simultaneously on three levels: Campbell's life in Germany as a Nazi propagandist and American agent,

---

[25] Ibid., p. 89.

his life in New York up until his surrender to the Israelis, and his confinement in the Israeli jail.

Mother Night's forty-five chapters span 202, making each chapter about four-and-a-half pages.[26] Throughout the development of Vonnegut's novels, he devotes less space for the development of a single idea.

Even though the narrative follows a semi-chronological order, the structure of Mother Night places less emphasis on linear time than did Vonnegut's first two novels. The result of less emphasis on traditional cause and effect relationships is that more emphasis is placed on the idea that events tend to occur with few relationships existing among them. The main idea that the structure of the novel suggests is that madness asserts itself on the world, not because man generates it, but because there are undefinable and threatening forces working on him. The reason that Campbell holds little hope for the future is that the past has not pointed ahead to much hope. The idea of spiritual futility is manifested in Campbell's physical confinement which symbolizes modern man's spiritual confinement, a common ailment among many inmates of the twentieth-century. Furthermore, Campbell's confinement provides a frame for his story. It is the frame which acts as a lens focusing

---

[26] Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Mother Night, Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1961, 1966, Delta-Dell, 1961, 1966. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis within the text of this chapter.

on the action.

The first six chapters of the novel form the first half of the frame; the last chapter in the novel returns to the frame. The bulk of the narrative deals with Campbell's life in New York with fragments interspersed throughout the narrative which explain Campbell's background in the war or significant relationships which he has had with other people. Chapters seven, eight and nine depict his early life and a brief summary of his experiences in Germany. An important principle concerning the organization of the narrative is that the events are not presented in an exact chronological order. The narrative is presented in the way which Campbell remembers it. There are lags in time and an obvious juxtaposing of events. To present the narrative chronologically would have been too rigid a structure. Campbell's life was not rigidly structured. The sporadic way in which Campbell remembers, compliments the sporadic way in which events occur. The fact that Campbell cannot remember or record his confessions chronologically illustrates the fact that he is dealing with a set of non-relationships. It is the non-relationships of Campbell's own life that he sees manifested in the events of the world. The chapters, therefore, are glimpses into the mind of a man who records his life in terms of flashes and fragments.

The spatial form in Mother Night is perhaps much more

clearly defined than in Vonnegut's two previous novels because it is more obviously associated with the familiar stream-of-consciousness technique. Not only does the structure of Mother Night reflect the stream-of-consciousness technique, but it also reflects Vonnegut's first real success in creating a structure which mirrors the hero's feelings of estrangement in the post World War II era. What Vonnegut needed to do next was to create a hero who could survive in a complex, absurd world and not feel guilty about it. The only thing missing from Mother Night was a new spiritual methodology which could help Campbell satisfactorily rationalize his existence among those forces which sought to destroy him. The death of Howard W. Campbell, however, is significant because, " . . . the hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man-perfected, unspecific, universal man--he will be reborn."[27]

In the introduction to Mother Night, Vonnegut states what he considers to be the moral of the novel: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (v). In Campbell's case, he considers himself to be a hero because of his involvement with the Nazis as a propaganda specialist. Campbell, unaware of the true meaning of good and evil, considers any involvement with society to be good. Campbell succumbs to the persuasion of

---

[27] Campbell, p. 20.

Colonel Frank Wirtanen's argument that he should spy on the Nazis because it would be good for humanity. Actually, Campbell's actions are more evil than good, but Campbell does not realize this until he has become too deeply involved with the enemy. The result of Campbell's "serving evil" is that he accepts the guilt which goes along with his desire to remain true to himself. Finally, Campbell, because he cannot dismiss the notion that all is insane, levees a self-imposed guilty sentence against himself, even though he is proved innocent by the Israelis, and commits suicide. Even though Campbell is sentenced to freedom, he finds the prospect of life to be nauseating. Freedom to Campbell is actually a sentence to life in an insane world which offers little hope for the future of Howard W. Campbell or even Mankind.

Howard W. Campbell is actually a symbol of modern man who feels compelled to find a niche in society and stay there feeling a sense of worth. The difference between Campbell and his counterpart, the modern Everyman, is that Campbell's story is told after the fact which offers insights not afforded the average person who is caught up in the unknowing pursuit of evil. It is not until Campbell has openly served evil that he realizes that his actions were wrong. Even though Campbell learns a lesson, he learns it too late. The difference between Campbell and his contemporaries is that Campbell feels as though he should be held

accountable for the insanity in the world. Campbell, during the period in which he was a Nazi, " . . . remain[ed] true to the romantic illusion [of] "self" but false to the insanity he [saw] around him. He naively assumed that he is morally superior to the world and the only one who can be held accountable for its crimes."[28]

Campbell's story begins after the fact. He is in an Israeli jail awaiting trial for "war crimes." Campbell recounts his life in New York before his father was transferred to Germany by General Electric. In Germany Campbell becomes a playwright, which preceeds his involvement with Col. Frank Wirtanen. As a spy, Campbell pretends to become a traitor to America by broadcasting coded propoganda messages for the Germans. Campbell feels comfortable living in two worlds at once. He is both a patriot and a traitor. Later, Campbell is caught by American forces, but is freed before having to face charges. Eventually he ends up in Greenwich Village where he lives a life of quiet exile. Campbell, however, is forced to make contact with the outside world, and it is not long before his true identity begins to be revealed. The world begins to close in on Campbell as he tries to hide in New York. He begins to wonder about the prospects of freedom and is eventually

---

[28] John Somer, "Geodesic Vonnegut; or, If Buckminster Fuller Wrote Novels," The Vonnegut Statement, eds. Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer. p. 226.

only sickened at the thought of it. Finally, Campbell decides that all is lost and turns himself over to the Israelis.

In Israel, Campbell writes Mother Night while awaiting trial. Just as it seems as though all hope is lost, Frank Wirtanen comes forth and reveals himself as an American officer, Harold J. Sparrow, who offers evidence to clear Campbell. But it is too late for Campbell because he has already assumed the consequences for his actions and the guilt for man's insanity. Campbell cannot accept his freedom and hangs himself for "crimes against himself" (202).

The story of Howard W. Campbell marks the point in Vonnegut's journey through six novels when he seriously attempts to bring his pseudohero home. In Howard W. Campbell, Vonnegut extends his concept of a hero. While Malachi Constant only has to learn to believe in himself, Howard W. Campbell has to understand his world in terms of himself. But according to the myth critic, Joseph Campbell, "the first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying visions of fulfillment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalaties and noisy obscenities of life."[29] Because Howard W. Campbell is Vonnegut's first attempt to create a hero who could live in a realistic world, Campbell is suggestive of Vonnegut's

---

[29] Campbell, p. 218.

growing desire to write about Dresden, to return home and to confront the "noisy obscenities of life."

The redeeming aspect of the hero's return to reality is that he is able to approach and even account for the insanity which he sees. Vonnegut's return to the "real world" and especially the war, allows him to "remember" the very subject about which he has been trying to write. The effect of Vonnegut's return is that he is able to bring his hero and his world together. The result of this early attempt to "come home" is an act of remembering which in turn allows for the psychic structure of Mother Night. Also, in Mother Night, Vonnegut's hero realizes the need for a schizophrenic condition. Vonnegut writes, schizophrenia is "a simple and widespread boon to modern mankind" (136). Mother Night also illuminates Vonnegut's own psyche for a need to escape the limitations of the real world and enter a fantasy realm where he can again attempt to reunite man and world using schizophrenia--the spirtual retreat--as a catalyst.

When Vonnegut finished Mother Night, he had not come to grips with Dresden, nor explained the absurd connotations which many events apparently possess. What Vonnegut had accomplished though, was to move further away from the confines of the worn out nineteenth-century structuring principles of cause and effect. With a more refined concept

of spatial consciousness, Vonnegut was better prepared to substitute his own explanations for the meaning of life. Mother Night is structurally important because the breaking down of relationships among events in linear time, and the creation of smaller narrative units parallels, for the first time in Vonnegut's novels, the twentieth-century sensibility.

CAT'S CRADLE: THE MYTHIC EXPERIENCE

Cat's Cradle is Vonnegut's fourth novel. First published in 1963, this novel is about John, a free lance writer, who takes the name Jonah when he is enlightened. Actually an extension of Howard W. Campbell and a more perfected form of Paul Proteus and Malachi Constant, Jonah is Vonnegut's first real hero.[30] The fact that Jonah has acquired an understanding of himself along with the rest of mankind and does not implicate himself with the foolishness of the world, indicates that he is the first of Vonnegut's protagonists to come to terms with himself in relation to his society. Jonah is able to separate himself from society, and by viewing it objectively is still able to function in it. Because he does not allow himself to be victimized by the workings of twentieth-century technology, he is able to direct his life toward a suitable spiritual alternative, Bokononism. Bokononism is a religion which does not attempt to explain the workings of the universe on a cosmic scale, but simply provides comforting alternatives for the truth of man's existence.

At the end of Cat's Cradle, Bokononism even allows

---

[30] Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Cat's Cradle, Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1963, Delta-Dell, 1963. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis within the text of the chapter.

CAT'S CRADLE: THE MYTHIC EXPERIENCE

Cat's Cradle is Vonnegut's fourth novel. First published in 1963, this novel is about John, a free lance writer, who takes the name Jonah when he is enlightened. Actually an extension of Howard W. Campbell and a more perfected form of Paul Proteus and Malachi Constant, Jonah is Vonnegut's first real hero.[30] The fact that Jonah has acquired an understanding of himself along with the rest of mankind and does not implicate himself with the foolishness of the world, indicates that he is the first of Vonnegut's protagonists to come to terms with himself in relation to his society. Jonah is able to separate himself from society, and by viewing it objectively is still able to function in it. Because he does not allow himself to be victimized by the workings of twentieth-century technology, he is able to direct his life toward a suitable spiritual alternative, Bokononism. Bokononism is a religion which does not attempt to explain the workings of the universe on a cosmic scale, but simply provides comforting alternatives for the truth of man's existence.

At the end of Cat's Cradle, Bokononism even allows

---

[30] Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Cat's Cradle, Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1963, Delta-Dell, 1963. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis within the text of the chapter.

Jonah to exist in a new form of the folk society; the same type of society to which Vonnegut has been trying to return since he came home from the war and found his world a shambles. Most significantly, Vonnegut, through Jonah, has even cleared his own head of the egocentric concept of guilt which allows him, in his next novel, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, to approach his biggest subject: Dresden.

Like Mother Night, Cat's Cradle is told after the fact. It is told by Jonah, who as John, the free lance writer is working on a book to be called, The Day the World Ended. Ironically, John's book is to be about the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. On another level, John's book is also a book about the day Vonnegut's world ended, the day Dresden was destroyed. The final irony occurs when John's book actually does recount the end of the world. In Cat's Cradle the end of the world is an apocolyptic vision which results from man's misuse of ice-nine, a chemical designed to freeze mud on beaches in preparation for marine landings. Another irony is that when the world ends, the mud on the beach is not only frozen but so is most of the "human-mud" in the world. Vonnegut's concept of "human-mud" is a parody of the Biblical concept of God's creating man from mud. "God made mud' . . . 'So God said to some of the mud, 'Sit up!'" '"And I was some of the mud that got to sit up and look around'" (180, 181). Unlike Vonnegut who was "destroyed" by his "end of the world," Dresden, John

is not destroyed because he has achieved a state of mind, as Jonah, which does not allow him to feel guilty about mankind's acts of stupidity. John continues to be some of the mud that remains sitting and looking.

The novel begins with Jonah telling how he was in the process of gathering information for his book on Hiroshima. Because he was curious about events in the household of Dr. Felix Hoenikker, the father of the atomic bomb, on August 6, 1945, John wrote a letter to Newt Hoenikker, one of the three children of the late scientist. John discovers that Dr. Hoenikker was a cold hearted man who cared little about the bomb or even people, including his own family. Later, John learns more about Hoenikker, and his role in the discovery of ice-nine. John also learns that one of Hoenikker's children, Frank Hoenikker, is alive and living on the Caribbean Island of San Lorenzo where he is Minister of Science and Progress.

Assigned to do a magazine article on San Lorenzo, John flys to the island where he becomes actively involved in the San Lorenzian government. He becomes president. John also becomes a member of the island's outlawed religion, Bokononism.

As events begin to close in on John, he learns about the existence of ice-nine on San Lorenzo and, for good reason, becomes concerned about its being misused by one of the persons who has possession of it. One day at an air

show, an airplane crashes into the cliff below the presidential castle causing part of the castle, along with a small chip of ice-nine, to plummet into the sea. A chain reaction takes place causing all of the water in the world instantly to freeze. John assumes that nearly everyone in the world is dead, and for several days lives in an underground room to escape the storms that rage above ground. At the end of the novel, John and the few survivors of San Lorenzo live together assuming that they are the only people on Earth. It is during this period that John finishes writing his book about the end of the world.

Cat's Cradle emphasizes more than any other Vonnegut novel the consuming power of technology. Symbolically the theme of man's penchant for destruction in the novel, applies on at least three levels: (1) the actual destruction of Hiroshima, (2) the figurative destruction of modern man, and (3) the destruction of Kurt Vonnegut along with Dresden. Cat's Cradle is Vonnegut's first novel in which he writes directly about the loss of consciousness resulting from the excesses of science in its attempt to create things which are far removed from the realities of human needs. In short the most obvious social implication of Cat's Cradle is that there exists a discrepency between what man hopes technology can do for him and what it actually does for him. Vonnegut suggests that technology has mislead man to overestimate his power and to accept guilt for events that are

beyond his control. For example, the end of the world is not caused intentionally, but is accidental. Nobody is really at fault. The end of the world in Cat's Cradle is perhaps Vonnegut's most striking symbol of how events touch man in accidental ways.

If Vonnegut was to succeed in having a hero establish a rapport between himself and mankind, he needed to find a way in which a hero could rationalize the existence of evil and at the same time survive harmoniously with it. John in Cat's Cradle is such a hero. What Vonnegut does in Cat's Cradle that he had not done in any previous novel is create a suitable spiritual alternative as a substitute for the sense of personal guilt which one acquires from trying to assume a meaningful role in the world. R. E. Laing writes in The Divided Self, "The "normal" individual, in a situation [that he sees] to be threating to his being and to offer no real sense of escape, develops a schizoid state in trying to get outside it, if not physically, at least mentally: he becomes a mental observer, who looks on, detatched and impassive, at what his body is doing or what is being done to his body."[31] Laing continues, " . . . the self then seeks . . . to transcend the world and hence be safe."[32] The heroes of Vonnegut's novels Cat's Cradle, God

---

[31] R. D. Laing, The Divided Self, p. 79.

[32] Loc. cit.

Bless You, Mr. Rosewater and Slaughterhouse-Five all succeed in living lives which remain, to varying degrees, detached from the insanities of the world.

In Cat's Cradle Vonnegut needed to depart from the limitations of the real world in order sucessfully to find a remedy for his shattered self. The entrance into Cat's Cradle marks an entrance into a fantasy realm where reality exists independently of self. The structure of Cat's Cradle is, in a sense, reminiscent of the structure of The Sirens of Titan; it assumes a mythical quality. John like Malachi departs from the real world, but unlike Malachi who literally departs from it, John assumes a schizoid condition which allows him to stay, but remain basically unattached. He is content to live in his world because of Bokonon's teachings about dynamic tension. John says, "I was serious and excited about Bokonon's theory of what he called "'Dynamic Tension,' his sense of a priceless equilibrium between good and evil." (89). John continues, "It was the belief of Bokonon that good societies could be built only by pitting good against evil, and by keeping the tension between the two high at all times: (90). Because John does not run away, he is still in contact with Earthly concepts. The result is that John is able to bestow boons on his fellow man because he is able to report objectively what he sees without getting involved in the world's madness and feeling guilty about it. As far as John is concerned, the atrocities which he sees are not

really caused by anybody, and really could not be prevented. They just happen.

Structurally, Cat's Cradle could possibly be Vonnegut's most important novel because it marks the point in his career as a novelist when he created a hero who is able to (1) remove himself from the horrors of life, (2) survive harmoniously with himself without guilt, (3) discovers a suitable spiritual alternative into which he can withdraw and still function in the world, and (4) report the horrors of the world as accurately as he can. The fact that John is a news writer implies that his method of writing Cat's Cradle would be similar to a standard method of news writing. He tells events in the order of importance (He begins his story with the fact that he is a Bokononist and ends it with the account of the end of the world), and he tells events in the best order he can. The structure of Cat's Cradle, then, is similar to that of a diary but the main focus is on the experience of the hero who emerges from the stark reality of Howard W. Campbell and is transformed into Jonah who experiences life on a mythical level which allows him to realize comforting "truths" to bestow on his fellow man.

Cat's Cradle contains two hundred thirty one pages which are divided into one hundred twenty seven chapters. There are only 5 chapters which span 3 pages and only one which covers 4; therefore, the majority of the chapters are only one or two pages long. The use of the small narrative

unit affords very little time for the development of a single idea. Because Jonah "remembers," he remembers events in the order in which they happened. In this sense he is similar to Howard W. Campbell. The difference between Campbell and Jonah is that Jonah does not look for reasons. A Bokononist would say, "It happened--as it was meant to happen" (28, 176, 191). John concerns himself with the disparity of events in his mind; the events in the world are of no real account to him other than that they happen. In Chapter forty-nine, John recounts the story of how Lional Boyd Johnson got to San Lorenzo. A victim of a series of freak accidents, Johnson conceeds to the idea that " . . . something was trying to get him somewhere for some reason" (92).

Because Jonah is a Bokonist, he views himself in the same way. If an event appears to have absurd connotations, and it helps steer a person away from or to a certain line of speculation then a Bokononist would refer to it as a "wrang-wrang," and it would be good (71). A case in point is the stone angel that Mr. Krebbs shows John. John sees the name on the angel, gravestone, and sees that it is his own. Upon seeing his own name carved on the gravestone, he says that all of a sudden he saw " . . . tunnels leading in all directions through time. I had a Bokononist vision of the unity in every second of all time and all wandering mankind, all wandering womankind, all wandering children" (67).

After John experiences this "vin-dit," a shove in the direction of Bokononism, there is one last sentence at the end of the chapter: "The name was my last name, too." The voice is clearly Vonnegut's. The implication of this vin-dit (epipthany) is that the old self has died and there has been a rebirth of a "new" self, or Jonah, who sees everything as existing for the sake of everything else. Everything is interrelated for some reason. A Bokononist would not question the purpose of events but would, instead, be glad that they happened. So it is with Jonah and his view of the events in Cat's Cradle. An effect of Bokononism on Jonah's book is that one of the principle tenents of the religion is that it is based on lies. Because it is true that John is a Bokononist, then everything he writes is a lie. John writes, "Nothing in this book is true" (frontispiece). But lies have a function; they are as the preface to Mother Night explains, told for artistic effect. This situation makes the writer a liar. The point is that a writer may have to lie to express truths, and it is impossible to tell if the truths that are being told are actually lies. Howard W. Campbell spent his time trying to figure out events and their meanings. John, the writer, has learned not to bother with separating the two. Therefore, the only thing the writer can do is report what he sees. There is no sense in trying to interpret anything because it is impossible to determine whether or not the event is in actuality a lie or

truth. The significant thing about Bokononism is that it exists as an attempt to explain the mysteries of existence. Man exists in a world which is governed by incomprehensible forces which determine lives, and through the teachings of Bokonon, one can come to a satisfactory rationalization about the meaning of life. The real meaning of life according to Bokononism is this: Life is meaningless. The function of Bokononism is, however, to artistically inform or teach people that life is meaningless. This function however, is performed in such a way so that the "victim" is convinced that chaos is order and that it is good. For example, a Bokonist contends that events happen because they are meant to happen. In short, there is no real meaning in the workings of the world, but it is nice to pretend there is. The tenents of Bokononism give people terms and teachings, in a basically senseless vocabulary, which put them at ease simply because they offer comfort.

In Cat's Cradle, Vonnegut finally comes to terms with the subject of man and his relationship to his world, and determines that man's relationship with the world achieves harmony only when he realizes that dynamic tensions must exist between good and evil: "It was the belief of Bokonon that good societies could be built only by pitting good against evil, and by keeping the tension between the two high at all times" (90). This dynamic tension is depicted metaphorically by the atmospheric dome which covers the

island of San Lorenzo after the ice-nine catastrophe. The dome keeps out the storms which rage in the atmosphere and protects what is left of humanity: "San Lorenzo might have been protected by a tornado-proof sheet of glass" (217). The end of the world for Jonah is, in reality, a manifestation of good being pitted against evil. Since this type of tension is important to him, it is evident that the very structure of Cat's Cradle reflects the same dynamic tension which he is constantly aware of. He writes in short narrative units because he is breaking down the relationships between cause and effect and emphasizing, instead, the spatial relationships between good and evil.

At the beginning of the novel, Jonah states that he used to be a Christian, but now he is a Bokononist. (13). By the very nature of a Bokononist one would know that Jonah must believe that numerous incidents have shaped his life and have led him to find a purpose. Being a Bokononist, and a writer, Jonah is not aware of implanting a logical structure in his "novel," The novel ceases to be a novel and is, instead, a book, a book which simple and consciously records events. Another significant thing is the title of the first chapter, "The Day the World Ended." For John, the world has ended, but on a deeper level one may also assume that the old guiltridden, structured world of the soul has ended as well, which allows for a new hero and structure to emerge.

The structure of Cat's Cradle reflects Vonnegut's

concept of order being manifested in chaos. Because there is little redeeming value in Jonah's attempting to rearrange the events which he "remembers" for his book, The Day The World Ended, he simply records them in the order in which he remembers them. Therefore, the structure of his book in no way resembles the structure of a traditional time structured novel. At best, Jonah's book is only a representation of a novel, but is in reality a mirror which reflects life as it is. He does, however, implant, at the beginning of each chapter, the therefore sign [.˙.] which is all that he can do to construct order out of what he sees. Unlike Howard W. Campbell, who is obsessed with the idea of finding explanations for the non-relationships among events, Jonah provides his own comforting rationalizations for things which he cannot understand. As a Bokononist, he is concerned mainly with understanding the workings of the world on a personal rather than cosmic scale.

The effect of Jonah's attempt to classify events in terms of cause and effect, even though events do not necessarily reflect cause and effect, is that he is Vonnegut's first hero to realize that the best anyone can do is to assume a psychic stance which adknowledges the presence of undefinable forces, but which allows for a psychic retreat from them. The need for a psychic retreat illustrates the hero's need for a private world which remains basically unaffected by the world's madness, but does not try to negate

the existence of that madness. When one achieves the harmony of a dynamic condition, one no longer experiences a need to reform the world, but, instead, to explore the inner self for the meaning of life.

In Cat's Cradle, Vonnegut has moved to the heart of man's rationalization for existence in an absurd universe. Since man can not logically explain the ills of the world, he must rationalize them. This amounts to a transendent state of mind,or a coming to terms with one's self in attaining an acceptable level of existence. The problem which Vonnegut had not solved when he had finished writing Cat's Cradle was that of determining to what degree of sanity or madness does this rationalization lead. Because Vonnegut had moved closer to achieving a structure which essentially parallels a schizophrenic state of mind; he next needed to create a hero who could successfully confront the madness of the world and interpret it in terms of its degree of sanity or madness. Between Cat's Cradle and Slaughterhouse-Five, Vonnegut needed one more novel in which he could create a hero into whose mind he could delve for an answer to existential existence. God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater is the novel: Eliot Rosewater is the hero.

GOD BLESS YOU, MR. ROSEWATER: THE SCHIZOPHRENIC EXPERIENCE

In God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965) Vonnegut created a hero, Eliot Rosewater, who can successfully confront the sense of purposelessness in a technological society and at the same time create a sense of purpose by dispensing "love" to whomever may need it.[33] Love, Eliot realizes, is a commodity which is apparently in short supply in the modern society. Eliot is enlightened because he has attained a schizophrenic condition, which not only allows him to successfully confront the insanities of the world, but also to confront Dresden. But in addition to Vonnegut's hero who functions well in the world, as opposed to the heroes of Mother Night and Cat's Cradle who assess their roles in life in relation to past experiences, one of the most important aspects of the novel is that the structure of the novel compliments Eliot Rosewater's schizophrenic condition. Also, within Eliot's schizophrenia, Vonnegut provides a psychic basis for spatial consciousness.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater involves a young

---

33 Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1965, Delta-Dell, 1965. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis within the text of this chapter.

lawyer, Norman Mushari, who is determined to prove Eliot Rosewater, eldest heir to the Rosewater Foundation, insane. Mushari's motives are purely selfish because he knows that the legalities of the matter will put a handsome sum of money into his own pocket. Mushari's case against Rosewater is based on evidence which verifies Rosewater's penchant for alcohol and poor people. Eliot's actions become questionable as he begins to develop a liking for volunteer fireman and science fiction. After a series of nervous collapses, Rosewater's life begins to fall apart. His marriage crumbles; he drops out of sight, and eventually rents a little office above a fire station where he offers help to anyone who wants it. Eliot gives away just about anything anyone would need.

Eliot contends that his actions are based on love, but his father reprimands Eliot severly, accusing him that he is a fine one to profess knowledge of love. Finally, Eliot boards a bus to meet his estranged wife in Indianapolis, but just as the bus approaches the city, Rosewater goes insane. He sees the entire city being consumed in a fire-storm, the same fire-storm which he had seen consume Dresden during the war. Rosewater's imaginary fire-storm causes him to black out for one year. At the end of the year he wakes up in an insane asylem where he learns that he has been "rehabilitated." Still worried about a sanity hearing, Rosewater, learns that there are supposedly fifty-seven

paternity cases against him. Delighted by the prospect of an heir, he turns over $100,000 to the foundation and directs that the remainder of his estate be divided among his supposed offspring. Eliot offers this advise: " . . . be fruitful and multiply" (217).

A more perfected form of Vonnegut's concept of the hero, Rosewater possesses the ability to perform satisfactorily in the world and at the same time engage himself in activities which are spiritually satisfying. The only problem encountered by Rosewater is that society condemns him for trying to live in two worlds at once. He is a victim of what George Orwell calls in 1984 "doublethink": "Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them . . . This process has to be conscious, or it would not be carried out with sufficient precision. But it also has to be unconscious, or it would bring with it a feeling of falsity and hence of guilt."[34] Eliot's "doublethink" way of thinking is conscious until he goes insane and achieves a total schizophrenic condition. It is Eliot's unconsciousness which results in his loss of guilt and falsity.

The setting Vonnegut creates for Rosewater is that of a technological society which does not allow for spiritual fulfillment. The forces which work against any honest sense

---

[34] 1984, George Orwell, p. 176.

of personal identity are depicted in the young lawyer, Norman Mushari. As long as Rosewater performs satisfactorily--between 1947 and 1953 he ran the Rosewater Foundation "flawlessly"--everyone leaves him alone. When Rosewater begins to "crack up," however, and direct his efforts really to helping people, shysters like Norman Mushari want to have such a person removed from power. Ironically, Mushari cares little for the good of the foundation or even Rosewater; Mushari is only concerned with the monetary gains of such ventures. Hence, the social theme in Rosewater concerns itself mainly with the idea that money can be a leading factor in any tale. "A sum of money is a leading character in this tale about people . . ." (15), Vonnegut writes.

Between Player Piano (1952) and God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965), Vonnegut had created and developed a hero, provided a spiritual/pychic retreat (schizophrenia) into which his hero could withdraw, allowed his hero to come to terms with himself and at the same time confronted the actual world on realistic terms. He had even introduced a new theory of time as depicted by Winston Niles Rumfoord in Sirens of Titan and even provided in " . . . Bokonon's geodesy, the context for [that] theory."[35] Vonnegut's final task, then, was to bring his hero home and define the

---

35 Somer, p. 227.

the Dresden experience. Home for Rosewater applies on two levels: (1) the idea that he is coming home to himself, a spiritual return to a person's own ability to understand oneself; and (2) "home" literally becomes home. Eliot's home is Indianapolis, the same home which Vonnegut knew before he left for the war. Indianapolis to Vonnegut had been the place where he had been brought up and taught his sets of values, the same values which had become distorted because of his experiences in the war and Dresden. Indianapolis, then, is a symbol of an idealic past to which Vonnegut wanted to come back, to which he, in fact, does return through his hero Eliot Rosewater:

> "A ticket to Indianapolis, please."
> "One way or round trip, Eliot?"
> Eliot did not hesitate. "One way, if you please."
> Tawny's glass nearly toppled. She caught it in time.
> "One way to Indianapolis!" said the proprietor loudly.
> "Here you are, sir!" He validated Eliot's ticket with a stamp savagely, handed over the ticket, turned quickly away. He didn't look at Eliot again, either (196).

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater is similar to Mother Night and Slaughterhouse-Five in the sense that it is partially autobiographical. The society of Eliot Rosewater is similar to Vonnegut's own post World War II society in which the individual is dehumanized and even victimized by technology. Rosewater, like Vonnegut, feels compelled to break away from the traditional morés and to return to his own conscious for answers to the meaning of life. Rosewater, after several years of performing satisfactorily by buying

expensive art treasures and investing money in medical research, finally realizes that in the name of progress, people have been forgotten. Eliot is, then, plagued by excessive guilt and, like Vonnegut, tries to remember what he once considered to be good and worthwhile. Eliot determines that volunteer fireman perform useful functions and that science fiction is not bad, either, because it serves as a means at getting to the truth of man's existence and purpose. He also realizes that he as a human being has an inherent responsibility to help people who are less fortunate. Actually, Eliot is trying to remember what it is in his own life that caused him to erect a facade which stands between himself and the rest of society and his past. Finally, Eliot's guilt comes to the surface and tremendous amount of energy is released. Eliot's head literally erupts when his guilt acquires an external reality.

As Eliot's bus nears Indianapolis, Eliot and Vonnegut both come to terms with the aesthetic problem of guilt and Dresden:

> Eliot didn't look up again until the bus reached the outskirts of Indianapolis. He was astonished to see that the entire city was being consumed by a fire-storm. He had never seen a fire-storm, but he had certainly read and dreamed about many of them.
>
> He had a book hidden in his office, and it was a mystery even to Eliot as to why he should hide it, why he should feel guilty every time he got it out, why he should be afraid of being caught reading it. His feelings about the book were those of a weak-willed puritan with respect to pornography, yet no book could be more innocent of eroticism than the

book he hid. It was called The Bombing of Germany. It was written by Hans Rumpf.

And the passage Eliot would read over and over again, his features blank, his palms sweating, was this description of the fire-storms in Dresden:

> As the many fires broke through the roofs of the burning buildings, a clounm of heated air rose more than two and a half miles high and one and a half miles in diameter . . . This columm was turbulent, and it was fed from its base by in-rushing cooler ground-surface air. One and one and a half miles from the fires this draught increased the wind velocity from eleven to thirty-three miles per hour. At the edge of the area the velocities must have been appreciably greater, as trees three feet in diameter were uprooted. In a short time the temperature reached ignition point for all combustibles, and the entire area was ablaze. In such fires complete burn-out occured; that is, no trace of combustible material remained, and only after two days were the areas cool enough to approach.
>
> Eliot, rising from his seat in the bus, beheld the fire-storn of Indianapolis. He was awed by the majesty of the column of fire, which was at least eight miles in diameter and fifty miles high. The boundaries of the column seemed absolutely sharp and unwavering, as though made of glass. Within the boundaries, helixes of dull red embers turned in stately harmony about an inner core of white. The white seemed holy (200-01).

Rosewater's vision of the imaginary fire-storm marks his insanity. Be blacks out for one year. When he awakens he finds himself committed to a mental hospital. During the year's lapse of Eliot's memory, he comes to grips with Dresden and reaffirms man's place in the universe. What Vonnegut had accomplished in Rosewater is the creation of a hero who understands that man exists independently of any real spiritual source, and who discovers a way to

nourish himself. This solution, however, created another problem for Vonnegut. As John Somer writes:

> It took him [Vonnegut] four more years to unite Rumfoord's theory of time and Bokonon's theory of dynamic tension into a structural principle for his Dresden book. It took him four years to dramatize the gap in Rosewater's life, the gap that defined the problem of contemporary man and its answer, four years to conceive his schizophrenic manner of writing, an aesthetic that could re-create and nurture a hero destroyed by Dresden.[36]

The structure of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater is unlike that of Cat's Cradle and Mother Night, in that it begins at the beginning rather than after the fact. Not since Sirens has Vonnegut traced the spiritual growth of a hero. Between Sirens and Rosewater Vonnegut had to make two attempts at coming to terms with the world, defining what relationships exist between man and the forces which necessitate events. As noted in the chronological progression of Vonnegut's novels, what he had been doing is breaking logical relationships among events. The point is that, by the time Vonnegut had finished writing Cat's Cradle, he realized that there are no particular relationships among events themselves or between man and events. Bokonon's theory of events is simply, "what happens is meant to happen." There are no particular relationships except that everything happens for the good of everything else. After Cat's Cradle, Vonnegut needed a structure

---

[36] Ibid., p. 228.

to depict Bokonon's theory of events and the dynamic tension that exists among them.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater spans two hundred seventeen pages which are separated into 14 chapters. Each chapter, though, is sprinkled with Rosewater crests which tend to break the flow of the narrative allowing the narrator to change the train of thought at mid page--or anywhere he wishes. These small units of narrative run from as few as two to as many as eighteen per chapter. There are a total of one hundred fifty nine narrative units throughout the text of Rosewater which results in about 1.1 pages per segment as opposed to about 1.8 pages in Cat's Cradle. Even though Rosewater is not told in an exact chronological order, the spiritual growth of Eliot Rosewater tends to flow along a linear concept of chronological development; it is the events which surround the life of Rosewater which are juxtaposed with chronological time. The omniscient narrator does not feel compelled to give order to the way events occur. The reason for the disparity between the growth of Rosewater in relation to his world is that Rosewater's life assumes a type of mythic quality in which he sees himself one way and the world another. Rosewater attempts to assume a transcendental concept of self and from time to time lives in a private psychic world. Rosewater's vision of reality floods into his conscious mind only when he is forced to descend to socially acceptable levels of conformity. When

Rosewater occasionally "comes down" to reality, he views events as being disjointed with one another.

The development of the narrative in Rosewater follows a distinct cause and effect pattern. The most striking aspect of this pattern, though, is that Vonnegut has constructed it on two levels. One level is representative of the world from which Rosewater gradually tries to escape, and the other level is representative of Rosewater's private world which, for Rosewater, remains basically unaffected by the other, more insensitive world. Peter Reed contends that, "It [the world from which Rosewater wants to escape] is a world in which madness commonly passes for the standard for sanity, and [Rosewater's private world is] where sanity appears neurotic."[37] As long as Rosewater remains content to view both worlds as being viable in their own right, he is able to maintain his schizophrenic condition. But Rosewater's mistake is trying to find relationships between the two worlds when, in fact, none may exist. Because Rosewater is victimized into thinking the insanity of a world more brutal than that of his own "sane" world could actually filter in and affect change, he is guilty of the fallacy of post hoc, ergo propter hoc.

John L. Schneider defines this Latin phrase as

---

[37] Reed, p. 147.

" . . . the error made when we assume that B follows A, A has caused B. Priority in time does not always mean causality, and although event B occurs immediately after event A, it is not certain that A has caused B to occur."[38] Even though the events in Rosewater's love oriented world, as well as the events in the world which lies outside his realm of compassion and understanding, follow a chronological development, Rosewater cannot see any relationships between sanity and madness. He insists in viewing one as causing the other when, in fact, this is not the case. Rosewater's romantic notion of duty is that, for him, the world must be either/or, but not both. Sanity and madness cannot coexist as a standard of normalcy for Rosewater. Rosewater's personal "crime" which causes his loss of harmony is that he tries to be true to himself and, at the same time, see a sense of logic in the workings of society. The result is that Rosewater cannot decide if his allegiance should lie with his true notion of self or with the insanities of the world. Ultimately, Rosewater is victimized into thinking that living in two worlds at once is immoral. Consequently, he goes insane. It is Rosewater's insanity as manifested in schizophrenia which provides the aesthetic mode for recreating his own concept of self, a self which had been brutalized by his own society.

---

[38] John L. Schneider, Reasoning and Argument, p. 44.

The structure of Rosewater, in addition to illustrating the dualality of the world's sanity and madness, also illustrates the hero's nearly perfected concept of spatial consciousness. Because Rosewater feels threatened by his environment, events in his life seem non-naturalistic, Eliot's consciousness is unable to restore a sense of order to events in relation to chronological time. Events in the novel exist in spatial patterns which not only reflect the sensibility of Eliot Rosewater, but also the twentieth-century sensibilities of modern western man.

Eliot Rosewater is Vonnegut's first hero who responds affirmatively to the madness in the world. He comes to terms with Dresden which appears to be the cause of his neurosis and is able to redefine his role in the world. What Vonnegut needed to create after Rosewater was a framework into which he could place a hero who has been reborn. He needed to create a novel, the structure of which, could reflect the spatial consciousness as manifested in Rosewater's schizophrenia. Slaughterhouse-Five, then, is the novel which explains Eliot's schizophrenia and dramatizes the impact of Dresden on Eliot's life.

This chapter has shown how Vonnegut, through four novels, has created a hero, provided a means for that hero to progress from a broken wreck of a man (Malachi Constant) to a person (Eliot Rosewater) who knows who he is, where he

is going and how he is going to get there. The emphasis of this chapter has been on the idea that Vonnegut has moved from a worn concept of linear consciousness (Player Piano)--which does not work very well in terms of explaining man's spiritual dilemma in a contemporary space-age, to a spatial consciousness which more accurately depicts modern man as a victim of circumstances and shows him a way to reconstruct himself and find the way home. The only problem remaining for Vonnegut was to purge himself of the Dresden experience by using Eliot Rosewater's schizophrenia as a basis. This is what Vonnegut has to do in Slaughterhouse-Five before he can start over and begin living again.

CHAPTER IV

SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE: SPATIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Slaughterhouse-Five is the novel Kurt Vonnegut had been trying to write ever since he began his career as a novelist. It is his "famous Dresden book." It is also an affirmation of Vonnegut's belief in himself.[39] But most importantly, Slaughterhouse-Five depicts the aesthetic, spatial consciousness, which allows Vonnegut's hero, Billy Pilgrim, to "survive" in the modern world. In the first chapter of Slaughterhouse-Five, Vonnegut writes, "When I got home from the Second World War . . . I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden" (2). Vonnegut goes on to say that all he thought he would have to do would be to report what he had seen: "But not many words about Dresden came [to his] mind then--not enough of them to make a book, anyway" (2). The problem with writing about Dresden was that the implications of the bombing of that city went much deeper for Vonnegut than its mere destruction.

---

[39] Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Slaughterhouse-Five, Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1969, Delta-Dell, 1969. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis within the text of this chapter.

CHAPTER IV

SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE: SPATIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Slaughterhouse-Five is the novel Kurt Vonnegut had been trying to write ever since he began his career as a novelist. It is his "famous Dresden book." It is also an affirmation of Vonnegut's belief in himself.[39] But most importantly, Slaughterhouse-Five depicts the aesthetic, spatial consciousness, which allows Vonnegut's hero, Billy Pilgrim, to "survive" in the modern world. In the first chapter of Slaughterhouse-Five, Vonnegut writes, "When I got home from the Second World War . . . I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden" (2). Vonnegut goes on to say that all he thought he would have to do would be to report what he had seen: "But not many words about Dresden came [to his] mind then--not enough of them to make a book, anyway" (2). The problem with writing about Dresden was that the implications of the bombing of that city went much deeper for Vonnegut than its mere destruction.

---

39 Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Slaughterhouse-Five, Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1969, Delta-Dell, 1969. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis within the text of this chapter.

For Vonnegut, much more had actually been destroyed. As John Somer writes:

> Vonnegut was taught to believe in the perfectibility of man, in the marvels of science and technology, and he was taught that he should assume a role in the creation of a "brave new world." His early heritage was reinforced when he studied chemistry in college, where he was taught to believe in the predictability of the material universe. He was brought up to believe that science and technology would ennoble man and advance civilization, but in the war Vonnegut discovered that the opposite could also be true. He watched science and technology debase man, saw it magnify his brutishness, not his compassion. He watched science and technology destroy, in fourteen hours, a thousand-year-old city, a symbol of man's cooperation, a monument to his nobility. He saw the "fairy-land" city of Dresden reduced to its essential chemical properties, saw man's "artificial thing" reduced to its "natural" state. Vonnegut watched his dream of progress feed its "light's flame with self-substantial fuel, / Making a famine where abundance" once lay.[40]

The problem Vonnegut had was not what to write about Dresden but, instead, how to write about it.

In Slaughterhouse-Five Vonnegut writes about a hero, Billy Pilgrim, who has "come unstuck in time." Billy, born in 1922--the same year as Vonnegut--is an optometrist in Ilium, New York. Billy, married with two children, visits various moments from his past, present, and future. Vonnegut describes Billy's condition, "Billy is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren't necessarily fun. He is in a constant state of stage fright,

---

[40] Somer, pp. 222-23.

he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next" (20). The story, then, does not follow a chronological order. Events are juxtaposed to one another with " . . . numberous time shifts between . . . sequences . . . and . . . periods. Seldom do more than two pages fix on one date."[41]

The narrative of Slaughterhouse-Five, if adjusted to fit a chronological pattern, would evolve as follows: Billy Pilgrim, prior to World War II lived in Ilium with his parents. Because his father was an optometrist, when Billy graduated from high school, he attended the Ilium School of Optometry. Taking time out of school for the service, Billy was sent to Europe where he was a chaplain's assistant before being captured by the Germans and put in a prisoner of war camp in Dresden, Germany. While in Dresden, in the celler of a slaughterhouse, (slaughterhouse-five, hence the title of the book) Billy saw the City of Dresden incinerated in a firestorm. Once back from the service, Billy again enrolled in the Ilium School of Optometry. Billy later married Valencia Merble, the daughter of the founder and owner of the school.

In 1967, Billy is kidnapped by a flying saucer from Tralfamadore where he is displayed naked in a zoo with Montana Wildhack, an Earthling blue movie star. The

---

[41] Reed, p. 174.

Tralfamadorians teach Billy truths about time and give him insights about the fourth dimension, a dimension which Earthlings know nothing about because they cannot see it.

On Earth, Billy spends several years trying to convince people that his trip to Tralfamadore was real and offer other Earthlings the same insights that he had been taught on Tralfamadore. Finally on February 13, 1976 (ironically, the same month and day Dresden was destroyed), while giving a lecture on flying saucers, time and death, Billy is shot and killed by a crazed gunman. Death for Billy is simply a "violet light and a hum." He, then, swings back into life, "visiting this moment and that."

Thus, Billy Pilgrim becomes literally, a Pilgrim. He is on a pilgrimage through time and space. In short, Billy's vision of life is "different" from that of other people. Vonnegut's social theme in Slaughterhouse-Five concerns the modern Everyman who feels a sense of estrangement from society. Billy's alienation from society is, symbolically, a symptom of the alienation felt by many people who live in the twentieth-century. The problem which Billy faces is that he has been programmed to act in certain ways at certain times; he has little control over how and when he acts next, Billy is depicted as being a machine. For example, once during the war Roland Weary, a hateful comrade of Billy's was trying to kill him. Vonnegut writes, "Weary drew back his right boot, aimed a kick at the spine, at the tube which

had so many of Billy's important wires in it. Weary was going to break that tube" (44).

As Billy travels in time, he sees many events as happening independently of other events which surround them. For Billy, chronological time is nullified. He is encased in a field of total spatial consciousness, consciousness which depicts the workings of the world as not being dependent on any definable force. There is no explanation as to why Billy is unstuck in time. It just happened: "The moment was structured that way." In Vonnegut's journey through six novels, he has been trying to isolate and define the reason why things happen. He has been trying to discover a boon for mankind, which could adaquatly depict the obvious disparity between absurd events and man's natural tendency for order.

Actually, even though Billy's travels appear to be void of any real structure and purpose, they do indeed have a definite order and direction. He is travelling in time back to the Dresden experience so that he can purge himself of the guilt associated with being one of the few to survive it.

In Slaughterhouse-Five, Vonnegut needed to perfect the sensibility which he had been striving to come to terms with through his first five novels; a sensibility which could portray the lot of modern man. Because Vonnegut felt that man could no longer relate to the role of technology

due to its destructive effect on society, he needed to invent an alternative to the convention of chronological time in which the rapid expansion of science and technology exist. The only salvation for Vonnegut was to somehow escape the influence of the system, but still be a part of it. Having previously created a hero, Eliot Rosewater, who had discovered the redeeming properties of a schizophrenic condition, Vonnegut needed to create a hero who could embrace that condition as an aesthetic for survival in the modern world.

Structurally, Slaughterhouse-Five, is not only an extension of Rosewater's schizophrenic vision of a disjointed world, but it explores and fills in the one year gap in Rosewater's mind. The novel, therefore, is representative of a state of mind. Since Vonnegut had discovered schizophrenia to be a "widespread and simple boon," he next needed a new consciousness, or "mainstream" in which such a boon could exist. Because the nineteenth-century concept of order no longer exists, its attendent theory of chronological time also is meaningless. Therefore, Vonnegut needed a new discipline to order events. The result is that he needed to spatialize time. As Spencer writes:

> . . . the spatialization of time in the novel is the process of splintering the events that, in a traditional novel, would appear in a narrative sequence and of rearranging them so that past, present, and future actions are presented in reversed, or combined patterns; when this is done, the events of the novel have been "spatialized," for the factor that

> constitutes their orientation to reality is the place where they occur. One of the most obvious effects to be achieved by means of this process is simultaneity; the representation of two or more actions in different places occurring at the same moment in time. In this way, a novelist may activate a great many characters in a great many situations that are intended to take place simultaneously, or he may dissolve the distinctions between past, present, and future as they are dissolved in dreams and in the stream-of-consciousness flow.[42]

The notion that place orients events to reality is important because it is through Vonnegut's spatialization of time that he is able to get "home" again--or at least back where he started, Ilium. Place is important. The major themes of Vonnegut's first six novels, when taken together, tend to be circular. If one were to assume that Billy Pilgrim is a spiritually perfected form of Paul Proteus from Player Piano, also a citizen of Iliun, then Vonnegut has brought his new hero home, or at least back to a familiar but better place. In Billy Pilgrim's Ilium, there is no mention of a "bridge across the Iroquois," no notion that the city is divided.

The most significant thing about the unity of hero and place in Slaughterhouse-Five is that unity is achieved because of Billy Pilgrim's ability to achieve spiritual harmony with himself. Billy has become indestructible. Billy's spiritual immortality is in accordance with what

---

[42] Spencer, pp. 156-57.

Joseph Campbell describes as the ability to achieve a "spirtual double," an external soul not afflicted by the losses and injuries of the present body, but existing safely in some place removed."[43]

The place to which Billy has become removed is a schizophrenic state of mind. Billy's ability to use his schizophrenia as a boon allows him to receive "an image of life that is surprising and beautiful and deep" (76). In short, Billy's vision is a modified vision of actual reality. Billy, unlike Vonnegut's other heros, has learned that asking questions is of little value. Billy, instead, seeks answers. The Tralfamadorians provide conforting answers for Billy that do not merely diagnose man's troubled soul but offer a substitute reality for actual truth. For Billy, a substitute reality is better than no reality at all. The comforting, "The moment is structured that way," and "It had to happen," is good enough.

Billy is Vonnegut's ultimate hero. He is a symbol of the modern man who has attained a level of consciousness which depicts a balance between good and evil, a manifestation of Bokonon's dynamic tension. Because Billy's experiences on Tralfamadore combined with his being unstuck in time, he ahs a true vision of Earthling reality and a

---

[43] Campbell, pp. 174-75.

limited concept of the reality that exists in the fourth dimension, but with the help of his Tralfamodorian friends, along with him memory of past, present and future, Billy's vision of non-relationships among events becomes a remedy for Earthling ailments. The dynamic tension of Billy's life is kept high at all times and therefore never succumbs to the intensified stresses of either good or evil. Like the doctors in Kilgore Trount's novel who could not understand the cures for man's diseases because they were all in the fourth dimension, Billy never understands the causes for catastrophes like Dresden. Furthermore, Billy never completely understands the forces which assert themselves on man. Billy is in a continual state of equilibrium. It is this state of equilibrium between man and his world which Vonnegut had been trying to come to terms with since Player Piano, Billy's harmony with life and himself is depicted in the structure of the novel.

Slaughterhouse-Five is "somewhat" of a Tralfamadorian novel. On the title page of the novel, Vonnegut announces that, "THIS IS A NOVEL SOMEWHAT IN THE TELEGRAPHIC SCHIZOPHRENIC MANNER OF TALES OF THE PLANET TRALFAMADORE, WHERE THE FLYING SAUCERS COME FROM." Later in the novel, Billy learns that a Tralfamadorian novel is composed "in brief clumps of symbols separated by stars" (76).

At the same time Billy discovers the structure of

the Tralfamadorian novel, A Tralfamadorian points out to Billy that

> each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message--describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn't any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of man marvelous moments seen all at one time (76).

It is the concept of the Tralfamadorian novel which provides the basis for interpreting the structure of Slaughterhouse-Five.

Slaughterhouse-Five is a frame story, a story within a story. The first and last chapters of the book are autobiographical. Chapters two through nine comprise the story of Billy Pilgrim. According to the Tralfamodorian concept of order in the novel there is no beginning, middle, or end. Because Slaughterhouse-Five is a Tralfamadorian novel of sorts, one would expect that this would also be true of the novel. It is. But there is, however, a definite structure. As Reed points out:

> While Slaughterhouse-Five may appear to be wandering and random, an example of Vonnegut's tendencies toward the episodic and the digressive indulged to the extreme, it actually possesses an intricately designed structure. The author's description of his efforts to outline this story, climaxed by his making his "prettiest one" on the back of a roll of wallpaper with his daughter's crayons, seems entirely

> appropriate. Billy Pilgrim is at one point described as trying to reinvent or restructure his life, while in telling the story Vonnegut tries to give form to the same experiences. At the center of Vonnegut's material--in the wallpaper outline it is cross-hatched across the sheet--is the Dresden raid. From that central event he extends a web outward in time, space and characters. But "web" is a poor metaphor; one might as easily say that he "tunnels into" the experience of find its meaning. Time, space and event coexist and coalesce in this novel, and that is what the structure attempts to convey.[44]

The main narrative thread in Slaughterhouse-Five is the story of the bombing of Dresden. In the novel, Vonnegut places the insanity of the Dresden massacre in the same perspective as other insanities which his hero sees. On the same page, Vonnegut is able to move freely from the meaningless absurdity of Billy's father-in-law's favorite Polish song "he liked so much."

> Me and Mike, ve vork in mine.
> Holy shit, ve have good time.
> Vunce a veek ve get our pay.
> Holy shit, no vork next day.

to an absurdity he encountered in the war, "a farm laborer who was being hanged for having sexual intercourse with a German woman (134). The apathetic, guilt free, "So it goes" after each reference to death seems also to be applicable to the emptiness of all Earthling existence. The point is that Vonnegut, in Slaughterhouse-Five, no longer views the Dresden experience as something to remain ashamed of,

---

[44] Reed, p. 178.

something which happened independently of all other Earthling stupidity. By writing Slaughterhouse-Five in the "schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamodore," Vonnegut did not have to implant morals, causes or effects which do not exist.

The Dresden massacre and the wartime events leading up to and away from it lie at the heart of the narrative. Furthermore, even though these events appear not to follow a chronological order, the opposite is indeed true. The fact that Billy is "unstuck in time" allows him to associate other insane events with the war. He is able to move freely into and out of the it. The result of Billy's schizophrenic level of awareness is that he can see two worlds at once; neither one, for Billy anyway, suffers a greater degree of destruction. He sees all events as having had to happen. As the Tralfamodorians answer Billy when, upon being kidnapped, he asks, "why me?"

> "That is a very Earthling question to ask, Mr. Pilgrim. Why you? Why us for that matter? Why anything? Because this moment simply is. Have you ever seen bugs trapped in amber?"
> "Yes." Billy, in fact, had a paperweight in his office which was a blob of polished amber with three ladybugs embedded in it.
> "Well, here we are, Mr. Pilgrim, trapped in the amber of this moment. There is no why" (66).

According to the Tralfamadorian concept of the novel, they are written in clumps of symbols, "each clump of symbols is a brief urgent message--describing a situation, a scene . . .

Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other" (76). An example of this is the way the Dresden experience is written. The Dresden experience is presented similarly to the way one would watch a television movie with occasional interruptions for commercials. After the commercial is over, the movie resumes where it left off. In Slaughterhouse-Five, Dresden is the "movie"--told in chronological order. The "commercials" are other narrative threads. If one were to mark out all of the parts of the novel which did not deal with the war and Dresden, the remaining Dresden parts would be presented in chronological order. The point is that the "clump of symbols" which portray Dresden do depict an "urgent message," the message that Vonnegut had been trying to write since he began his career as a novelist. The result is that even though there may not exist a "particular relationship between all the messages,"

> they ofter do show a kinship of theme or image, and they cohere to create "an image of life: which, while not always "beautiful," is frequently "surprising" and in total effect quite "deep." Because all of its scenes cannot be read simultaneously, the book comes closer to possessing a climax than does the Tralfamadorian novel. It is hard to single out one climactic event, be it the raid itself or the ironic execution of Edgar Derby, but the novel certainly builds toward the end where the meaning, the questions and the emotional impact come together.[45]

---

[45] Ibid., p. 180.

The emotional impact of Slaughterhouse-Five lies in the fact that Billy is able to coexist with his memories of the traumatic Dresden experience along with the meaninglessness of his life in Ilium. Billy has learned that all events are interrelated in their meaninglessness. Because Billy is an optometrist, he is the first of Vonnegut's heroes to "see" the human condition as it is. Billy no longer tries to understand events on a cosmic scale, but, instead, accepts reality as being meaningless.

Slaughterhouse-Five is Vonnegut's "famous Dresden book." The sensibility of chaos and banality of the post World War II world lies at the heart of the novel. Unlike Joseph Heller's hero, Yossarian, in Catch-22, Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim does not run away. He in fact goes back home, if for no other reason than to get the inside of his head sorted out. Also, unlike Yossarian's remedy of temporary escapism, Billy, with the help of the Tralfamadorians, prescribes a remedy for his own inability to understand the system: he believes that there exists no particular reason why things happen; they just happen. Vonnegut, like Billy, has also quit looking for explanation. In the first chapter of the novel, Vonnegut says, "I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and axiety and time" (2). At the end of that chapter, Vonnegut writes, "People aren't supposed to look back. I'm certainly not

going to do it anymore. I've finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun" (19).

In his next book, Breakfast of Champions (1973), Vonnegut writes, "I think I am trying to make my head as empty as it was when I was born onto this damaged planet fifty years ago . . . This book is a sidewalk strewn with junk, trash which I throw over my shoulders . . . "[46] In Slaughterhouse-Five, Vonnegut had purged himself of the guilt associated with Dresden and created a consciousness which allows his characters to understand themselves in relation to the twentiety-century. The only task remaining is to find a rationale for recreating his much longed for folk society. Breakfast of Champions is his first move in that direction.

---

[46] Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Breakfast of Champions, Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1973, Delta-Dell, 1973. This and all subsequent references to Breakfast of Champions in the following chapter are taken from this edition, and are indicated in parentheses.

CHAPTER V

"OLLY-OLLY-OX-IN-FREE"

In Mother Night Vonnegut's hero, Howard W. Campbell, says that he wishes America would call out "Olly-olly-ox-in-free" so he could come out of hiding (34). In a sense this wish is almost a subconscious wish for all of Vonnegut's major characters, and even for Vonnegut himself. In Breakfast of Champions (1973), Vonnegut, having successfully come to terms with Dresden and brought himself and his hero home, writes, "I think I am trying to clear my head of all the junk in there . . . I'm throwing out characters from my other books, too. I'm not going to put on any more puppet shows" (5). Throwing out characters, "giving them their freedom," is what Vonnegut does in Breakfast of Champions. Having to "start over" after Dresden and "coming home," Vonnegut writes, "I feel as though I am crossing the spine of a roof--having ascended one slope" (4). Vonnegut writes, "I am cleansing and renewing myself for the very different sorts of years to come (293).

Breakfast of Champions marks Vonnegut's second beginning. He writes, "I have no culture, no humane harmony

in my brains. I can't live without a culture anymore" (5). Vonnegut is trying to find the folk society of his father's "brave new world." Vonnegut's crossing the spine of a roof indicates that he is in the middle of a journey. Perhaps for him the hardest part is over; it is time for an easier journey. Nevertheless, Vonnegut writes in the preface to his new book, Wampeters Foma and Granfalloons (1974),[47] "I happen to have my equilibrium now" (xxiv). Vonnegut goes on to explain:

> 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 in 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 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

---

[47] Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Wampeters Foma and Granfalloons, Opinions by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1974, Delta-Dell, 1974. As of this writing this work is not available to the public; it is in an uncorrected page proof form. A portion of this work was graciously supplied to this author by Dr. John Somer, Assistant Professor of English at the Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas.

> is the planet Earth, which is forever at the exact center of the implication, midway between tips.
>
> All the twinkles and glints in the night sky might as well be sparks from a cowboy's campfire, for all the life or wisdom they contain (xxv).

Vonnegut, like the Earth, "which is forever at the exact center of the implication, midway between tips," is also at a mid-point in his life and his career as a novelist. For Vonnegut, "Midland City" is a good place to dismiss the past and pursue Genesis. Breakfast of Champions is Vonnegut's seventh novel; it is also a point of departure for Vonnegut's pursuit of the Genesis.

Breakfast of Champions is about the meeting of two people, Dwayne Hoover, a Pontiac dealer in Midland City, U.S.A., and Kilgore Trout, a science fiction writer from New York. Trout is on his way to Midland City to attend the Midland City Arts Festival. Kilgore Trout will give information to Hoover which will cause him to go insane: he is already on the brink of insanity.

The climax of the novel occurs in the cocktail lounge of the Midland City Holiday Inn. The three principle characters are Kilgore Trout, Dwayne Hoover and their author, Kurt Vonnegut. Kilgore Trout gives some information to Hoover from his novel, Now It Can Be Told; the information is this: "You are the only creature in the entire Universe who has free will. You are the only one who has to

figure out what to do next--and why. Everybody else is a robot, a machine" (253). This information triggers a response in Hoover which causes him to go on a rampage in which he injures or "beats the daylights" out of several people. A broken wreck of a man, Dwayne Hoover ends up on Skid Row, as Vonnegut ends the last chapter, "He doesn't have doodley-squat now . . ."(280).

Perhaps, the most important part of Breakfast of Champions is the epilogue. In the epilogue, Vonnegut gives all of his characters their freedom, what he said he was going to do at the beginning of the novel. Vonnegut, confronting a somewhat timid Kilgore Trout on a street in Midland City, announces:

> "I am approaching my fiftieth birthday, Mr. Trout. I am cleansing and renewing myself for the very different sorts of years to come. Under similar spiritual conditions, Count Tolstoi freed his slaves. I am going to set at liberty all the literary characters who have served me so loyally during my writing career.
>
> You are the only one I am telling. For the others, tonight will be a night like any other night. Arise, Mr. Trout, you are free."
>
> "Bon Voyage," I said.
>
> I disappeared (294).

The last words Vonnegut hears Trout say are, "Make me young . . . !" The epilogue ends with the prophetic, "ETC."

Breakfast of Champions is a starting point. Its beginning and ending are ironically reversed. The beginning is really the ending. It is not exactly the end of the

novel, but it is the ending of Kurt Vonnegut's obsession with trying to find the reasons for things. Because of his journey through Slaughterhouse-Five, Vonnegut has come to terms with the idea that there is no why. Things have to happen. The beginning of Breakfast of Champions is in reality the ending of Vonnegut's preoccupation with "trash" as he calls it. Vonnegut is working through Breakfast of Champions toward a new beginning. He not only dismisses the banalities of the world, but also does not want anything to do with his own creations as depicted by the freeing of his characters.

The title Breakfast of Champions is significant in that it is not only "a registered trademark of General Mills," but because it suggests a beginning, a new day. One can almost envision Vonnegut yelling for Billy Pilgrim and his other "champions," "Wake up; it's time for breakfast; time to start over." On a symbolic level, then, the title of the novel along with its sub title, "Goodbye Blue Monday," suggests a new beginning.

Thus, after an arduous journey through six novels, Kurt Vonnegut's literary career may head in a new direction. He successfully defined the problems his characters must face in the world, and methodically resolved aspects of these problems in his first six novels. In Player Piano, he named the ground of his home, Ilium, and established the problems

created by technology. In The Sirens of Titan, he invented a symbol for a transcendent theory of time, a chrono-synclastic infundibulum. In Mother Night, he created a realistic setting for the first time, even though it destroyed his hero. In Cat's Cradle, he interjected a fabulous geodesy into a realistic setting and, thus, provided the philosophical premise that enables his characters to survive in a mad world. Armed with such a success, he allowed his next hero, Eliot Rosewater, to confront an illusion of Dresden. Eliot's insanity provides the basis for Billy Pilgrim's eventually conquest of Dresden. The consciousness Vonnegut created for Billy allows him to live within the problems of Ilium that destroyed Paul Proteus in Player Piano.

Vonnegut's technical achievement in these six novels is the creation of a means of structuring narrative elements that would manifest the consciousness of his heroes. He began writing novels using the conventional linear concept of time. Novel by novel, from Player Piano on, Vonnegut shortened the length of a narrative unit from an average of eight-and-one-half pages to units numbering only a few sentences in Slaughterhouse-Five. The shorter he made his units of narration, the easier he found it to break with a linear progression of events and order his story spatially. As he moved from a linear awareness of order to a spatial awareness of order, he found it easier to create characters who could function in a world that appeared to be totally

chaotic. An analysis of the structure of the novels from Player Piano to Slaughterhouse-Five reveals Vonnegut's experiments with narration and characterization and charts the evolution of Billy Pilgrim's spatial consciousness. That this artistic journey proved valuable to Vonnegut as a man is confirmed by the presence of Breakfast of Champions, his greeting to the future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Campbell, Joseph. The Hero With a Thousand Faces. Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1970.

Frank, Joseph. The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963.

Fromm, Eric. "Afterword" to 1984 by George Orwell. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. Afterword 1961 by the New American Library of World Literature, Inc. pp. 257-267.

Klinkowitz, Jerome. Somer, John (eds). The Vonnegut Statement. New York: Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1973, New York: Delta-Dell, 1973.

Laing, R. D. The Divided Self. London: Cox and Wyman Ltd., 1970.

Laing, R. D. The Politics of Experience. New York: Balantine Books, 1967.

Orwell, George. 1984. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1949.

Reed, Peter J. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. New York: Warner Books., 1972.

Reich, Charles A. The Greening of America. New York: Bantam Books, 1971.

Scneider, John L. Reasoning and Argument. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967.

Scorer, Mark, et al, (eds). Criticism. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948, pp. 379-92.

Spencer, Sharon. Space Time and Structure in the Modern Novel. New York: New York University Press, 1971.

Toffler, Alvin. Future Shock. New York: Random House, Inc., 1971.

Vonnegut, Kurt. "The Happiest Day in the Life of My Father." Address to the Wilbour Blashfield Foundation. Ceremonial of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Ins itute of Arts and Letters. May 26, 1971

_____. Breakfast of Champions. New York: Delacorte/ Syemour Lawrence, 1973, New York: Delta-Dell, 1973.

_____. Cat's Cradle, New York: Delacorte/ Seymour Lawrence, 1973. New York: Delta-Dell, 1963.

_____. God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater. New York: Delta/Seymour Lawrence, 1965, New York: Delta-Dell, 1965.

_____. Mother Night. New York: Delacorte/ Seymour Lawrence, 1961, 1966, New York: Delta-Dell, 1961, 1966.

_____. Player Piano. New York: Delacorte/ Seymour Lawrence, 1952, New York: Delta-Dell, 1952.

_____. The Sirens of Titan. New York: Delacorte/ Seymour Lawrence, 1959, New York: Delta-Dell, 1959.

_____. Slaughterhouse-Five. New York: Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1969, New York: Delta-Dell, 1969.

_____. Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons, Opinions by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. New York: Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1974, New York: Delta-Dell, 1974. (As of this writing this work is in an uncorrected page form.)

(unsigned). "Playboy Interview: Kurt Vonnegut, Jr." "Playboy", July, 1973, pp. 57-60, 62, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74, 214, 216.