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Funny Comment, Sad Context: A Literary and Linguistic Analysis of Humor in Kurt Vonnegut’s Novels

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1. Introduction to paper

Money is as good a reason as any to write fiction and become good at it. Among other things, Kurt Vonnegut's career is proof of this fact, since one major factor that compelled him to begin writing, just as it had previously compelled his mother to start writing, was money. For Kurt Vonnegut was born in a time when fiction writing in America was still a well paid career and it would continue to provide decent revenue to any capable author when Kurt was a young adult working as a correspondent for General Electric. Magazines gave a lot of money even to unknown writers, provided the author could make his texts slick enough, which Vonnegut could. So he began to write because to gain money. How he continued to write was how he gained fame.

Known as a postmodern writer, among other things (humanist, Neo-Luddite, spokesman, essayist, playwright, funny man), Kurt Vonnegut in fact was a precursor to the very cultural current he is so well identified with today. Long before artists of the 1960's and 1970's proceeded to deconstruct the standard values that had long been considered as sacred, including, or perhaps especially in art, Vonnegut was busy in the late 40's and all throughout the 50's throwing into question the fundamental beliefs of his country in particular, and of mankind in general. Among his earliest conclusions is perhaps best expressed through the epitaph of his third novel *Mother Night* (1961) which says that *we are what we pretend to be, so we should be careful what we pretend to be*. This statement epitomizes a notion which bothered the young author for over a decade before he could finally express it in such simple words, the notion that reality, as we envision it, is nothing more than a construct, a byproduct of our own skewed perception. This idea, which would soon after become the hallmark of a cultural age, frightened the few critics that read Vonnegut's early works, because their implications threatened to do away with objectivity, universal truth and other such elements that had previously provided society with a sense of stability. Though this meant that the author had to endure hardships for many years, it never stopped him dead in his tracks and when he finally began to receive recognition for his efforts, Vonnegut never ceased in his struggle for alternative views and for innovation.

One of the most remarkable aspects surrounding Kurt Vonnegut as a writer is just how much he was an artist of his own time. A man with a purpose, he embarked on a life-long

mission that he truly considered to be sacred (as he had mentioned several times in his speeches and his writing), which was, as James Joyce had put it years before, to forge an image of the conscience of his race. In Vonnegut's case, that "race" was present-day humanity and for many decades, right up to the end of his life he struggled to understand the human condition and to share his knowledge with anyone who will listen in the noble hope that his efforts would compel people to better themselves and the world they lived in. A writer who "never wrote a story with a villain in it" (Vonnegut 1969:8), he had the habit of judging mankind's actions, but never blaming anyone in particular and never asking his readers more than to make the best of their situation and to act as decently as they can, as he tried to. His self-imposed objectivity (which he encouraged people to see as personal, rather than universal objectivity) sometimes stirred some consternation, as in the example given by Jerome Klinkowitz late in life in which Vonnegut, after so harshly criticizing the Bush administration for starting the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, was nevertheless happy, honestly happy, when The First Lady Barbara Bush sent him a letter declaring herself a long-term fan of his writing. This is because, while the tools he used to gain his knowledge were experience and observation, the manner in which he transmitted further his wisdom was in no way didactic, or with a superior sense of self-worth, but rather with compassion, understanding and humor.

So much could be written about this artist, whose bibliography spans thirteen books, two short story volumes, a play and numerous essays and separately published short stories. For the purposes of the present paper, however, the focus of attention will be narrowed down to the humor that Kurt Vonnegut used in his writing, following its evolution from the earlier stages of his career on to more mature works. The difficulties in this endeavor are twofold. The first issue is the matter of the selection of material, since the number of texts is substantial, as has already been mentioned, yet at the same time the traits of one text will surely be found in others, especially if they were written around the same period. For the sake of clarity and in the hopes of covering a substantial block of Kurt Vonnegut's career, I have chosen three novels to analyze in particular, while references to other works will emerge where and when they are needed. The novels in question are *Cat's Cradle*, *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Deadeye Dick*. More than with most other writers, what the author wanted to say in his works cannot be ignored, since his intent when composing them was a wholly pragmatic one – to get some specific ideas through to his reader. In this sense, as will be shown, the first of the three selected novels is arguably the best

illustration of the concerns that Kurt Vonnegut had during the first half of his career, namely the blind faith in scientific research that is otherwise left morally unchecked, as well as the condition and future of humanity as a whole. The second novel is one that marks a drastic shift in theme and style, wherein conventional storytelling is circumvented and autobiographical elements are introduced, thus making Vonnegut's writing hereafter all the more personal in nature. The last novel represents the byproduct of this shift, as well as a stepping stone for his use of humor.

This brings us to the second obstacle in the elaboration of the present paper, namely the sheer breath and complexity of the very notion of *humor*. Indeed, as will be shown below, it is difficult to handle a concept which has been held in consideration for over two millennia, which has evolved into so many forms alongside the human race that created it, and which is today studied by researchers from multiple fields of study, whose theories are often incompatible. In order to avoid an overly complex analysis that might quickly dissolve into a series of contradictions and loose ends, a narrowing of perspective must be adopted, all the while making sure that the scope of the analysis does not become too restricted. As such, I have opted to focus on the humor in Kurt Vonnegut's texts from only a literary and linguistic perspective, since the art form belongs to the first, the medium in which it expressed belongs to the second and both are closely related and thus highly compatible. What will thus follow throughout the paper is an interpretation of the novels, followed by a literary and linguistic analysis the humor they contain, conducted for each text in turn and comparatively. The source of the literary analyses will be mainly the novels themselves, while the linguistic analysis will be performed on the basis of a breakdown of the texts conducted in accordance with the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) postulated by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin. The intended aim of this paper is to identify elements that might aid in mapping out the way in which humor functions in Kurt Vonnegut's novels as well as the manner in which it evolves throughout his career.

For this purpose the paper will be separated into four major chapters apart from this one. The first presents an overview of the history of the concept of *humor*, beginning from its ancient Greek origins and going all the way to the way the phenomenon is analyzed today. The fields of study that are touched upon are those of Philosophy, which encompasses the earliest considerations of humor, Psychology, which came in the game later to provide insight into the phenomena from a behavioral and neurological point of view, as well as considerations from

Literary Studies, which have worked in tandem with Philosophy to explore the depth of humor and, last but not least, from Linguistics, where ample studies in the field of verbal humor has resulted in substantial progress. In addition, this chapter also discusses the evolution of the concept itself and the transition undergone from a traditional relationship where humor was considered a byproduct of the comic to the contemporary view in which the former is an overarching concept and the latter is only one of its components. The difference between humor and irony is also touched upon, since the latter is often a tool used by Vonnegut in his works. Lastly, given the leviathan nature of the concept of humor, the chapter concludes that a definitive universal definition is not possible to conceive, since there are simply too many paths that can be taken and too many theories that are incompatible with one another. Instead of an ecumenical definition, what I will work with instead are those considerations that are limited to the fields of Literary Studies and Linguistics, whose approximation to one another ensures the maintenance of coherent theory which can provide relevant results.

With the vectors of humor established, the next major chapter focuses on Kurt Vonnegut and his novels. Thus the first subchapter of this section provides a biographical account of the author's life, which is vital to understanding the nature and characteristics of his novels, since Vonnegut, in departing from the mentality that preceded him, whereby the text should be interpreted outside the considerations of the author (in accordance to the theories of T.S. Eliot), made a point of communicating specific ideas through his fiction to his reader and had the habit of inserting numerous autobiographical elements into his work. The following three subchapters each take on one of the novels that the present paper analyzes, with separate smaller chapters laced in for all major aspects that should be considered regarding the texts. Thus the analysis of *Cat's Cradle* presents the text first of all as the novel that attracted the attention of the American Counter-Culture Movement which had such a huge impact on the social and creative endeavors of the young men and women of the 1960's and 70's. That this novel was frequently read and spread around the members of this community, especially college students, contributed vastly to the establishment of Kurt Vonnegut's public speaking career. Moving onto the novel itself, I present *Cat's Cradle* as a land filled with monsters, not in the literal sense but in that the monstrous acts of cruelty, indifference or just simply ignorance of the various characters in the novel all converge and guide the world they live in towards its all but inevitable destruction. How seriously the reader should take what he encounters becomes a complicated issue, which is

why the next part of this subchapter deals with the relationship between scientific truth and harmless lies, considering the benefits and limitations of both in our lives. Lastly, the question of what everything in the novel means is discussed and the final consideration postulated in *Cat's Cradle* is the manner in which we interpret the world around us and the meaning of life which we in fact invent for ourselves.

The next subchapter deals with *Slaughterhouse Five*, the author's most famous novel, and the part tackles the circumstances surrounding when and why Vonnegut chose to write it. Afterwards, I turn the attention towards the plot of the novel and, more importantly, the innovative style which in many ways secured the author's rise to fame. The next part of this subchapter presents the distorted, sickly nature of the characters in the novel, which have been made out to be weak and clumsy because of the war. One of these characters, Billy Pilgrim, is portrayed as a Latter Day Christ and the next section deals with the manner in which this image is created and exploited in the novel. Even though this character is also the protagonist of *Slaughterhouse Five*, Kurt Vonnegut goes to great strides to separate himself from Billy Pilgrim, and the section entitled 'Vonnegut vs. Billy Pilgrim' explains why he does this and how. Apart from his distinction to his own protagonist, Vonnegut also creates numerous allusions to the Biblical figure Job and then distinguishes his own conclusions in which we must draw our own significance from the random pain we must endure in life, whereby Job's revelation is that it is all for the greater good imposed by God. The seventh section of this subchapter deals with the Tralfamadorians, those illusive aliens that appear to be all-knowing, as well as Billy Pilgrim's ability to travel in time, and considerations are drawn as to whether either his ability or the aliens are real or whether the protagonist of the novel is insane. The final section, entitled 'Death in *Slaughterhouse Five*' deals with the enormous proliferation of death in *Slaughterhouse Five* and its function in the novel, as well as the manner in which mankind does and should deal with it.

The third subchapter deals with *Deadeye Dick*, a novel that signifies Vonnegut's coming to terms with fame and wealth, as well as hinting at the future direction in which his work takes. The first section of the subchapter entitled 'Getting personal' deals with the increase in autobiographical elements in Kurt Vonnegut's novel and his desire to move away from the trauma of surviving Dresden and towards dealing with the issues of his own childhood. The next section pauses upon Vonnegut's obvious need to revive the character Celia Hoover, which first

appeared in passing in the novel *Breakfast of Champions* but which now reemerges as fully-rounded in *Deadeye Dick*. The fourth section of this subchapter presents the protagonist Rudy Waltz as the only decent man in the novel for, despite having committed a double murder as a child, is the only one who proceeded to adequately repent for his deed and to redeem himself by abandoning his love of weapons and embracing art. Finally, the fifth section deals with the manner in which *Deadeye Dick* is a postmodern novel as well as the similarities that emerge between the text and those postulated by the Tralfamadorians in *Slaughterhouse Five*.

With the life and works of Kurt Vonnegut now presented, the fourth major chapter deals with the manner in which humor manifests itself. For each of the three novels a subchapter is provided which in turn contains two sections, one dealing with a linguistic interpretation of humor, the other with a literary one. For any of the texts a formal linguistic model is created with the help of the Attachments found in this paper, as well as an analysis of the six Knowledge Resources, as postulated by the GTVH. In addition, the literary interpretation provides insight into the manner in which the humor of each novel relates to the themes of the text and their interpretation by the reader. Once all this has been established, the fourth section of this subchapter takes on a comparative approach to what has already been considered in order to establish similarities and differences in the humor across all three novels. This in turn make it possible to determine which elements of humor are basic and remain basic to Kurt Vonnegut's artistry and which elements change, evolving at the same pace as does his literary career.

Finally, the forth major chapter is a conclusion that draws upon all things previously considered and once again presents in large numbers what this paper has managed to illustrate and prove.

2. Contemporary perspectives on humor

In what follows, a detailed presentation of the concept of humor will be provided, in the hopes of our coming to better terms with the issues faced when tackling this notion. Diachronically speaking, humor is at once one of the most frequently discussed and one of the most thoroughly ignored elements of human life. Why do we laugh? What do we laugh at? What makes something or someone funny? These are just a few of the questions revolving around humor which have appeared in scientific and philosophical works time and again beginning with Ancient times. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Freud, Bergson are just a few names out of the many thinkers that have at least paused upon the subject of humor. According to Attardo (1994), Goldstein and McGhee (1972) have identified over 400 books written in the Anglo-American space alone with humor as their main thesis, and this merely during the first half of the 20th century. Under such circumstances, one would expect the characteristics of humor to be well known and a clear definition to be readily available. Yet, this is far from the truth. The reality of the matter is that, despite its age, *humor* as a serious issue (if we ignore the apparent paradox of taking humor seriously) is a very modern and contemporary one, which poses many problems in regards to its nature and its forms of manifestation. As Isabel Ermida puts it, “humor has many facets and many academic constructions, as well as many terminological shades, which a tradition of interdisciplinary distance has tended to overlook and confuse” (Ermida 2008:1). When one can find humor in actions as well as in words and in objects and in expressions, it becomes difficult to see what all these elements have in common so as to extract any essence that may be universally deemed humorous.

The present paper thus deals with perspectives on humor precisely because its nature in any essentialist point of view is well beyond the scope of such a project. Although the problem of defining humor will be discussed, the purpose here is in fact to present the manner in which various thinkers of yesterday and today have dealt with humor, paying more specific attention on contemporary approaches.

2.1. Origins of the term

It is customary for the type of presentation intended in this paper to contain a quick look into the origin of the term discussed and an exception from this convention will not be made here. However, attention must be drawn to the fact that, unlike with other terminology, there exists a considerable discrepancy between the word *humor* and the study of this concept. For most concepts, such a discrepancy is marginal or even historically insignificant. Thus it is safe to say that, for example, the term *poem* dates back to ancient times, when people began analyzing this artistic form. *Psychology* as a concept appeared around the same time when the science itself began to emerge. In contrast, while the issue of humor is extremely old, the term *humor* itself is, by comparison, rather new in its present meaning.

The medical term *humour* – synonymous with *black bile*, which is one of the four fluids which regulate human behavior, as postulated in the theory of Hippocrates (Ermida 2009:4) – may date back to ancient Greece, but “it was in the 17th century that, all around Europe, *humor* slowly began to enter the lexical field of the comic. The term gradually expanded so as to cover a behavior which [...] escaped the social norms” (ibid). At this stage, it was still a neutral concept, in the sense that it was not deemed either good or bad, but merely an imbalance which caused one to laugh. It would take another two hundred years of evolution (if we may call it that) for *humor* to be seen as something positive and it is really only in the last century that any serious work has been done to understand it. In order to make sense of this slow evolution and of what humor is considered to be today, we must take a step back for but a moment and review some of the major considerations regarding this concept.

2.2. Historical background

It is perhaps strange to begin any attempt at understanding a concept with some aspects of its historical background rather than with a definition of the concept itself, however, in the case of humor, such an approach seems necessary. As it was briefly stated in the introduction to this paper, there are several scientific domains that deal with humor and each of them does so in their

own way. The result is that each of them has their own understanding (and definition, more or less) of what they see as *humor*. In what follows, some of the more important fields of study will be presented, together with some of their major contributors.

2.2.1. Philosophy

Most researchers would agree that the first to theorize upon humor was Plato (although he refers to laughter) who saw it as “a mixed feeling of the soul, i.e., a mixture of pleasure and pain” (Attardo 1994:18). In *Philebus* Plato claims that we laugh at (and therefore find humor in) our friends’ shortcomings, which are a direct result of their inability to know themselves. However, because we, as spectators to an instance of comedy, ultimately take pleasure in the misfortunes of others (who are not our enemies), Plato concludes that laughter is in turn a sign of moral weakness and ultimately places the comic in the category of malice, since laughing makes our bodies feel good, but taking pleasure in the pain experienced by others stains the soul.

Historically speaking, he was followed by Aristotle and then by Cicero (see Attardo, 1994:26) among a few less significant others who touch upon the matter, after which there came a long period of virtual darkness during the centuries when Christianity deemed the matter unworthy or even sinful to discuss. Why the Church took such offence towards humor, or why pre-Christians did so is an interesting issue in and of itself, and here Morreall (2009) presents a theory that is worth pausing over.

Looking at both ancient and medieval society, the form of consideration in regards to humor was generally expressed within the framework of a comparison between two literary genres, namely the tragedy and the comedy, with the first being classified as significantly superior to the second. What Morreall (2009) presents is an interesting hypothesis that explains both this traditional form of favoritism and, ultimately, why things are so very different today. He begins by tackling the notion of *amusement*, which psychologically is considered to be the human reaction to humorous stimuli. Unlike others, Morreall states that amusement is not in fact an emotion, that “amusement is so different from standard emotions that it is not useful to count it as an emotion at all” (Morreall 2009:28). He argues that a standard emotion is a specific

reaction to one's environment characterized by a momentary desire and triggers physiological changes in our bodies. His example is expressed in the scenario where a person is in danger of being attacked by a dog. Upon detecting this danger, the man's immediate desire is to escape being bit and this desire in turn triggers the release of adrenaline. The result is the standard emotion known as *fear*. If we fear something, our desire is to avoid it and if we love something, we want to bring it closer to us. When we find something funny however, as Morreall states, it is not necessary to like or dislike our object of amusement, that is to say, we have no specific desires towards the object in question. On the contrary, a specific level of detachment is necessary in order to find something amusing. This idea is not new. Henri Bergson (1998[1901]) pointed out that humor requires "a momentary anesthesia of the heart". If a drunk person falls down some stairs we as spectators can react in one of two ways: we can empathize (that is to say, we have an emotional response to the event) with the man and in this case we would feel sadness or fear, or we can detach ourselves from the situation, view the drunk man's fall as a somewhat mechanical act of buffoonery and thus we find the whole event amusing.

Considering amusement not as an emotion but, on the contrary, as a detachment from any sentimental response is vital to Morreall's hypothesis on the difference between traditional and modern society and on why the former favored tragedy over comedy, while the latter sees matters the other way around. It should be made clear that, since "tragedy fosters an attitude towards life based on emotions, and comedy fosters a non-emotional, playful attitude", what is really discussed in this tragedy vs. comedy debate is the affinity towards either emotional response or rational detachment to life in traditional and contemporary society. As Morreall accurately points out, Ancient society was militaristic in nature. The existence of a people was largely dependent on a military commander's ability to make quick decisions and upon its soldiers to follow these orders unquestioningly. Failure to abide by such strict conduct meant that there was a very high risk of invasion, which often had very disastrous consequences. It seems obvious then that Ancient society was largely based on survivability, on one's capacity to adapt to surrounding dangers and, as such, on one's ability to control and channel various emotions like anger and fear. Because emotions are closely tied to our basic animal instincts that help us adapt and survive, they also display a degree of rigidity, in the sense that if one is confronted with the same stimulus twice, not only will his emotional response be the same, but the way in which this response manifests itself will be largely similar. When emotional, "we do not think

carefully, critically, or imaginatively: we may not think at all. And so, in an outburst of anger at our children, say, we may automatically yell the same words we yelled the last time they angered us” (Morreall 2009:79). Tragedies are artistic constructs which embody precisely this rigid form of emotional response to the world. Far from being able to detach themselves, in the hopes that they may find some alternative solution to a dilemma, tragic heroes often find themselves trapped by rigid conformities, whose rational authenticity they, by definition, are unable to analyze. It is not surprising that a society whose survival depends on conformity and emotional responses would feel much closer to the tragic hero than to a comic one, who can simply put into use an array of non-conformist solutions.

When we think of the Middle Ages, we think of the rise of Christian society, which may not have been necessarily tribal anymore, but was one which was still based on emotional response, since it was a world where unyielding obedience to a military commander simply became the unyielding obedience to king and clergy. It is not surprising then that the Church frowned deeply on humor. However, after the Enlightenment period and with the growing affinity towards rational thought, society began shifting away from a survival-based, emotional lifestyle. Today, very much unlike the ancient world, “treating life as a series of battles is a source of harmful stress” (Morreall 2009:81). Where once anger and fear were appropriate responses to outside stimuli, today they are considered irrational and counterproductive. Objective analysis of a situation in order to identify proper solutions is, on the other hand, what we strive to master. It is not surprising then that humor, with its detached, rational nature should be favored in contemporary society. And if we accept Morreall’s hypothesis, it would also give a reasonable explanation as to why humor was traditionally considered as being of lesser value, or even a danger, and why, from the beginning of the 20th century, it has become an important academic and social concern.

The transition from a society that frowned upon claims for a serious analysis of *humor* to today’s perception began perhaps with Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and then with Emmanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. From here onwards, at least as far as the field of Philosophy is concerned, the easiest way of understanding the myriad of considerations is perhaps by looking into the major theory *types* that were constructed and have since been built upon. These are the *Incongruity Theory*, and the *Disparagement Theory*.

The *Incongruity Theory* encompasses “the idea that humor results from the combination of dissimilar elements and feeds on the consequent surprising effect” (Ermida, 2008:25). Any given narrative construct, as well as any situation, is made up of elements and patterns of occurrence which are normally predictable to an extent. The *Incongruity Theory* states that, when the conclusion of a narrative or of an event defies our expectations, the discrepancy between our expectations and reality is what makes us consider the entire event as being humorous in nature. Kant is without a doubt the forerunner of this theory. In his *Critique of Judgment*, he analyzes laughter, together with what is arguably the most common source of verbal humor: the joke (consequently he is also one of the first to consider the joke as a viable object of study, an object which linguists will later focus on almost exclusively). Kant sees laughter as a “play with aesthetic ideas”, which offers gratification “by mere force of change” (Kant 2007[1790]:201). This *change* is understood to be a form of reduction; hence Kant concludes that “Laughter is an effect arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing” (Kant 2007[1790]:202). As a quick example, let us consider the following: In the 1943 *Looney Tunes* cartoon *Falling Hare*, Bugs Bunny is trapped in a plane that is hurdling to the ground. As the earth appears ever closer, the viewer is expected to become increasingly tense now that a dramatic crash seems imminent. However, just before slamming into the dirt the plane suddenly stops and hangs in midair inches above the ground, as it has run out of gas. According to Kant’s theory, this sudden shift from the viewer’s expectation of a crash to a state in which all is fine would be here the source of humor.

Though Kant never uses the word *incongruity* per se, those who have done so – see Shopenhauer (1818) – have obviously been influenced by his philosophy. The term itself then began to be used by other fields of study, particularly linguistics. As Attardo (1994:49) points out, “incongruity theories are conceptually closer to linguistic theories of structuralist descent because they are essentialist. This higher degree of closeness has led to the frequent classification of linguistically based theories with incongruity theories”. By *essentialist* Attardo means that both theories strive to determine what the common denominator is for all accounts of humor (they try to find their essence). It would be wrong, however, to consider that all linguistic theories are incongruity theories. This fact is most fortunate for the former, since the latter is not without flaws. One fundamental problem with the *Incongruity Theory* is that it assumes that the reaction to a discrepancy will be amusement, even though it is safe to say (at least empirically)

that this is not always the case. When faced with a surprise, one can just as easily feel fear or even anger, and the *Incongruity Theory* has no definitive means of explaining why amusement is the reaction in some cases and why in others it is not.

The *Disparagement Theory* is arguably far more historically grounded than the *Incongruity Theory*, since its consideration of humor as a negative element can be traced all the way back to Plato's warnings against excessive public displays of laughter. Also called *Hostility Theory*, *Aggression Theory*, *Superiority Theory*, etc, it is based on the notion that any instance of humor entails the existence of two central elements: the *humorist* and the *butt of the joke* (or victim), where the former is placed at a vantage point in relation to the latter. Thomas Hobbes is one of the more known advocates of this theory. His opinion was that people are naturally individualistic and ultimately cruel, and so it makes sense that one should find true delight in the misfortunes of others (and not anywhere else) because we do not share in their misery, a fact that in some way makes us superior to them. In some form or another, the *Disparagement Theory* continued to exist well into the 20th century. Bergson, for example, theorized that humor was a kind of social corrective, which implies some notion of superiority towards the person that requires correcting. The limitations of the theory are perhaps obvious. Despite the fact that there is no actual evidence to support the claim that, when looking at the *butt of the joke* we necessarily feel superior to it or want to harm it, it is also unreasonable to assume that in every instance of humor there must always exist some form of hierarchy.

2.2.2. Psychology

The most significant contribution to humor studies in the field of psychology is arguably Sigmund Freud's *Release Theory*. Precursors to the theory, as Morreall points out (2009:16), go back to the essays by Lord Shaftesbury and Spencer, who thought of any kind of outward expression as our way of releasing some specific emotion that has been building up inside us. But it is Freud who took this idea and tried to provide it with some scientific validity. His theory, outlined in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), is that "laughter releases energy that was summoned for a psychological task, but then became unnecessary when the task was

abandoned” (Morreall 2009:19). A drunken man falls down a flight of stairs. Upon seeing this happen, we immediately fill up with emotions of fear and pity. Then at some point we are given an indication that we are meant to detach ourselves from the tragic nature of the event (perhaps we are reminded that we are in a theater, watching a comedic play). Having no more use for the built up energy, we release it through laughter and consider the entire event as being humorous. On the face of it, the theory seems sound, except for the fact that there is no actual way of proving that every instance of laughter is the result of pent up energy. Indeed, in the same empirical manner in which Freud came to his conclusion, we could argue that there is no (and cannot be any) accumulated emotional energy where instant comic situations are involved, or where the humor in a text comes from a simple play on words. Indeed, in the example given by Morreall (2009:20) – “Fleas / Adam / Had’em” – it is certainly difficult, if not impossible, just what emotion builds up in the second one needs to read the short text, which would then need releasing.

2.2.3. Literary Studies

Despite the fact that considerations over the characteristics and value of comedies (be them epic or dramatic) goes back to Ancient Greece, it is safe to say, as Attardo does that for most of this period in history “literary criticism was intertwined with philosophical and psychological thought on humor” (1994:51). Indeed, to a great extent this is still so, since the process of analyzing humor in a literary text continues to rely on data taken from other fields, such as psychology or even linguistics, in order to try and explain the phenomenon in question (that is to say, how the humor in the text functions and why). In any case, apart from the work done by Freud, another text that has had some significant influence in the analysis of humor in the field literary criticism is Henri Bergson’s *Le Rire* (1998[1900])

Relying on a presupposed interpretation of comedic literary works, Bergson’s basic theory is that one laughs at a sort of mechanical rigidity of movement (Bergson 1998[1900]:28). The presupposed interpretation is the one where a spectator, for example, at a comedic play knows that, unlike in serious dramas or tragedies, where the intended focus is on a character with some

particular traits, here he must concentrate on the traits of the character themselves (Bergson 1998[1900]:31). What Bergson is essentially talking about here is what we today would call *rational detachment*, namely the act of emotionally separating oneself from the event we are witness to. Watching a man slip on a banana peel can either make us feel fear and pity or make us laugh, depending on whether we choose to relate to the pain that the fallen man must be feeling or to the mere mechanical act in motion. This act of detachment is still considered today as being a vital condition in the perception of humor, a fact which certainly speaks to the importance of Bergson's contribution. Where *Le Rire* begins to lose strength is in the notion repeated throughout the text that humor is a social phenomenon, a claim which, even empirically, is limited. A person can certainly imagine himself laughing by himself (hence, without the presence of other individuals) and at a scene that lies outside of society (something he observes in nature). Another criticism lies in the fact that Bergson's analysis is not actually applicable to the humor that comes from wordplay or on a potentially vast amount of jokes, where the narrative element present (if it is present at all) does not necessitate any transition from a natural state to an artificial one. The theory in *Le Rire* is perhaps too rooted in the visual (be it something the spectator sees or the reader imagines). As a result, it cannot, for example, account for the linguistic elements that make a text humorous. In addition, although Bergson answers the question of *what* is humorous, he fails to account for *why* it is so. He says that the focus on the mechanics of a scene or of an event rather than on its nature is what we laugh at, but the problem of why the mechanical or the unnatural is humorous of all things (it could just as easily be horrifying) is left unexplained.

2.2.4. Linguistics

Despite its relative youth as an independent field of study, linguistics has provided the most concise analysis into humor. Unlike in other sciences where we at best have research into humor conducted briefly by scholars who otherwise specialize in other areas, in linguistics there are people who focus specifically on verbal humor in an attempt at understanding precisely how a humorous text is constructed and what about it is humorous. As in the case of psychology

(though more so here) it is unnecessary to comment upon every linguistic theory of humor, assuming that such an endeavor is at all possible. Among the more notable scholars are Julien Greimas, Violette Morin, John Morreall, Viktor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo, though there are many others (for a more complete list, see Attardo (1994)). Their methodologies, areas of focus and perspectives may differ significantly, but they do have certain things in common. For one thing, until very recently the focus has been almost exclusively on jokes and joke-like texts, perhaps due to the simplicity of their textual forms. Because of this, in what follows I will follow the same method of presentation of the linguistic theories of humor found in Attardo (1994) and thus begin with the way in which a joke is thought to be constructed, followed by some concrete theories into what makes it funny and finally with a more contemporary look into how one may go about analyzing humor in texts other than jokes. In order to understand the way in which a joke-like text is constructed, as Attardo explains, we must begin with Greimas' *Isotopy Disjunction Model* (IDM).

Greimas (1966) begins his analysis by determining “the smallest units of meaning, which he calls *semes*” (Attardo 1994:65). These units, as the definition implies, are components of a slightly larger construct called a *lexeme*, which contains what can be understood as meaning(s). It is a notion that is similar to the semantic markers hypothesized by Katz and Fodor, with the added value that here Greimas highlights how the emphasis on some semes and not on others in a given context helps to determine the momentary meaning of the lexeme. Thus, if we take the lexeme [HEAD], it can refer to the specific part of the human body, in which case the seme VERTICALITY is highlighted. On the other hand, the same lexeme can be used in a structure like “the head of the column”, in which case ORIZONTALITY is more prominent. From here, Greimas makes two important observations: the first is that every lexeme has “at least one seme which does not change in the various contexts” (Attardo 1994:66). Such a type of seme is what he calls the *semic nucleus* (Sn) and is what ultimately separates one lexeme from another. If we take the lexeme [HEAD], the two semic nuclei that exist are EXTREMITY and SUPERATIVITY, since, regardless of the context, what is considered to be the *head* is always placed at an extremity and is always in front or above everything else. The second observation, which is highly pragmatic in nature, is that the rest of the semes come into play depending on context and for classification purposes Greimas calls them *clasemes* (Cs). The combination of semic nuclei and clasemes create the overall meaning of a lexeme in a given context and this

meaning is called by Greimas a *sememe* (Sm). Thus, in abstract form, the meaning of a word can be rendered as followed:

$$S_m = S_n + C_s$$

When we place two or more sememes into a sentence, we can achieve an overall meaning of the text, but only if “its elements have one or more clasemes in common” (Attardo 1994:69). This meaning, which is “compatible with all the elements [of the text]” (ibid) is what Greimas calls the *isotopy*, or *sotopic meaning*.

Greimas’ model of the sentence is not without problems (for one thing, it can be considered too simple), but his notion of *isotopy* is important when discussing the meaning of a joke. Let us consider the example given by Greimas himself:

- (1) “At a sophisticated party, two guests are talking outside.
‘Ah’, says the first, in a satisfied tone, ‘nice evening isn’t it?
Magnificent meal, and beautiful *toilettes*
(=lavatories/dresses), aren’t they?’ ‘I wouldn’t know’,
answers the second. ‘What do you mean?’ ‘I didn’t have to
go’” (Greimas (1966), in Attardo 1994:63).

Up until the second speaker’s remark *I wouldn’t know*, the text constructs the “mundane” isotopy, by using such clasemes as MUNDANE and +SOCIALITY (Attardo 1994:69). However, the end remark creates a register switch that brings up the clasemes PRIVATE (-SOCIALITY) and BODILY FUNCTIONS. The implication behind Greimas’ observations is a vital one, which today is considered by humorists to be a general fact: that in a joke-like text “two (or more) isotopies remain present after all the linguistic mechanisms have applied” (Attardo 1994:73), or, simply up, that such a text has two or more meanings. According to Attardo, Charaudeau (1972), who follows the basic considerations of Greimas’ model, while focusing on the *disjunctor* (the linguistic element that triggers the second meaning in the joke) also remarks that “the passage from one isotopy is caused by a linguistic element, but is also *camouflaged*” (Attardo 1994:82). In other words, the additional second meaning of the text is kept hidden until the end, when the disjunctor (which today is commonly called *the punch line* of the joke) comes into play.

As Attardo further explains, Violette Morin (1966), another scholar inspired by Greimas’ work, played a further important role in development of the understanding of jokes. Being interested in the way these texts are constructed, she presents a set of three functions that always

appear in a fixed order. They are (a) the *normalization* function (F1), which presents the narrative baseline of the joke, (b) the *interlocking* function (F2) which establishes a problem that must be solved, and (c) the *disjunction* function, which solves the problem humorously (Attardo 1994:86). Thus, in joke (1), F1 is fulfilled by the setting in which two men are talking at a party. F2 is connected to the dialogue that introduces the word *toilette*, which has two distinct meanings, while F3 is found in the final remark, where the second man's remark *I did not have to go* humorously establishes that the second meaning (that of a lavatory) is the one which is used. It should be noted, however, that not all jokes necessarily contain all three functions (or that one or more of them can simply be implied. As proof, Attardo (1994:88) gives the following example:

- (2) "Can you write shorthand?"
"Yes, but it takes me longer"

In this case, the narrative portion of the joke (F1) does not actually exist in the text (one could argue that it is simply not important). Still, these cases form, when compared to the sum total of jokes, an extremely narrow category and it is safe to say that the typical joke will contain all three functions. It should also be noted that they appear in the text (again, in most cases, not all) in order. First the narrative background is established, then the problem is presented and finally we have the punch line close to the end of the text.

After these breakthroughs in the understanding of the humorous text which postulate the existence of a specific structure of the joke-like text, a lot of work has been done in order to account more fully for the many unanswered questions that still remain. In the late seventies, when "script theories" emerged to account for the way in which the lexicon is organized, a number of scholars applied these theories to humorous texts. Thus it was that in 1985, Victor Raskin presented, in his book *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, a formal semantic theory that contains the main and sufficient elements that a single-joke-carrying text must have in order for it to be humorous. The theory is based on semantic scripts which, as his colleague Attardo Salvatore mentions, are "organized chunks of information about something (in the broadest sense)" (Attardo 1994:198). An example of a semantic script is available below:

- DOCTOR:
 - Human, adult
 - Highly educated – attended medical school

- Receives patients and treats them, either at the hospital or at home (in the past, in some western cultures, the patient came to the doctor's house for a consult, or in some other parts the doctor came to the patient)
- +contextual elements

Using scripts as central tools, Raskin's *Semantic Script-based Theory of Humor* (SSTH) stipulates that in order for a single-joke-carrying text to be humorous, "the proposed set of necessary and sufficient conditions consists of the following two semantic properties: first, in order to be a joke, the text should be *partially or fully compatible with two different scripts* and secondly, a *special relation of script oppositeness* should obtain between the two scripts" (1984:14, emphasis mine). Consider, for example, the following joke:

(3) "Is the doctor home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper.

"No", the doctor's lovely wife whispered in reply, "Come right in."

From the first words in the text – *doctor, patient, bronchial* – we can identify the [DOCTOR] script, and this is what can be considered the first reading of the text, which is not in any way humorous. The word *whispered* in the second line and the wife's invitation to come in are however not compatible with the above script. In simple terms, they don't make sense within the initial reading. These elements make up what Raskin calls the *trigger*, which forces the reader to reread the text one or more times, until finally the second script [LOVER] appears, which makes the previously non-compatible elements fit into place. The two scripts, as can be seen, are both compatible, at least partially, with the text. Since the doctor is married, there are also opposites in terms of faithfulness/unfaithfulness, or sex/no sex. Thus the two conditions of the SSTH are met and the text is humorous.

In order to explain how he came to this pair of necessary conditions, Raskin begins by presenting the joke as a form of *non-bona-fide communication*. By *bona-fide communication*, we understand a communication that "is governed by the *co-operative principle* introduced by Grice (1975), according to which the speaker is committed to the truth and relevance of the text, [while] the hearer is aware of this commitment and perceives the uttered text as true and relevant" (Raskin 1985:124). In other words, there is an expectation at play in a normal conversation whereby the speaker conveys meaningful and truthful information (as far as he is concerned). The hearer assumes the relevance of the speaker's words to the degree that, no

matter the circumstances, he will give the latter the benefit of the doubt and proceed to always look for less likely (but still possible) relevant interpretations, when the obvious one fails to make sense. In joke telling, however, we are dealing with a form of communication whose intended meaning is different from (or even antithetical to) the information that is literally provided in the text. Although Raskin doesn't mention this, we can think of jokes as *performative texts*, in the spirit of Austin (1962), since the purpose in telling a joke is not that of conveying relevant information but of making the reader/hearer laugh.

Based on the premise that the joke is non-bona-fide in nature, Raskin points out that there are four communicational situations in which a joke is conveyed: in the first case the speaker does not intend to make a joke and the hearer does not expect a joke to be uttered. In this case some form of bona-fide communication is maintained, since the ambiguity of the text is not perceived by the hearer and thus unintentional information which would turn the speaker's text into a joke is overlooked. This will sometimes happen when the hearer is a non-native speaker and is thus unaware of the less conventional interpretations of some word uttered by the speaker. The second situation is one where the speaker intends to provide a bona-fide communication but the hearer perceives it as a joke. This is the very definition of unintentional humor, in which the speaker is not aware of some unconventional yet possible interpretation of his words, which the hearer in turn perceives. For example, when former American president George Bush said that "a lot of imports come from other countries", his intention was to convey this information in earnest. Yet many perceived this statement as being humorous due to the rather obvious tautology (not *a lot*, but *all* imports by definition come from other countries). In the third case the speaker intentionally tells a joke but the hearer does not perceive it as such or did not expect it. In such cases the latter's reaction can vary considerably, from brushing the remark off to being offended, especially if the social context in which the joke is said does not permit such jest (one can imagine that joking about the dead during a funeral might upset some people). So far all three situations have in common (besides being non-bona-fide in nature) the fact that in each case the co-operative principle either fails or is maintained only due to ignorance on behalf of one party or the other (or both). The fourth situation, where the speaker intentionally makes a joke and the hearer expects the joke, is different because here the co-operative principle applies.

Paul Grice based his co-operative principle on the notion that in a bona-fide communication the speaker aspires to respect the four maxims (a fact which the hearer presumes on the part of the speaker):

- (i) Maxim of Quality: Give exactly as much information as required
- (ii) Maxim of Quality: Say only what you believe to be true
- (iii) Maxim of Relation: Be relevant
- (iv) Maxim of Manner: Be succinct

These maxims do not, however, apply well in the case of jokes where the co-operative principle stands, since, for example, it is *not* the speaker's intention to convey meaningful information that is true and the hearer in turn does not expect to receive truth. In order to account for this discrepancy, Raskin (1985:103) goes about adapting Grice's maxims and comes up with the following:

- “(i) Maxim of Quality: Give exactly as much information as is necessary for the joke
- (ii) Maxim of Quality: Say only what is compatible with the world of the joke
- (iii) Maxim of Relation: Say only what is relevant to the joke
- (iv) Maxim of Manner: Tell the joke efficiently”

The presumption is that, by following this new set of maxims a non-bona-fide communication between two or more individuals can exist while maintaining the co-operative principle. What it also implicitly illustrates is an important difference between joking and lying, which is another non-bona-fide mode of communication. In the latter case there is no situation where the co-operative principle can exist, since it is by definition the speaker's intention to provide false information without the hearer knowing this fact. Unfortunately one cannot count on these modified maxims and on the co-operative principle to distinguish a joke-like text from every other forms of non-bona-fide communication. Irony, for example, while very often used in a humorous context, is not necessarily humorous in itself, yet it can easily adhere to Raskin's maxims and can maintain Grice's principle. It follows then that, in order to understand why a joke-like text is humorous, it is necessary to look at the text itself.

As pointed out briefly above, the conditions for a text to be humorous are for it to be compatible with at least two semantic scripts (this creates an ambiguity which singles out joke-like texts from regular, bona-fide ones) and second that there must be a *special relationship of oppositeness* between the scripts. Moreover, after analyzing several jokes, Raskin determines

that the oppositions themselves can be grouped up into three categories. The first is one between “the actual situation in which the hero of the joke finds himself [...] and a non-actual, non-existing situation which is not compatible with the setting of the joke” (Raskin 1985:111). One of the jokes used by the author to illustrate this is the following:

- (4) The Archdeacon has got back from London, and confides to his friend the doctor, “Like Saint Peter, I toiled all night. Let us hope that like Saint Peter I caught nothing

Thus it is understood that the hero’s real life situation is that he was involved in debauchery, this being his actual situation, and not in honest toil, which is the non-existent situation.

In the second situation we have “the normal state of affairs [as opposed to] the abnormal” (ibid). Let us consider the following:

- (5) Should a person stir his coffee with his right hand or his left?
Neither. He should use a spoon

Up until the punch line of the joke the normal state of affairs implies the fact that, regardless of the hand used, the use of a spoon is self-explanatory. It is only with the last sentence that the abnormal image of stirring coffee with one’s bare hand is made apparent to us.

The third and final situation is one where we deal with “a possible, plausible situation and a fully or partially impossible or much less plausible situation” (ibid). Consider the following:

- (6) Nurse: That’s a pretty bad cold you have, sir. What are you taking for it?
Patient: Make me an offer!

The possible situation is obviously one where the patient is sick and the nurse asks him what treatment he is taking. This is opposed to the implied impossible situation where the patient tries to sell his sickness.

As Raskin correctly remarks, despite the non-actual, abnormal or impossible nature of the opposing situation, the text of the joke contains certain linguistic elements which render the unnatural state of these second set of scripts less unnatural. For example, in (4) the punch line may render the archbishop’s pious work out to be non-actual (he was in fact involved in debauchery), however the phrase *toiled all night* can in fact function for either cases, thus making them both compatible with the text. This is at the same time one of the considerations that separates Raskin’s theory from incongruity theories. In the case of the latter, where the idea is that the actual occurrence overwrites and replaces the expected one (the hearer expects one

thing but something completely different occurs, thus rendering the anticipated event mute), in the model postulated by the SSTH the expected and unexpected occurrence or interpretation exist in parallel and it is precisely the possibility of these opposite scripts to co-exist within a text which renders that text humorous.

Another important observation that Raskin (1985:114) makes is the ordering of *triggers* into two distinct categories. As stated above, the *trigger* encompasses the word or words that disrupt the bona-fide reading of the text of a joke and thus force the reader or hearer to search for a second interpretation. The two types of triggers are (i) those that rely on ambiguity and (ii) those that rely on contradiction. Joke (4) is a good example for ambiguity-based triggers, since the phrase *toiled all night* can, in the given context, refer both to honest work and to debauchery. For those that rely on contradiction, let us consider another joke found in Raskin (1985:48):

- (7) A rogue who was being led to execution on a Monday remarked: "Well, this week's beginning nicely"

As the author points out, the trigger lies in the rogue's use of the word *beginning* and is expressed through the contradiction between the imminent end (the man is about to be executed) and the end that is far off into the future, which the very *beginning* implies. It is interesting to point out here (even as a mere passing note) that quite a few Romanian dry jokes seem to generally adopt this second type of trigger. Consider, for example, the following jokes:

- (8) Un Țăran avea un cal, iar calul nu avea nimic împotriva
/A peasant had a horse and the horse had no problems with that/
(9) O cămilă în deșert întreabă pe alta „cât e ceasul?” A doua cămilă scoate un termometru și răspunde „Joi.”
/A camel in the desert asks another “what time is it?” The second camel takes out a thermometer and answers “Thursday”/

In (8) the trigger is found in the words *had no problems* and is expressed through the contradiction between the rational presumption that a horse has no opinions in the way humans do and the possibility presented here of this animal having such ideas. Joke (9) presents a fable-type situation, meaning that we should from the very beginning tacitly accept the idea of camels talking and of one carrying a thermometer. The trigger here is found in the two words *thermometer* and *Thursday* and is expressed by the contradiction between the second camel's

expected reaction, which would involve him appealing to some means of expressing time in seconds or minutes or hours (like a watch) and his/its absurd choice to rely on a device that measures temperature in order to provide a day of the week. What is suggested here is, of course, not that *all* Romanian dry jokes rely on contradiction-type triggers. It is merely an empirical observation that such jokes seem to have a tendency to use them.

Since the appearance of Raskin's theory, a series of endeavors have existed to build upon his work and possibly to extend the basic notions of the SSTH beyond the simple joke-like text. In Attardo (1994) the author manages to take these reactions to Raskin's theory and divide them into two categories, namely *The Expansionist Approach* and *The Revisionist Approach*. The first category "is based on the postulation of an essential deep identity between jokes and other forms of humorous narrative" (Attardo 1994:221). The existence of this *deep identity* essentially means that it is possible to break down any text of any size into an array of script oppositions and then apply the basic premise of the SSTH on these opposing script pairs. As an example of the *Expansionist Approach*, Attardo (ibid) mentions the case of a Polish scholar named Wladislaw Chlopicki who, in an unpublished MA dissertation, tries to take two short stories and break each down into pairs of opposing scripts. As Attardo puts it, his approach "is powerful and yields insightful generalizations" (Attardo 1994:210). If there is a fundamental flaw in Chlopicki's methodology, it is, according to Attardo, that what the Polish scholar proposes is the idea that script oppositions are found all throughout a short story in the same way as it is found all throughout the text of a joke. In other words, he "obliterates the differences among texts that can all be reduced to the same set of binary oppositions; for example, nobody would claim that a short story is equivalent in every way to a joke, yet, according to Chlopicki [...] they can both be described in almost the same terms" (ibid).

The *Revisionist Approach* entails "taking the SSTH as a theory of the text-type 'joke' and devising the tools necessary to handle those features that characterize texts other than jokes" (Attardo 1994:222). What this means is that, instead of seeing to what extent Raskin's theory can apply to other texts, this approach takes from the SSTH only those concepts which it would need in order to devise a *new* theory which would function on other types of texts. One theory that resulted from such an approach is that of Attardo, in collaboration with Raskin, namely the *General Theory of Verbal Humor* (GTVH). First postulated in 1991, the GTVH "is broadened to include all humorous texts, at any length. Specifically it is not limited to narrative texts, but also

to dramatic and conversational texts, in which there is no narrator” (Attardo 2001:28). Rather than a semantic theory, the RTVH is a general linguistic one that is based on distinct *Knowledge Resources* (KRs) that “must be tapped into when generating a joke, in addition to the script opposition from the SSTH” (Attardo 1994:223). These resources are (i) *Language*, (ii) *Narrative Strategy*, (iii) *Target*, (iv) *Situation*, (v) *Logical Mechanism* and (vi) *Script Opposition*. The first includes all the verbal information that goes into the construction of the text, including its lexical structure and semantic values. This is the resource that the reader uses in order to make sense of the text itself before any humorous interpretation is carried out. The second resource accounts for the fact that a text is by definition “cast in some form of narrative organization, either as a simple narrative, as a dialogue, as a (pseudo-)riddle, etc” (Attardo 1994:224). Resource (iii), as the name suggests, pinpoints the “butt of the joke”, which is especially important when dealing with aggressive forms of humor. In this case the absence of this KR would mean that the reader/hearer would understand that the text is meant to be humorous but fail to comprehend what it refers to. Of course, not all humorous texts have a specific target in mind. In this case, the KR still exists, but is rendered empty. The fourth KR, *Situation*, illustrates that any humorous text is about something in a broad, rather than specific sense. In joke (7), for example, it is about a rogue who is on his way to be executed.

The *Logical Mechanism* KR “is the parameter that accounts for the way in which the two senses (scripts, isotopies,...) in a joke come together” (Attardo 1994:225). This is not, of course, limited to jokes, but comes into play when dealing with any instance where two senses are paired and lets the reader/hearer comprehend whether this union is in the form of a juxtaposition or false analogy, and so on. This is also the most problematic of the KRs. In the 2002 article dedicated exclusively to them, “it is probably premature to attempt to taxonomies LMs” (Attardo 2002:17), and even the article itself makes no pretence that it accounts for every instance of the logical mechanisms found in humorous texts. Quite simply, there are just too many unknown and uncertain variables. Nevertheless, Attardo does present a few that appear most often in humorous texts, therefore it would be useful to include them in this presentation of the GTVH. Taking them as they appear in the article, the first LM is dubbed ‘Reasoning from false premises’, in which, true to its name, it describes a text whose humor is based on a logical conclusion that is, however, drawn from illogical premises. The next is ‘Analogy’, where a connection between two distinct elements is created, which in turn produces humorous results. The third LM mentioned

by Attardo explicitly is ‘Missing Link’. In this case, there is a link between two notions – the two semantic scripts – but this link is inferential, which is to say it is placed outside the semantic context of the humorous text. The fourth LM is ‘Coincidence’, which is a fairly straightforward one – a reaction or response turns the text into a humorous one where initially this process was unintended, at least as far as the characters of the text are concerned. ‘Parallelism’ is the fifth LM that Attardo presents and is based on the notion that “syntactic parallelism entails semantic parallelism” (Attardo 2002:12). Therefore, if within a text one establishes a syntactic parallelism between two words, the reader will in turn create a similar connection of meaning between them, even though theoretically this connection doesn’t exist. Derived from this LM comes ‘Implicit parallelism’, with the added factor that in the former the equation is spelled outright, whereas in the latter it must be inferred.

Under the macro-category *Faulty Reasoning* (which is a rather odd one, since, to an extent, all humorous texts are based on a kind of faulty reasoning) are the Logical Mechanisms ‘Ignoring the Obvious’, ‘False Analogy’, ‘Exaggeration’ and ‘Field Restriction’. The first three are fairly self-explanatory. The first is based on the notion that the target of the humor has in front of him the solution to his dilemma and, despite the obvious location of this solution, he manages to ignore it entirely. ‘False Analogy’ appears when the text derives a comparison between two elements based on a premise that is proven to be erroneous. ‘Exaggeration’ is derived out of taking the traits of a certain element and blowing them far out of proportion. ‘Field restriction’ is perhaps easiest to explain in the manner that Attardo does, through the following example:

“The teacher is lecturing about science. While she is explaining mammals she asks questions. ‘Jimmy, can you give me an example of a toothless mammal?’
‘Sure, my grandma’” (Attardo 2002:15)

In his joke, the humor is created through the process of restricting “the field of application of the selectors ‘toothless’ and ‘mammal’ to a much smaller domain (humans)” (ibid).

As far as *verbal humor* is concerned, Attardo mentions the LM ‘Referential Ambiguity’. In this case, a text is constructed in such a way that, as per term, it endows some specific word or phrase with a referential ambiguity that provides it with at least two wholly distinctive interpretations. In the example by Attardo, for instance – “John only makes love to his wife and

so does Paul” (Attardo 2002:16) – the sentence leaves it intentionally unclear as to whether Paul sleeps with his own wife or with John’s.

Though they are not exactly elaborated upon, only mentioned, it is useful for our purposes to pause also upon the LMs ‘Juxtaposition’, ‘Inferring Consequences’ and ‘Vacuous Reversal’, as they are present in the novels studied. The first entails the pairing together (without an actual analogy being introduced) of two elements which otherwise would not be compatible. ‘Inferring Consequences’ is often used in newspaper cartoons. For example, an image with a room that contains a cardboard box with the image of a pogo stick on it and circle-shaped marks in the rug which lead to a broken window. What the image therefore infers, without actually showing, is that someone, a child perhaps, jumped around with the pogo stick and eventually fell through the window. Finally ‘Vacuous Reversal’ refers to the process whereby the humorous text takes the semantic value of the targeted object and inverts that value. The reversal is *vacuous* because, while the two semantic scripts exist in the text as a whole, the trigger at the end effectively erases the initial semantic script, leaving only its counterpart.

Leaving Logical Mechanisms behind, the final KR contains the same notions of script opposition illustrated by Raskin’s SSTH. This is also the most important resource when dealing with humor. The other five KR’s may vary in form or value, some of them may play no role in the perception of humor at all (such as the *Target* resource in non-aggressive humor), but “any humorous text will present a SO” (Attardo 1994: 226). Nevertheless, the existence of all six KRs as components that make up the GTVH is what makes this theory succeed where the SSTH fails (or at least runs into difficulties), namely in dealing with texts other than jokes.

On the basis of this general theory, Attardo (2001) endeavors to illustrate how one might go about analyzing humor in large pieces of text. Here the author takes texts which are very different in nature, such as Oscar Wilde’s *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime* or an episode from the television show *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and breaks them down into formally illustrated components, which in turn highlight the existing humor. In order to explain Attardo’s process, it is perhaps easier to first illustrate the list of symbols that the author uses and then proceed in explaining them (2001:90):

-	Non-humorous text (of any length)
→	End of narrative + material occurring after a punch line

J	Jab line
P	Punch line
[...]	Beginning and end markers of a narrative
...	Any occurrence of – and J
↪	The beginning of a text

Some of the terms illustrated in the table are rather self-explanatory, while others need some clarification. For example, any piece of text has a beginning (↪) and an end (→). A matter which Attardo seems not to explicitly point out but rather take simply for granted is the existence of non-humorous pieces of text (-) within the larger humorous text. He does, however, pause to consider the important role that non-humorous texts play, for example in the development of the narrative or the set up for an impending humorous occurrence (Attardo 2001:89). The notions that do need a bit more explaining are *punch lines* and *jab lines*.

The *punch line* is already a well-established concept and for the purposes of this article it is sufficient to note that it is a segment of a text which disrupts the flow of the narrative for humorous purposes. In a joke it is usually found at the end of the text and is synonymous with Raskin's *trigger*, since it is the word or phrase which forces the reader to go back over the text in search for the new semantic script. In contrast to the *punch line*, Attardo introduces for the first time in 1996 the *jab line*. Unlike the former concept, this one stands out most notably because of the fact that it “does not disrupt the flow of the narrative” (Attardo 2001:83), meaning that it is an integrated element of the narrative (integrated within the context of the text) which creates the script opposition without forcing the reader to reevaluate the previously read piece of text.

It is important to pause as well upon *narratives*, since in any situation a text *is* a form of narrative and it is not always clear what kind we are dealing with. To begin with, Attardo (2001:80) lists certain more or less commonly known characteristics of narratives, as for example the fact that they are texts which relate a story that is told by a narrator. One interesting observation, however, is that “narratives are recursive, i.e., any character in a narrator may initiate another narrative embedded in it” (ibid). This means that any given narrative can either have a potentially infinite number of narratives within it or be, in turn, embedded within a narrative (or even both). This observation leads the author to introduce three additional concepts: *micro-narratives*, *macro-narratives* and *narrative levels*. A *micro-narrative* is “the simplest possible narrative, in the sense that it consists of one action/event”, while a *macro-narrative* is

defined as “any combination of micro-narratives” (ibid). *Levels* are attributed to each narrative in order to illustrate their relationship to one another. In this sense, a macro-narrative at level₀ is the main storyline of the text, the level at which the story typically begins and ends. If within this narrative a character begins to tell a story, the events of that story are placed at level₁.

With both the set of formal symbols above and the classification of narratives in mind, Attardo (2001:90-92) proceeds to give examples of various narratives which are deemed humorous. Although the author does not do so, it is perhaps best to begin with the way in which a standard joke-like text is depicted:

$$(10) \mapsto - P \rightarrow$$

Thus we have a text whose beginning is followed by non-humorous text, followed by the punch line of the joke and then the end. Since the text is inherently simple in nature it only contains one main narrative level. A larger text would potentially be far more complex and Attardo gives an example of this, taken from Peachman’s *A Merry Discourse of Meum and Tuum*:

$$(11) \mapsto \dots [\mapsto - P \rightarrow] - [\mapsto - J - J - P \rightarrow] \rightarrow$$

Example (11) (considered for the purposes of this illustration as an independent text) begins at narrative level₀, where no instance of humor occurs. This is followed by an interceding piece of text that is at level₁ and which is joke-like in nature (since it contains a punch line placed at the end), then by a return to the main story line and finally with another instance of a level₁ narrative. This second text is in turn more complex than the first as it contains jab lines apart from the final punch line.

A text as large as a play or even a novel would have a considerable number of such narratives within narratives. Regardless of its complexity though, with the help of Attardo’s formal system it is possible to map out the text’s exact structure, after one has identified of course every instance of humor that is found within it. This can be done by locating the punch lines and jab lines and identifying the narratives that they are connected to. Finally, once this is done, the humor in each of the cases can be broken down using the GTVH. Attardo applies this methodology to analyze several texts. For illustration purposes a small example will be provided. One of the texts which the author analyzes is the episode *Chuckles Bites the Dust* from the Mary

Taylor Moore Show. The episode begins with a newsroom, when one of the characters utters example (12), which has the structure of a joke:

- (12) “The teletype must be broken, or else G. Ford [the President] held up a liquor store with a toy pistol”. (Attardo 2001:128)

By applying Attardo’s methodology to this piece of text, we can render it and its humor as follows:

- (13) - [↔ - P →] -
SO president/criminal
LM teletype is broken – mechanical failure
SI hold up
TA technology, Pres. Ford
NS joke
LA irr.

(Attardo 2001:129)

The first line (-) represents the set up that existed prior to (12), while the second line marks the fact that the larger text of the episode continues afterwards. What may be curious here is that Attardo considers the *Language* knowledge resource *irrelevant*, without providing an explanation as to why. We may assume that what he means to say here is that, since there are no specific linguistic elements that stand out such as idioms or instances of irony (the language used is, in other words, basic), this KR does not add anything relevant to the interpretation of the humor in this text. In any case, it seems fairly obvious that one can use Attardo’s methodology to breakdown any text in segments as illustrated above, thus creating an abstract map of the where humor can be found and what is its density (how many jab lines and punch lines there are, whether they are evenly spread out or clustered, etc). What remains unclear is whether, by applying Attardo’s methodology to various texts, one does not risk committing the same error that Chlopicki did, namely to imply that all textual forms are the same. Attardo would probably say that we are safe from this because the GTVH would point out the distinction (see Attardo 1994:228), but the claim is far from having been proven. If we were to look at a play and at a novel, but only in the form illustrated in (13), would we really be able to tell the difference?

Because we are dealing here with linguistic perspectives on humor, one last line of research must be mentioned here that is pragmatic in nature, namely the research into *Register-based humor*. A linguistic *register* can be defined as “the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situational type” (Halliday, in Attardo

1994:237). Another way of saying that the elements of a *register* are *associated with a situational type* is that they are *context dependent*, in the sense that a *register* is constructed with a specific context in mind. Catford says much the same thing when he defines it as “a variety correlated with the performer’s social role on a given occasion” (Catford 1965:89). Defining a *register* is of course an important issue to consider. Attardo here considers that, rather than an essentialist approach, which would run against various difficulties due to the unstable nature of a register (its values can always change depending on context), a *polythetic* approach would be preferable. By this he means something similar to Wittgenstein’s observations in relation to games, namely that there is no common denominator among all games but that certain games have a “family resemblance” to one another, which means that they can be grouped together. Using such an approach, Attardo concludes that “a polythetic theory of register characterizes the various registers which can be identified in linguistic use as having family resemblances among them” (Attardo 1994:244). People who write in sports magazines can be said to use a specific register that is different from what someone would write in a literary magazine, especially when we consider themes and elements of style. Having this in mind, it becomes rather obvious that one simple way of generating *register-based humor* is by selecting the style that is appropriate for one register and using that style in a context that would call for a different register entirely. It is easy to imagine how using the wide range of vocabulary and rich mode of expression that is found in literary magazines in order to describe a football match could seem humorous. It would perhaps be too much, however, to say that *all* such inappropriate uses of register would yield humorous results. One could imagine that a person might just as well feel offended rather than amused.

2.3. Between *comic* and *humor* (or from *comic* to *humor*)

In order to fully comprehend both contemporary interpretations and the difficulties in our understanding, we must pause for a second over the relationship between the concepts *humor* and *comic*. What will be shown in this section, however briefly, is that, despite their different

origins and diachronically varying relationship, today they can largely be considered one and the same.

The *comic* (for this is arguably the older term) has been given many considerations and definitions, to the point that it is perhaps easier, as Adrian Marino (1973) does, to point out what is not to be associated with the term in question, as well as to point out the historical difficulties that have impeded a proper analysis of the *comic*, at least until recent years. As such, it is wrong to necessarily associate the *comic* with theatrical comedies, or, more precisely, to consider the *comic* as part of theatrical comedy, as an old tradition had done. In order to prove this fact, it is enough to point out, as Marino (1973:422) has, that, if it is true that all comedies exploit situations that are more or less comic, then the *comic* includes many non-theatrical aspects. Another thing that the *comic* is not, as Marino goes on to explain, is something that can simply be defined as a cause of laughter. As a physiological response, laughter can come about for multiple reasons (Marino 1973:423), influenced by circumstance, social norm or just plain uncontrollable reaction, all of which can have nothing to do with the *comic*.

What the *comic* is also often equated to is the *ridiculous*, yet this equation, as Marino (1973:424) explains, is flawed simply because not all that is *ridiculous* is *comic*, and that, as he sees it, the former concept includes all manners of things in the world, while the latter is more limited to that which is intellectual in nature, that which is aesthetic.

The critic's point of view can perhaps be considered to be a bit too rooted in the domain of literary studies, yet, as he continues to explain the relationship between *comic* and *ridiculous*, it becomes clear that Marino is referring to the actual act of ridiculing. In this sense, the *comic* is described as an intellectual process of rationally criticizing whatever the comic writer has as his object of study, in relation to which the writer in question places himself at an objective and, at the same time, on a morally superior position. As such, Marino's comparison reminds very much of the *Disparagement Theory of Humor* outlined by Thomas Hobbes, whom Marino even mentions (1973:426).

When discussing the history and evolution of the *comic* Marino doesn't have much to point out, which perhaps speaks more to the unclear nature of the term than to any limitations on the critic's part. What he does pause upon (Marino 1973:410-421) is the negative position that Christianity had in regards to the *comic*, as well as the classic resolve to place it on an

aesthetically lower position than, for example, the *tragic*, a resolve that survived well into the 19th century and began to erode only at the beginning of the 20th.

Within all these considerations, *humor* was traditionally considered as some consequence or by-product of *comic*. Yet, the similarities between the considerations and problems in understanding the term *comic* outlined by Marino and those presented by Morreall and Ermida (among others) in dealing with what they call *humor* are obvious. In both cases we are presented with a term that has its origins in Ancient times, was associated throughout most of human history with the realm of literature (where it was placed on a lower value scale when compared to more sober emotion) and was considered dangerous especially by religious institutions due to what can be considered its natural propensity to force people who adopt it to rationally analyze and question what they have in front of them. On the basis of this similarity, the notion of equating *comic* to what we today understand as *humor* begins to sound reasonable. It is, in fact, not even something entirely new. Ermida (2008:5) points out “the tendency in Germany in the first quarter of the 19th century to use the term *humor* as a synonym for *comic*”. In today’s Anglo-American tradition especially, “humor is an umbrella term covering *all* the phenomena in this field.

In this way, “*humor* replaces the *comic*” (Ermida 2008:3) as the overarching term which acts as a verbal representation of whatever it is that we consider funny. And while this does not in any way lead to a universal definition, the act of equating *humor* and *comic* is nonetheless extremely helpful. By accepting that they refer to one and the same thing, scholars focusing on humor studies have been granted a much clearer historical basis upon which to conduct the thorough analyses conducted today into the various manifestations of humor.

2.4. Humor and irony

A final consideration in this chapter is the relationship between *humor* and *irony*, which, as concepts, have many things in common and yet which also have some fundamental differences. Like with humor, defining *irony* as such is by no means an easy endeavor. Wayne Booth, when dealing with what he calls *stable irony*, outlines (1974:5) its four basic characteristics. Thus, first

of all, *irony* is *intended*, meaning that “it is deliberately created by human beings to be heard or read and understood” (ibid). Secondly, it is *covert*, in that it is “intended to be reconstructed with meanings different from those on the surface” (Booth 1974:6). The third characteristic is that *irony* is *fixed*. This means that “once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions” (ibid). The last characteristic is that it is *finite*, in the sense that it refers to something specific in a given context, rather than some broad or universal concept.

When putting the concepts of *humor* and *irony* back to back, Ermida points out that “the analogy between verbal humor and irony derives from a common characteristic: having one *signifier* which conceals more than one *signified*” (2008:11). Because of this, it is often difficult to talk about irony without comparing it to humor. And yet, fundamental differences do exist. As Evrard puts it, “irony is different from humor as far as its objectives and seriousness are concerned. Whereas irony makes a judgment and tends to determine meanings, humor looks at the world and doubts it, hesitating, refraining from interpretation” (Evrard, in Erminda 2008:13). In this sense, instances of irony appear as tools used for specific purposes, while those of humor exist for their own sake. Indeed, it can at least intuitively be considered that one makes an ironic statement in order to convey some specific meaning (as Booth would say, the statement is *intended*), while the intention of the humorist would more likely be to simply make his reader laugh. As far as linguistic script-based theories are concerned, I would also argue here that there is one fundamental difference between the two concepts: *humor* posits the co-existence of two opposite semantic scripts, while *irony* involves the process of *substituting* one semantic script for its opposite. In the joke in example (3) the scripts [PATIENT] and [LOVER] exist in equal measure within the text, yet in a sentence like “The President is a real genius”, when meant to be ironic, the scripts [GENIUS] and [IDIOT] do not coexist, but rather, in the process of understanding the ironic nature of the sentence, the reader replaces the former script with the latter.

Of course, one cannot deny the fact that many instances of irony are perceived as being humorous. In this respect, it is important to take into consideration Attardo’s remark that “with the proviso that irony need not be humorous, when it is so, it is clear that irony may contribute to the perception of humor in a text” (2001:122). This implies that, even when it is humorous, the

humor of an ironic statement is rather an additional element (a bonus as it were), whereas conveying the intended secondary meaning of the utterance remains the main purpose.

2.5. A lack of definition

From all things considered above, a first conclusion that can be drawn is that a clear definition of *humor* that can be placed in a dictionary as a universal fact is all but impossible. The closest one can come to giving a simple explanation is by adopting the overly circular statement *humor embodies those elements that are deemed humorous, whatever they may be* which is vague to the point of futility.

Still, even without an essentialist definition of humor, some general characteristics can still be inferred. As a second conclusion to this chapter, we can say that humor is context dependent. Whether it be the narrative within which it is constructed, or the circumstances in which the hearer/reader comes into contact with it, or (as it most often happens) a combination of both, interpreting humor is largely influenced by the environment in which it is made manifest. The third conclusion, thanks to the work done especially by Raskin and Attardo, is that a general theory that can account for how verbal humor is constructed in any given text is possible. We've seen that all jokes seem to have the singular characteristic of being compatible with two semantic scripts which are opposite in nature, therefore it is conceivable that any script opposition can be used to successfully generate a potentially infinite number of jokes. We've also seen that, with the help of script-opposition as one of the components of a general theory of verbal humor, it is possible to formally depict any text, so that those elements which are humorous can stand out. Therefore, the question *What is humorous?* can be provided with some answers, at least as far as verbal humor is concerned. *Why something is humorous* – the problem that Philosophy, Psychology and even Literary Criticism tackle – remains uncertain, at least from an essentialist perspective, and therefore perhaps the most honest answer the question of why is that *it depends* on who is interpreting what is humorous, where he is interpreting it and even when.

3. Kurt Vonnegut and the novels

3.1. Kurt Vonnegut – a short biography

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was a middle-class free-thinking intellectual, who as a child was raised in a family and a community of like-minded individuals. His place of birth was the city of Indianapolis, Indiana, on November 11, 1922.

To understand Kurt Vonnegut's views, one must go all the way back to the first of his relatives that immigrated to the US, for, as the author explains more than once, the original sources of his beliefs were hereditary. Fortunately, in the autobiographical text *Palm Sunday* Vonnegut states that his Uncle John wrote a historical account of the family's history (see Vonnegut 1981[1994] for reference). Thus, starting from the beginning, we are told that "all of Kurt Vonnegut Jr's eight great-grandparents were part of the Great Migration to the Midwest in the half of the century from 1820 to 1870" (Vonnegut 1981[1994]:334). The vast bulk of the immigrants who settled in the area, and who came to populate the city of Indianapolis, were skilled artisans and peasants. In a humorous response to John Updike's inquiry as to how the people in Indianapolis are, Vonnegut points out that the city is

"the only human settlement in all of history whose location was determined by a pen and a straightedge. The new State of Indiana was approximately a rectangle, but with a jagged bottom edge which had been scrawled by water obeying gravity, not by men. Men next drew on a map a great X, connecting the corners of the new state with diagonals. Where the diagonals intersected, no matter what was there, there would be the capital" (Vonnegut 1991:93)

What this anecdote reveals is just how practical these people are, that they should settle on a location for their capital city not on the basis of on optimal scenery or any other such emotional consideration but simply by determining the geometric center of the State.

Whether it is true or not is irrelevant. What it does indicate is the fact that, according to Vonnegut, the people of Indianapolis were suspicious of anything whose material purpose could not be readily ascertained. And while Vonnegut's ancestors were "far better educated and of higher social rank" (Vonnegut 1981[1994]:335), being burghers, city merchants and in general members of the upper class, what is important to remember is that, like their less educated

counterparts, both the Lieber family – from which the author’s mother originates – and the Vonnegut family were highly practical people, mostly interested in business and the accumulation of wealth. Under such circumstances, it remains an established fact that, apart from providing them with some aesthetic pleasure in an otherwise very down-to-earth existence, for both families “the practice of the arts was regarded as an evasion of real life by means of parlor tricks” (Vonnegut 1981[1994]:355). It is therefore important to keep in mind that Kurt Vonnegut did not inherit a long standing tradition in arts (although both his father and grandfather were architects). What he did receive, as we shall soon see, is something different entirely.

Of the eight great-grandparents, certainly the most significant, in terms of the development of Kurt Vonnegut’s views, was Clements Vonnegut. Very much a by-product of the Enlightenment Period, Clements “had a far better education than ninety-eight percent of the Germans or other immigrants” (Vonnegut 1981[1994]:336) and, perhaps equally important, he “rejected formalized religion and disliked clergymen” (ibid). Thus, instead of identifying with one religion or another, he considered himself a Freethinker, speaking and writing extensively on the matter of placing human virtue and human interactions above spiritual beliefs, which were considered by him to be wholly unnecessary, and even, ultimately, destructive. According to Kurt Vonnegut, at his funeral Clemens had arranged for this speech to be delivered:

I departed from this life with loving, affectionate feelings for all mankind; and I admonish you: Be aware that people on Earth could be joyous, if only they would life rationally and if they would contribute mutually to each other’s welfare. This world is not a vale of sorrows if you will recognize discriminately what is truly excellent in it; and if you avail yourself of it for mutual happiness and well-being. Therefore, let us explain that we base our faith on firm foundations, on Truth for putting into action our ideas which do not depend on fables and ideas which Science has long ago proven to be false”

(Vonnegut 1981[1994]:505)

Faith placed not only in Truth, but also in the possibility of human beings to work together for the greater good without the need for religion are elements that are found all over Kurt Vonnegut’s writings.

In life, Clemens Vonnegut was a very active member of the Indianapolis community, especially in the area of education. He “served for twenty-seven years on the Board of School Commissioners of the City” (Vonnegut 1981[1994]:338) and was described as “an incorruptible and highly efficient officer” (ibid). With such a persona as a direct descendent, it is not surprising that the Vonnegut family invariably passed down from generation to generation a deep sense of faith in human rationale and in humanity in general, a sort of religion which Kurt Vonnegut called *Freethinking* and which he was introduced to from the day he was born. Although he would find out exact details about his great-grandfather only later in life, Kurt Vonnegut felt deeply connected to the man and stated that “Clemens Vonnegut was a cultivated eccentric. That is what I aspire to be” (Vonnegut 1981[1994]:342).

Later on in life, working upon the importance of rational thought over belief, Vonnegut would debate in *Palm Sunday* the implications of Thomas Aquinas’ division of laws into three – Divine Law, Natural Law and Human Law – and of placing them on a hierarchical ladder in that order. The author makes an analogy between these Laws and playing cards and establishes that the first is equal to the Ace, the second to the King and the third to the Queen. According to Vonnegut, the original concept of the American system, the American dream as it were, is based on the premise that equality among individuals is possible since “because of the Constitution, the highest card anybody had to play was a lousy Queen” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:322). This is to say that a person’s rights should be assured because all Governmental decisions are limited to Human Law and at most they can make reference to, though never act upon, Natural Law. The danger of being unsatisfied with an incomplete deck of cards, with adding Aces and Kings into the equation, as Vonnegut explains, is that “there is so little agreement as to how those grander laws are worded. Theologians can give us hints of the wording, but it takes a dictator to set them down just right” (ibid). In other words, accepting Divine Law and Natural Law inevitably leads to a totalitarian regime in which a dictator uses these laws to justify his ruling, placing it above man’s right to question it. The warning that Vonnegut brings to the table (since he usually has one) is that people in America are not made conscious of the fact that the freedoms they take for granted is not inalienable. As the author explains,

“what troubles me most about my lovely country is that its children are seldom taught that American freedom will vanish, if, when they grow up, and in the exercise of their duties as citizens, they insist that our courts and policemen and prisons be guided by divine and natural law” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:323)

The moment that citizens (and it is considered that only citizens can do this) begin to believe that the administrative forces are not subject to their own will, that they are leaders of the people instead of servants of the people, then America stands just as much of a chance to become a totalitarian regime as any other country in the world. The only proper course of action, therefore, is to circle back to the kind of *Freethinking* mentality that was so well praised by Clemens Vonnegut and to consider that man and human needs should come first in our society above anything else, including Divine Will.

Returning to the history of the ancestry of Kurt Vonnegut Jr, as has already been stated, the Vonnegut family had flourished for generations on the basis of business and other such down-to-earth types of work. Yet, despite being a highly practical man from a like-minded family and a like-minded community, Clemens' son Bernard, for whatever reason, had a burning desire to be an artist. Kurt Vonnegut describes his grandfather as "a freak in the family for being able to draw and paint so well at an early age" (Vonnegut 1981[1994]:352), but a person who, nonetheless, was given a high-class education both in Germany and the US and was permitted to focus his career on architecture rather than finances. After receiving his degree from MIT and having worked in Germany and New York, he returned to Indianapolis, where he became involved in art organizations, and, in turn, "his son Kurt joined them in his maturity" (Vonnegut 1981[1994]:354). Thus, art and the propensity to become artistic were introduced into the Vonnegut family by both Bernard Vonnegut and Kurt Vonnegut Sr, although, by the time Kurt Jr would be born, things in the family will have changed significantly.

As far as the author's mother's side of the family is concerned, although they played an arguably smaller role in the formation of the author's system of beliefs, the Lieber family is also important to discuss, since Edith Lieber Vonnegut played a large role in his decision to become a writer, and Edith, in turn, was largely influenced by her upbringing and ancestry. Like the Vonnegut's, the Lieber family were German immigrants, though they quickly rose to wealth in the US as merchants. The history begins with Peter Lieber who, in 1865, after having lived in Minnesota for a while, moved to Indianapolis when he bought the city brewery from its former proprietors. As a direct consequence of his owning a company that produced alcohol, Peter also became heavily "involved in politics. He had to be in order to get the saloon licenses for his favored customers" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:341). It is thus through his business and his perhaps

less than honorable career in politics that the Lieber family became rich and powerful. However, according to Vonnegut, in 1893 Peter was given a high political position which had him return to Germany, leaving the family business in the hands of his son Albert (Edith's father). Unlike his father, Albert is characterized as having been "extroverted and flamboyant, sociable and a big spender" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:349). He married one Alice Barus in 1885 and had three children, out of which Edith was their youngest child. Shortly after, Albert was remarried to Ora D. Lane, a woman who apparently disliked the children and "chastised and ill-treated them in subtle ways" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:351), which is a nice way of saying that she psychologically abused them. From here, two important facts can be inferred. The first is that Edith Lieber was born into vast riches and being wealthy was something she considered all her life as an integrated part of her family's life (it is one of the reasons why Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was forced to go to Cornell University and obtain a degree in chemistry – it was expected that he and his siblings would recover the family fortune, which was lost during the Great Depression). The second inferred fact is that, thanks to her step-mother, Edith grew up with significant emotional scarring which in all likelihood contributed to her committing suicide (an event that had a significant effect on her son's choice of becoming a writer).

Although Kurt Vonnegut Sr. is characterized as having been a talented and successful architect, his business took a severe financial blow from the Great Depression, which the family would never recover from. The hardships were made worse due to the fact that while business was going well, Kurt and Edith "traveled and entertained rather lavishly" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:365), as would any young couple who'd been raised to never worry about money. As a result, when the economic crisis hit, they had little to no savings. In an attempt to recover some of the family wealth, Edith tried her hand at writing short stories and selling them, since, at the time, slick magazines paid a lot for such texts. She was wholly unsuccessful and, as her son explains, "she was a good writer, it turned out, but she had no talent for the vulgarity the slick magazines required" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:408). By his own admission, her inability to write and sell short stories prompted Kurt Vonnegut Jr. after her death to get into the writing business himself, since "it used to be a fairly reliable rule of American middle-class life that a son could be expected to try hard, with his own life, to make some of his disappointed mother's dreams come true" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:372).

Everything that happened in both the Lieber and Vonnegut families from the middle of the 19th century and to the beginning of the 20th made it so that, on November 11th 1922 Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was born into a wealthy and well educated family that had planned to make him a lifetime member of high society, but which was forced early on to introduce him to a much simpler world (not that he would ever regret it). In his youth, instead of being sent to a high-class prep school, as his brother Bernard and his sister Alice had been, Kurt was placed in a public high school named Shortridge. According to the author, he fit in there very nicely however, and, when looking back, concluded on numerous occasions that “Indianapolis gave me a free primary and secondary education richer and more humane than anything that I could get from any of the five universities I attended” (Vonnegut 1991:97). What Vonnegut means to say here is that, unlike more elite educational institutions – as the ones he attended in his early adult life, which focused more on theoretical aspects of science and art – Shortridge High School taught him the value of human interaction in an everyday environment. It is most likely that what played a central role in the author’s later ability to express complex issues within his novels, while using very gritty and simple expressions, is the intersection between on the one hand the education and social class standards which his parents tried to maintain and enforce, and on the other hand the down-to-earth viewpoints of the children that young Kurt would interact with. The clarity, at least in terms of language, that is a hallmark of Vonnegut’s work also began at Shortridge, which, at the time, was one of the few schools in the country that had its own student-run newspaper. Writing for the newspaper meant writing for a fixed and definable set of readers who provided his work with immediate feedback. As a result, even as a child, Kurt Vonnegut learned to write primarily with his readers in mind. At the same time, the Shortridge policy seems to have focused student writing on clarity, and Vonnegut himself said about his teachers that they “hoped that I would become understandable – and therefore understood” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:392). What resulted then is a boy who, at a very early age, learned how to write for a specific reader and that his texts should transmit specific ideas that should be expressed as clearly as possible.

Besides writing, Kurt Vonnegut also read a lot in his youth, but perhaps not quite the books his mother would have wanted him to pick up. As the author admits in *Palm Sunday*, one of the authors that had a great influence on him at a very young age was James T. Farrell. A writer and a political activist, Farrell was an avid partisan of socialism, which in all likelihood is

how Vonnegut came about his writings, since Kurt's Uncle Alex shared the same political views. The themes in Farrell's novels may have influenced Kurt's own social perspective, but, according to Vonnegut, this was not his most important contribution. What Farrell did for Kurt was

“he showed me through his books that it was perfectly all right, perhaps even useful and beautiful, to say what life really looked like, what was really said and felt and done – what really went on. Until I read him, I wished only to be well received in polite company” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:455)

Edith Vonnegut most certainly must have insisted that her son, as a member of an esteemed family (rich or otherwise), should behave like a complete gentleman and only be interested in what a gentleman might read or write. It must have been quite an impact for Kurt Vonnegut to come across a text that showed him a totally different perspective, one with the help of which he could connect with his friends in a far better manner than his mother's upbringing could allow.

Being rather sociable, Kurt surrounded himself with friends, but these boys belonged to simple workers, people who were very foreign to the rich world that his mother and father had been raised in. As a result, as the author confesses, “peer pressure had actually made me a scorner of my parents' class” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:534). As a result, the boys would gather at the Vonnegut house to read, but what they absorbed were ideas written by “human minds which were calmer and more patient and amusing and unafraid than [his] parents could afford to be” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:469). It is little wonder then that writers like Twain and Hemmingway had a far greater influence upon Kurt Vonnegut's writing than did Shakespeare or Eliot.

Humor and the tendency to make jokes also stem from necessity. Kurt Vonnegut was the youngest of the family members, considered to be the one with the least amount of experience and understanding, and, therefore, “at the table, there was only one way I could get anybody's attention, and that was to be funny” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:426). Young K (as his relatives called him in order to distinguish him from his father) thus spent a lot of time listening to comedy skits on radio and watching performances and movies by Laurel and Hardy, Chaplin and others, all in an attempt to master the craft of joke making. He would often test out his material on and with his sister and the two of them would often perform comedic skits together. It is little wonder that, when Alice eventually died in 1958 of cancer, the event shook Kurt hard, not only

because of their close relations but also because “his older sister was the person for whom he always imagined he was writing his fiction” (Farrell 2008:9).

The type of literary humor that Kurt Vonnegut would later adopt throughout his career is without question a postmodern one, despite the way in which some scholars envisioned postmodern humor at the time. According to Kevin Brown, who in turn bases his thoughts upon the words of other analysts, the postmodern consideration that there is no such thing as a single universal truth, and that the perception of our surroundings is dependent upon context and subjective points of view has as a consequence an abolition of a general moral code. This in turn has led many critics to believe “that satire is not possible any longer [because] no moral stance can be taken” (in Bloom 2009:139). The premise, in other words, is that satire, as was understood up until then, relied on such a general moral code that all readers could fall back upon because the code in question was connected to some set of universal truths. But in the context of post-modern mentality which posits the lack of any such truths, it would seem logical to conclude, by means of a proverbial domino effect whereby if you let one piece fall, they all go down in turn, that moral codes are no longer possible and therefore neither is satire. This is why Brown continues by stating that “Postmodern humor is often characterized as rebelling against the norms of literature and trying to subvert them with no motivation other than pleasure” (ibid). This would suggest that humorists in the second half of the twentieth century no longer focus on elements of society but instead they refer only to other texts, and in addition they do so for no better reason than the fact that they simply want to.

Kurt Vonnegut and others like him (Joseph Heller for example) are far from conforming to this consideration of postmodern humor. Indeed it would be hard to imagine Vonnegut writing merely for his own sake, when faced with his opinion that “when a man becomes a writer, he takes on a sacred obligation to produce beauty and enlightenment and comfort at top speed” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:166). A writer, according to the author, does not fulfill his true function in society if he does not strive to educate his readers and to make individuals (if not societies) try to better themselves. The problem that arises is, if there is no longer a set of universal truths (and Vonnegut shared this thought) and if, by extension, there are no more universal morals, how can one use humor for moral purposes? Once again, Kevin Brown theorizes that the postmodern moralist circumvents this issue through creating “a set of public norms by taking his or her

private norms and declaring them openly” (in Bloom 2009:141). In other words, the writer does not need to start off from a set of predefined considerations, as has been done so far. Instead, he can simply state through his writing what he believes is right or wrong and then invite the readers to choose whether or not they agree with him.

As a young man, well into his late teens, Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was exposed to various ideas and ideologies, including some socialist ones, thanks especially to his uncle Alex. As the author explains, his father’s younger brother “was a socialist, and among the books he gave me was Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class*. I understood it perfectly and loved it, since it made low comedy of the empty graces and aggressively useless possessions which my parents hoped to regain one day” (Vonnegut 1994 [1981]:371). His deep emphatic connection to such notions that he came to *understand perfectly* and *love*, found in books like Veblen’s and most likely discovered during conversations with his uncle, thus began to take root at an early age. They would later manifest themselves such themes as *the importance of community* and *the failure of the great American individualistic experiment*, which appear time and again throughout his writing career.

Yet this writing career might have never commenced. If one were to have asked the still young Kurt Vonnegut what he wanted to be in life, he would have most likely have opted to become an architect like his father and grandfather. This, however, was not meant to be. Despite a promising early start, Kurt Vonnegut Sr’s architectural career took a nose dive during the Great Depression, a setback from which he never recovered. Marred by his sense of failure, the man became convinced that all humanity professions were a waste of time and money. Thus it was that, when it came for K to think of his future, his father said that he “could go to college only if [he] studied chemistry” (Vonnegut 1991:54). While his brother Bernard went to MIT (from where he would begin a very successful career), Kurt Jr. went to study chemistry at Cornell University. Throughout his early adulthood, he would attend several colleges and each time the result was the same. As the author explains, “at Cornell I did badly. The army sent me to Carnegie Tech and the University of Tennessee to study mechanical engineering. I did badly again” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:385). Thus it took three academic institutions to convince Vonnegut and his family that the young man simply had no aptitude for exact sciences (despite the fact that, in some fashion or another, he would spend the first half of his writing career

focused on the scientific world, reason for which he was initially labeled a science-fiction writer). If he did get anything from his university experience, it came indirectly, from his work at the Cornell Daily Sun newspaper, which further convinced him that he wanted to be a journalist (another career that he would later stray from).

Kurt Vonnegut did badly in the military as well, which is not surprising since his only reason for joining was to have an excuse to abandon his studies at Cornell University. The most significant events during his brief military career were the death of his mother and his being taken as a prisoner of war, coupled with his having survived the firebombing of Dresden. Throughout the war, Dresden had been the only city that had no munitions factories or garrisons, no military items at all. The area had been kept clear intentionally, so that the city could serve as a major refugee and medical aid hub. In 1945, after having spent some time in a POW camp, Vonnegut and several other American prisoners were sent off to work there and it was presumed that they would be safe for the remainder of the war. What was unknown to them and the Germans, however, was that the British had decided to make an example of the city, as an act of revenge for the damage that German forces had inflicted on English soil. Thus it was that, on February 13th 1945, British and American planes passed over and, with the use of incendiary bombs, leveled the entire city essentially in a single run. As the author remarks, “the firebombing of Dresden was an emotional event without a trace of military importance” (Vonnegut 1991:100). The death toll remains a controversy, as Vonnegut further explains, because “the population at the time of the raid was a mystery, since so many refugees from the collapsing Russian front were arriving day after day” (Vonnegut 1991:101). By his own estimate, some 135,000 people died on that day. As expected, the event shocked the young writer deeply, and, when he was eventually released and was allowed to return home, he began to read and listen to the news, expecting to hear official details about the catastrophic event. To his surprise however, the entire operation had been tossed under the rug. What Vonnegut did hear about was the detonations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Together with the fact that the Allies had leveled Dresden, this stunning display in Japan of the destructive force that human beings could wield convinced Vonnegut that “a trust in technology, like all the other great religions of the world, had to do with the soul” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:381). Thus, fresh from the war, Kurt Vonnegut foresaw the exaggerated faith, akin to religion, that the US society of the late 1940’s and the

1950's would place in science and technology, a faith whose fundamental flaws the author struggled to expose in his early writings.

Unlike many of his contemporaries and predecessors, Kurt Vonnegut did not begin his writing career out of a want for self-expression but from want of money. From early on and well into old age, the author considered that "writing is just another job" (Vonnegut 1991:196), and at least in the first half of his adult life Vonnegut had quite a few occupations. Fresh from the war, his initial plan to be a journalist was soon dashed like his desire to become an architect, after realizing what he would have to do as a reporter to uncover facts (in the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse Five* he introduces some clues to that effect). In his personal life he married his high school sweetheart Jane Cox and together they had three children. With such a large family to sustain, Vonnegut began working for General Electric as a technical writer. It was during this time that he wrote and published his first short story *Report on the Barnhouse Effect* in *Collier Magazine* in 1950, for which he received the equivalent of a three month salary. Shortly after that, he wrote and published another short piece for which he was paid even more, which finally convinced him to quit his job and begin devoting his daily life to fiction writing. With regards to the 1950's and to what it meant to his fortune of having begun his writing career then, Vonnegut often said something to the effect that

"I am a member of what I believe to be the last recognizable generation of full-time, life-time, American novelists. We appear to be standing more or less in a row. It was the Great Depression which made us similarly edgy and watchful. It was World War II which lined us up so nicely, whether we were men or women, whether we were ever in uniform or not. It was an era of romantic anarchy in publishing which gave us money and mentors, willy-nilly, when we were young – while we learned our craft" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:313).

There are several observations that can be drawn from here. The first, regarding the practice of writing in the 1950's, is that, according to the author, this was an ideal period to begin your career because the publishing houses were more than willing to offer financial support and mentorship. Another observation is that the massive group of American writers that Vonnegut belonged to existed as *a generation* (as opposed to single artists emerging here and there, as it happens during less volatile times) because of the traumatic impact of both the Depression and the War. A third observation, perhaps more subtle, has to do not with what is contained in

Vonnegut's quote, but what is left out. In *Fates Worse Than Death* the author points out that there exist in the modern world "two types of writers – one who responds to life itself [and] the other who responds to the history of his art so far" (Vonnegut 1991:193). By pointing out that his generation of writers was created by the above-mentioned historical events, he is in fact excluding from his generation the second type of writer, despite the fact that for critics, who still existed in the shadow of Eliot's views on literature, considered this second type the only true creators of high quality writing.

In 1952 Vonnegut published his first novel entitled *Player Piano*. The book is inspired by the extreme faith that he saw placed in technology by the people around him and by the unanimously-agreed-upon idea circulating among scientists working for General Electric and other research labs that scientific research should not be hampered in any way. After World War Two the General Electric company took it upon itself to be a place of unfettered innovation, to establish "a virtual reinvention of what humankind could make" (Klinkowitz 2012[1998]:3) and the premise that was at the base of this hope for streamlining innovation was that scientists should be given a free hand to research anything they wanted. This latter idea was one which the author found particularly disturbing, since it brought with it the implication that a scientist need not or even must not let elements of morality to intervene in his quest for uncovering truth and for pushing forward technological development. In response to this, Vonnegut's first novel depicts a dystopia that exists sometime in the future, where machines control all aspects of human life. In his next book *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), Vonnegut toys with the notion of free will and life's meaning, postulating the possibility that all of human history may be nothing more than a process set in motion and controlled by an alien race that guided mankind's evolution for its own purposes. In this case that purpose is utterly ridiculed through the notion that it was all done just so that one of these aliens, whose ship has become stranded on Titan, might obtain the spare part he needs to repair his space ship and continue on his journey. And while these ideas may seem to us and to the readers back in the 1950's as outlandish science-fiction, in fact they weren't very far from what was being seriously discussed by scientists at the General Electric Research Facility. Judging fact and fiction comparatively, the reality of the matter is that

"the themes from *Player Piano* and *the Sirens of Titan* seem far less science-fiction than commonly middle-class [because] what began as a technological miracle meant to free people from drudgery wound up relegating them to the emptiness of having no meaningful, rewarding work." (ibid)

What thus became a crusade to technologically uplift mankind ended up backfiring, resulting, in Vonnegut's opinion, in a form of existence that is in fact not more fulfilling but, on the contrary, far emptier than before, because what the science-crazed direction followed by GE and all those that followed them ignored was that it is humanity and the human condition that must come first, before any other personal curiosity.

Overall, his goal (since Vonnegut believed that writers must have a specific goal, must transmit a certain idea to their reader) was essentially to point out the importance of humanism, a notion that he saw as being placed under fire in a world that is becoming ever-more artificial. The idea of scientists taking responsibility for their work and for how their work is applied is one that he held throughout his life. In 1985, for example, Vonnegut held a speech at MIT, where he proposed that the students (who would soon be the scientists of tomorrow) swear upon an adapted version of the Hippocratic Oath which would state that they "will create no deadly substance or device, though it be asked of them, nor will they council such" (Vonnegut 1991:120).

Unfortunately, this goal was initially hampered by the fact that, in trying to fit *Player Piano* in some specific genre, critics and other writers alike decided to dump the novel – and subsequently the author – within the category known as Science Fiction, a category which at the time was "derided by the literary establishment" (Farrell 2008:9). Being labeled in this fashion was especially disconcerting for Vonnegut because it did not actually characterize him adequately. As pointed out in an interview by Somer, "the difference between Vonnegut and science fiction writers is that Vonnegut is essentially a preacher, a moralist, a man with a message. Most science-fiction writers concentrate on ideas, not people" (Klinkowitz 1973:128). Critics, however, did not notice this fact during the 50's and 60's, which in turn assured that Vonnegut's name remain largely unknown in the literary community, despite the fact that, especially after the publication of *Cat's Cradle* (1963), Kurt Vonnegut was quickly becoming a sensation among university students and would eventually become an indirect representative of the Counter-cultural Revolution. To a degree, both readers and critics would continue to differ greatly in their approach to Kurt Vonnegut's writing (and still do). As Peter Freese so aptly points out:

“Vonnegut is still classified in widely different categories. His world view is still understood as either that of an optimistic humorist or a pessimistic nihilist, and the inimitable combination of his ‘easy’ and willfully naïve style that appeals to uneducated readers on the one hand and his cutting-edge experiments that fascinate connoisseurs of meta-fictional experimentation on the other, still triggers diametrically opposed reactions” (Freese 2009:23)

This ambiguity in his writing, ranging from the style of a low-based hack science-fiction writer to the complex approaches that characterize postmodern art, is a reflection of the author’s rejection of singular truths, a rejection that makes it impossible for him to write in a way that might allow readers to accurately place his novels in one nice drawer or another. In this respect, the fact that people have been unable to neatly categorize Kurt Vonnegut’s work speaks just as much to the complex nature of his writing as it does to the inability on behalf of many readers to understand that his fiction is not supposed to be categorized.

As far as Vonnegut’s personal philosophy is concerned, his interest in people and his focus on humanism can be drawn back to before he was born, but the theory behind it all, the theory he put into practice directly, was formed before he began writing, in Chicago. After returning from the war, before his family grew to include all three children, Kurt Vonnegut enrolled himself at the University of Chicago in the hopes of getting a degree in Anthropology. It was during that time that he came into contact with Professor Robert Redfield and the concept of *Folk Societies*. As defined in the Encyclopedia Britannica, a folk society is “an ideal type or concept of society that is completely cohesive – morally, religiously, politically and socially – because of the small numbers and isolated state of the people and because of the relatively unmediated personal quality of social interaction”. According to Kurt Vonnegut, we now live in “societies that have gone insane” (Vonnegut 1991:32), because the modern world has all but abandoned the ideal of the Folk Society in return for a culture based on individualism. For many years Vonnegut hoped to find one such society that would accept him as a member, and in a way the American Academy of Arts and Letters turned out to be just that. Unfortunately, despite his deep respect for Dr. Redfield, Vonnegut also implies essentially that such societies could no longer exist even if people in the US wanted them to, since one inherent condition for the existence of a Folk Society is that it’s members “must feel that a particular piece of land gave birth to them, and has been and always will be theirs” (Vonnegut 1991:125). And seeing that

modern American society is based on a sense of individualism and migration (people typically moving from one place to another depending on what opportunities emerge), such a sense of eternal belonging is not possible for most people.

In order to better understand Kurt Vonnegut, it is important to not only point out his interest in *humanism*, but to also pause a bit upon the type of humanism that the author adopted – postmodern humanism. The best way to do this is to place it in contrast with its predecessor. *Modernist humanism*, true to its interest in the individual, “draws all cognitive, aesthetic and ethical maps to the scale of the individual subject who believes in the originality and individuality of a unified self” (Davis 2006:31). Still very much acceptant of unified, grand truths, modern humanists believed in exploring and unlocking the depths of the single man’s mind and soul, which in turn were considered sufficient sources of inspiration. All the while, social interaction was considered less significant, and certainly the relationship of an individual or of a collective to the rest of the world was of minor importance. The end goal for the modern humanist was “utopia, an end result based on the belief in the perfectibility of humanity” (Davis 2006:32), since it was considered that the human being is not only capable but also predestined towards continual growth. In contrast, the *postmodern humanist* “denies an essential individuality of the subject [...], recognizing the global associations of humanity and its intricately delicate alliance with the earth” (Davis 2006:31). If the end game for modernists was a utopia,

“for the postmodern humanist there can be no utopia, only endless play, endless affirmation of life. Unlike the modernist, the postmodernist does not believe in the perfectibility of humanity or a final, static position such as utopia; rather, the postmodern humanist concentrates on the daily, local activity that may improve human life” (Davis 2006:32)

These elements of postmodern thought – the link between one individual and another, between humanity and the world, as well as the lack of any authentic truth – permeate throughout Vonnegut’s writing and spokesman careers. His concerns centered especially around the question of what humanity needs to do in order to survive through the centuries to come. Of course, his focus is not on what people should consider doing in the future, but on what they can do today, such as learning to respect one another and to preserve the natural resources of the planet that we so deeply depend upon. Despite the ominous warnings with which he litters his writings, his avid

use of humor, his unwillingness to place blame on any singular individual or social class (a joke that went around often and which was adopted by the author himself was that his writings have never had a villain in them), and his constant insertion of hopeful characters like Eliot Rosewater all point to the solid belief that humanity can balance itself out and that small communities can improve human life at a local level. But, at the same time, Vonnegut “never rests easily in his guarded optimism. Although he continually strives to believe in humanity, his precarious position as a postmodern humanist is constantly threatened by humanity’s incessant acts of deranged destruction” (Davis 2006:104). Even at a local level violence is constantly springing up in various forms and what seem to be simple steps that can be taken for the life of a community to improve often fall short. Ultimately, for Vonnegut, even “postmodern humanism is nothing more than a comforting lie, one more constructed narrative in the infinite range of narratives” (Davis 2006:33). But this need not lead people to despair in Vonnegut’s eyes, since, as he showed in the novel *Cat’s Cradle*, comforting lies have their uses, since merely striving to turn such lies into reality already lead to improvement in some form or another, even if the lie can never become truth.

Kurt Vonnegut himself left Indianapolis when he began working for General Electric. He left that place “where [his] ancestors had prepared so many comforts and privileges for [him], because those comforts and privileges were finally based on money, and the money was gone” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:373). After quitting his job for GE, Vonnegut moved his family again, to Cape Cod. During his stay there his family grew substantially on account of Alice’s death and they’re taking in three of her orphaned children. A few years later his marriage to Jane began to crumble and so finally, at the beginning of the 1970’s, they were divorced and Kurt Vonnegut moved to New York. The separation worsened his connections to his Indianapolis relatives, who already looked at him unkindly. Descendants of well educated families who, unlike their younger member K, went to high-end schools that indoctrinated them into classical and Victorian literature, Kurt Vonnegut’s older relatives disliked the course, sometimes brutish language of his novels, which they considered unbecoming a member of the esteemed Vonnegut family. The author even records in *Palm Sunday* some reactions they had. For example, of his Uncle John, who wrote the account of the family history, Vonnegut observed that he, Kurt, “was not a gentleman in his eyes, surely, and one satisfaction he may have found in writing about my ancestry was demonstrating how a gentleman wrote” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:332). Indeed, an

example of *the way a gentleman wrote* can easily be found in Uncle John's presentation. For example, he was most certainly aware at least in part of the troubles that existed in the Vonnegut house, because he hints to as much when he states that "Kurt and Edith's marriage was a happy one – as marriages go" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:365). That last part – *as marriages go* – is obviously meant as a reminder to anyone interested in the family's history that any marriage has its issues and that, therefore, it would be ungentlemanly to pause upon whatever unpleasant news one might find out. Among those issues there was the fact that, while Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was still a young boy, his father

"was, understandably, desperate for uncritical friendship from a member of the reputedly compassionate sex, since our mother (his wife) was going insane. Late at night, and always in the privacy of our own home, and never with guests present, she expressed hatred for Father as corrosive as hydrofluoric acid"

(Vonnegut 1991:28)

The family may have kept the full extent of their troubles confined to the walls of their home and only for when no one else was around, but it is hard to imagine that none of their relatives ever suspected that the family might have issues. Uncle John certainly knew something of it for sure, since he describes her as "despondent and morose" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:367) shortly before presenting her death. But a person of his upbringing is not supposed to be so obtuse as to spell out all the problems that existed in the Vonnegut household, nor was any other member of the family willing to tolerate such a thing. Even after becoming famous, Vonnegut relates how his relatives "say that they're glad I'm rich, but that they simply cannot read me" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:397) and up until then, during the hard years when his work was fairly unknown, instead of helping their own blood, his family simply turned a blind eye or displayed a cold shoulder. His Aunt Ella, for example, could have been of great help since she "owned Stewart's Bookstore in Louisville Kentucky, [yet she] would not stock my books. She found them degenerate, and said so" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:498).

Divorcing Jane must have been the last nail in the coffin as far as his Indianapolis relatives were concerned, to the point where, "more offensive to my relatives than my books, is the fact that I got divorced" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:498), and it is not surprising that in time Vonnegut felt he "had become a stranger there when Jill [his second wife] was an itty-bitty baby" (Vonnegut 1991:92). Despite his nonchalant manner in which he sometimes addresses the

issue of his leaving his hometown, the author must have been significantly affected both by the dismemberment of his macro-family (a longing for the nineteenth century image of a significant Vonnegut presence in Indianapolis as a well-rooted family may have contributed largely to Kurt's need to find a Folk Society he might once again be a part of) and by the reaction his relatives had towards his lifestyle and his writing, since Vonnegut reserved an entire chapter, however short it may be, in *Palm Sunday* entitled 'Embarrassment'. In this chapter the author plainly states "I am embarrassed about the failure of my first marriage. I am embarrassed by my older relatives' response to my books" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:501), thus he summarizes in short the factors that impeded any fruitful relationship with these older relatives. It most likely did not help that Vonnegut could only provide as a justification for this divorce the notion that he and Jane "had been through some terrible, unavoidable accident that we were ill-equipped to understand" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:500). Even though the two finally decided to separate amiably and were "still friends" (ibid.) this vague reason must have seemed wholly unacceptable to the author's family members, who cultivated a deep sense of rationality and of action brought about by specific logical motives. What's more, divorce was not at all common in the family's history. Vonnegut mentions one man as being his Uncle Walter, a cousin of his father's, who also "had the hubris to seek his fortune in the arts in New York City" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:499). The word *hubris* is an obvious indication of how the rest of his family members saw this Uncle Walter, who became a stage actor of all things, instead of a scientist or business man (as had been the Vonnegut tradition) and, by extension, how they must have seen Kurt Vonnegut Jr, who was also a divorced artist living in New York

As mentioned before, for the first half of his literary career, Kurt Vonnegut struggled with obscurity. It was not only the fact that he was categorized as a science fiction writer that convinced critics to turn a blind eye to his work. More pertinent perhaps was the author's propensity to express in a rather clear, simplistic language register the ideas that he wished to put forward in his novels. In the wake of modernist literature, where authors like James Joyce, T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound toyed heavily with language and expressed complex issues through even more complex language, critics generally took such styles of writing as a sign of talent. Thus, when Kurt Vonnegut began writing in the 1950's, he found himself as a writer in a "world where pure messiness was frequently thought to be a sign of some essential wrestling with the 'hard questions'" (Davis 2006:5). In the critics' views, questions such as the nature of man and of

society, or what the future could bring about aspects whose complexity must be reflected in the language used to express them, therefore, the harder it would be to express an idea, the deeper the author was thought to be delving into these 'hard questions'. It is not surprising then that, when coming across Kurt Vonnegut's style writing, critics should mistake its linguistic clarity with shallowness.

Vonnegut's decision to keep his language clear stems very much from his journalistic experience and perhaps from his pragmatic upbringing. As a journalist, the author knew that he had a fixed audience which he had to keep in mind at all times when writing. The pragmatic environment that he grew up in taught Kurt that it is important to be efficient when choosing to do anything. The result of these factors is Vonnegut's express and ever present concern that his ideas are perceived and understood by the reader, who, in turn, will hopefully learn something that will help him make the world immediately around him just a little bit better. This is in fact another paradigm shift that Vonnegut takes from modernity to post-modernity, one which critics in the 1950's could not understand. The earlier literary current concerned itself first and foremost with the text and then perhaps the author, while the reader was either meant to put in the necessary work to unlock the elements hidden within the text or else it was deemed that the respective reader simply did not have the mental capacity or the training to rise to the artistic and aesthetic level that the text required of him. In modern times the reader was the last person that the author and the critics concerned themselves with. In the postmodern era though the intrinsic value of the reader began to be reevaluated and his position in the writer-text-reader dynamic grew, eventually (especially with the rise of Reader Response Criticism) taking center point. Looking back, then, in his decision to simplify his language style, Kurt Vonnegut was very much a pioneer in so far as the importance he placed in the reader is concerned.

During the 1960's, one of the most important events in Vonnegut's life, one which would have very long lasting consequences from multiple perspectives, was his invitation to teach at the University of Iowa Creative Writing Workshop. On the one hand it meant four semesters which he would spend away from his family, a fact that undoubtedly contributed to Kurt and Jane embarking on different directions of growth, which in turn led to their divorce. He may have felt some fear that this might happen because in a letter written to Knox Burger he points out that, despite the honor of having been invited, he had no wish to go, but that his family and friends

had convinced him that it was an opportunity he should not miss out on. What he got in return for his hardships was “an extended family in the community of writers and students that, more than being just a college, made existence here a distinct way of life” (Klinkowitz 2009:51). First of all, since his days as a student at the University of Chicago, when he first learned about *Folk Societies* (and even before this, perhaps because of the traditionally community-centered mentality of the old Indianapolis), Kurt Vonnegut longed to become part of an extended family. He had hoped that Cape Cod might provide him with this community, but, as it turned out, actual *Folk Societies* only accepted those members who were traditionally already part of the community, to the author’s bitter disappointment. It must have come to him as a great surprise then to discover that, upon reaching Iowa, he would also be welcomed into an extended family of individuals that were united by the same endeavor – to create literary art.

Perhaps more important than having been accepted in an extended family (from a career, if not a personal perspective) were the connections per se that he managed to make during his stay in Iowa. As previously stated, Kurt Vonnegut grew up in a well educated environment and was given a decent education, which went a long way towards helping him become a writer. Yet for all his experience, what Vonnegut had lacked up until now was an actual connection to the literary community of his time, like a scientist doing research on his own with only the vaguest comprehension of what his fellow scientists were working on. This changed in 1965, when at the Iowa University Creative Writing Workshop he had the opportunity to befriend other writers like Nelson Algren, whose novel *The Man with the Golden Arm* won him the 1950 National Book Award, Vance Bourjaily, who had gained fame thanks to his piece *The End of My Life*, among many others, and even Jose Donoso, whose writings contributed greatly to the development of the Latin-American novel. Among the students he taught during his stay in Iowa was John Irving. The experiences that Vonnegut would have in Iowa from early on evidently had a huge impact on him, so much so that in a letter to Knox Burger dated 1966 Vonnegut mentions how he had gone from being unenthusiastic about leaving his family to having “the damndest revulsion to Cape Cod, loved my family but hated the house – don’t want to live there anymore” (in *Letters* 2012:121). For this reason, irrespective of the consequences it might have on his family relations, Vonnegut signed on to teach for two more years, during which time his connections within the literary community continued to solidify. Later on, by maintaining his

connections, the author had little trouble in moving to New York and finding ways to express himself artistically, not just in the form of prose writing, but also theater and drawing.

It was shortly after this important change in his life, of going to Iowa, and after close to two decades of writing, that critics would catch up with the times and recognize Kurt Vonnegut's contributions, thanks to the appearance of his fourth novel *Slaughterhouse Five*. This rise to fame was of course also due to the fortune of Vonnegut having published his anti-war book in 1969, when throughout America people were finally tired of the Vietnam War and marches for peace became ever more frequent. By 1971 Kurt Vonnegut was internationally renowned, though, having finally tackled with his Dresden experience in his writing, he found himself at a crossroads, uncertain in which direction he should take his literary career next. Nevertheless, the author continued to speak about the importance of compassion, passivity and tolerance, on the idea of living one's life in accordance with a solid set of morals. He spoke especially to university students, because

“it's been the university experience that taught me that you catch people before they become generals and presidents and so forth and you poison their minds with...humanity, and however you want to poison their minds, it's presumably to encourage them to make a better world” (Somer 1973:107)

To the best of his abilities, the author tried to maintain a positive and hopeful attitude towards the future, holding on to the idea that there is “certainly one good thing about this planet – the way people will try to help other people sometimes” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:470) and that “beauty could be found or created anywhere on this planet, and that is that” (Vonnegut 1991:25). Yet, as the years went by and things seemed to change all too little, Kurt Vonnegut became increasingly skeptical in regards to tomorrow. The future, as he saw it, lay entirely in human hands, for even if there is a God, “we can expect no spectacular miracle from the heavens, so the problems of ordinary human beings will have to be solved by ordinary human beings” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:515). This task of securing a future for humanity, however, as Vonnegut began seeing it, is one that we are failing at. To put it in his words, starting off from the words of another:

“Bertrand Russell declared that, in case he met God, he would say to Him: ‘Sir, you did not give us enough information’. I would add that: “All the same, Sir,

I'm not persuaded that we did our best with the information we had” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:509)

Ten years after this statement, Kurt Vonnegut tries to explain his change of tone by stating that “Humorists, [...] those who choose to laugh rather than weep about demoralizing information, become intolerably unfunny pessimists if they live past a certain age” (Vonnegut 1991:283).

This growing infusion of pessimism certainly colors his writing, starting after *Slaughterhouse Five*. If in this novel and the ones before it we can say that “there are no heroes in Vonnegut’s books and no real villains either” (Somer 1973:126), in the latter half of his writing career “the villains are culture, society and history” (Vonnegut 1991:31). Yet even during these darker latter years, hope – even if it is only a fool’s hope – still lingers in the author’s mind and is reflected, though to a lesser degree, in his writing. In *Deadeye Dick* (1982), for example, while the *neutron bomb* symbolizes the destruction that contemporary man tolerates and even approves of (it is considered a *friendly bomb*), still, the story of Rudy Waltz and his focus on family history show how “the author searches his [own] past to understand how the world he lives in has come to such an inhumane and irrational position” (Davis 2006:106). Just the act of searching for answers denotes a willingness to believe that solutions can still exist. One such solution, which would make it possible for mankind to live peacefully not just with each other but also with the world around them, is expressed in his very next novel *Galapagos* (1985), where a mysterious phantom narrator presents future man – a seal-like creature that has discarded the *big brain* that made our violence possible, so as to live in harmony. Of course, this solution too is not a perfect one and indeed it can be considered that Vonnegut in fact rejects this evolutionary course, for without the *big brain* that brought about the atom bomb, but also Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*, one can hardly be considered human.

Between these two novels, in 1984, Kurt Vonnegut attempted suicide by swallowing pills. In *Fates Worse than Death* he confesses that “it wasn’t a cry for help. It wasn’t a nervous breakdown [...] I wanted *out* of here” (Vonnegut 1991:181). He was rushed to the hospital and saved. After that though, he would never try to kill himself again and even let his optimism flourish somewhat, as proven by his writing *Galapagos*. And even later on, up until his death, though he would continue to say that our society was heading for a cataclysm, Kurt Vonnegut never denied that humanity’s fate was in its own hands, and, therefore, that we can always save

ourselves if at one point we begin to make the right choices. Even more proof of his enduring sense of compassion and hope was the fact that the author continued to deliver his heartfelt speeches into his eighties. According to Jerome Klinkowitz, who remained a close friend to the author and who followed his career even closer, in the last years of his life Vonnegut was still making ten major lecture appearances a year, and even if by now it was an increasingly difficult endeavor, he did it “for the pleasure of making people laugh, and the gratification of helping them understand” (Klinkowitz 2009:123). Apparently he also had a growing fear in old age that he would be forgotten. This was hardly the case, as proven by the fact that, on April 11th 2007, the news of his death was reported on multiple News channels across America and even shows like John Stewart’s *The Daily Show* stopped to commemorate the loss in closing of the show’s April 12th 2007 episode.

3.2. Cat’s Cradle

3.2.1. Kurt Vonnegut’s inauguration into the American Counter-Culture

Cat’s Cradle represents arguably Kurt Vonnegut’s first significant success, not so much in terms of literary criticism – as Peter Freese points out, critics received Vonnegut’s work poorly because they didn’t know where to put him (Freese 2009:17) – but certainly as far as the public was concerned. Beginning with this novel and until the emergence of *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969), the bulk of Vonnegut’s followers consisted of young adults – especially college students – who belonged to what was known as the American Counter-Culture.

In his study of Kurt Vonnegut’s life and works, Peter Freese identifies four reasons for this phenomenon. The first is that, in *Cat’s Cradle*, the author proceeds to reject the traditional western system of meaning, but does not offer an applicable new system. By focusing on the tension that arises between the failure of the old system and the lack of a new one, according to Freese, the novel articulates the very same problem that the young counter-culture were wrestling with at the time.

Another link that was created between *Cat's Cradle* and the Counter-Culture movement (though Vonnegut often felt the need to point out that he wrote for adults and that his connections with the youth of the times was purely coincidental) is the fact that the novel rejects all forms of nationalism. Instead these *granfaloons* are replaced by the *karass* – Vonnegut's own version at the time of the *extended family* that he would later talk about at length – which is capable of uniting anyone from anywhere on the planet. This sentiment of long-reaching connections, the idea that people are not trapped within the bubble of their own nationalities but rather that they can connect on a global scale is also a characteristic of the Counter-Culture movement. At the same time, it also reflects back to a sentiment of his own family and social connections branching out. In the introductory chapter of *Vonnegut in Fact* (1998), Jerome Klinkowitz describes at length an encounter that took place between the author and Ollie Lyon. Some forty years before, the two of them had been correspondents for General Electric and Mr. Lyon was apparently the one that encouraged Vonnegut to write and publish *Report on the Barnhouse Effect*, the short story that essentially began his literary career. And although they wouldn't see each other for decades after Vonnegut left the company, their encounter after so long is described as being less a matter of coincidence and more one of inevitability. From this perspective, Kurt Vonnegut's social connections appear like a spider web laid out across the United States map and even branching out across continents, and whether or not the author actively interacted with a member of this web at any given present time could not sever the established link entirely.

For Jerome Klinkowitz, this idea of a *karass* is among the most important of symbols in *Cat's Cradle*. In terms of the humor in the novel, the *karass* stands at its very base, or, to put it in Klinkowitz's words, "the comic nature of this novel derives from how unlikely and apparently disparate the membership of a *karass* can be, stretching across generations, geographies and cultures to form surprising but ultimately necessary events" (Klinkowitz 2012[1998]:1). When writing *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut might have just as well given it a sub title in the order of 'A series of unfortunate events' or of fortunate and unfortunate ones, because, when analyzed from a distance, the end result is not in any way something premeditated by the characters of the tale. Rather, every single choice made by any one single character has reverberating consequences that were in no way planned or foreseen. The narrator John, for example, decides to write a piece of non-fiction about the day the Atomic Bomb was dropped, from the perspective of those who

invented the weapon. A year after beginning and putting aside this project, which included a trip to the hometown of the father of the bomb, John accepts to go to San Lorenzo and write an article about Julien Castle. While there, the island's dictator collapses and is dying and John suddenly stands to become the next President. When 'Papa' Monzano does die, by ingesting *ice-nine*, the group of conspirators, including the narrator, decide to leave the corpse in the tower, not knowing that a plane would crash into it, thus throwing Monzano's body into the ocean and setting in motion the Apocalypse. From writer to reporter, to President and survivor, John's entire adventure might very well stand to be dismissed by the reader as a byproduct of nothing more than coincidences. This is why the *karass* becomes so important. It doesn't matter if it's just *foma*, what it does is to offer a justification behind everything that happens, a sense that there *is* some notion of pre-intention, a method behind the madness, even if the architect of this particular webbing might be a being that exists on a higher plain of existence, a God. Thus, the greatest benefit behind the introduction of the *karass* is to the structure of *Cat's Cradle* itself, for it allows the text to bring together dichotomous notions like war and peace, love and hate, to introduce acceptable paradoxes and yet still manage to "form what in the end is as coherent as a harmonic pattern's resolution" (ibid).

Returning to the novel's connection to the Counter-Culture Movement, a third link, as Peter Freese explains, is established by the novel's aggressive anti-intellectualism, namely its severe criticism of the value that the traditional (especially modern) American society placed on science. In similar ways, the Counter-Culture movement viewed with great suspicion expansion of science and technology across all facets of human civilization, without any regards as to whether or not the physical products of so much applied theory was truly beneficial. The idea that there were masses who viewed scientists with mistrust and even dislike is in fact expressed within the novel itself. When John and Dr. Breed arrive at the Research Laboratory of the General Forge and Foundry Company, they are greeted by Miss Pefko who says that "scientists *think* too much" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:24). But even more so, the narrator expresses this frustration towards scientists in the fat woman he sees there who "turned to examine Dr. Breed, looking at him with helpless reproach. [...] At that moment, she struck me as an appropriate representative for almost all mankind" (ibid). This woman represents the masses of individuals that now mistrust – hate, even – scientists. What is also interesting to point out here is that the woman's reproach is a *helpless* one, which is to say that, despite her mistrust, and by

extrapolation despite the mistrust of most people, there really isn't anything that humanity can do to stop the advancement of scientific progress.

Lastly, the youth of the Counter-Culture movement related easily to the novel *Cat's Cradle* because of its distinctive anti-war attitude. This is expressed generally by the book's contempt regarding the emergence and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Particularly, it is embodied by the pacifism of Ambassador Minton and his speech that expresses the idea that it is children, not men, who die in war and that it is only because these children die like men, "to their everlasting honor and our everlasting shame" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:181) that society is able to celebrate their sacrifice. And because the countermeasure to this celebration of death is the religion called Bokkononism, which places a great emphasis on love, *Cat's Cradle* also fits nicely alongside the Counter-Culture's famous saying "Make love, not war".

In terms of how the reader may receive this text, the structure of the novel – its separation into 127 chapters – is designed in such a way that it may appear from a literary (if not from a strictly linguistic) point of view as a collection of jokes. As Vonnegut himself points out, his novel represents a mosaic, "tiny little chips glued together and each chip is this thing I learned to do – a little joke" (in Freese 2009:186). Many of the titles of these chapters do seem odd and even humorous to a degree – take, for example Chapter 9 'Vice-President in Charge of Volcanoes' or Chapter 10 'End of the World Delight' – and most of them do contain at least one humorous fragment of text, if not necessarily at the end. There is, however, an additional reason for the multitude of short chapters, perhaps also one of the reasons behind Vonnegut's easy style as well, namely that with every chapter the author "shows consideration for the shrinking attention span of television-fed readers" (ibid). Already in 1963 the American people were well immersed in the television culture that offered them quick visual and emotional feedback for very little effort in return. And so, ever aware of his readers, Vonnegut simply adjusted his writing of *Cat's Cradle* to fit their needs.

3.2.2. *Cat's Cradle* – a world of monsters

The disparaging thing about *Cat's Cradle* is that it is difficult to find characters which are not, in one form or another, monstrous.

In the case of the entire Hoenikker family, ignorance (born of personal interest and social detachment), stands at the root of what makes all four human members monsters. Dr. Felix Hoenikker's ignorance exists to such a degree that it can only be called *innocence*. As a scientist (as *the* scientist), Felix appears in the novel as a person focused on anything and everything belonging to the world around him. In one of the few places where the narrator shows true admiration for the man, the former explains through the words of Dr. Breed that "the miracle of Felix was that he always approached old puzzles as though they were brand new" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:31). In other words the late Dr. Hoenikker had the rare ability to consistently tackle any problem with fresh eyes, thus being able to always provide a new perspective, whereas other lesser scientists would invariably get bogged down in passed assumptions. It is easy to see how such a man would be a great asset to any society, and indeed many of the innovations that have improved the life of man in all likelihood came from this sort of individuals.

The problem with Dr. Felix Hoenikker is that society and man are really not what he has in mind while doing his research. As his youngest son Newton explains, "he just wasn't interested in people" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:10). His disassociation with mankind is so extensive that some years after his wife died, little Newton asks his father to tell him something about his mother, but Felix "couldn't remember anything about her" (*ibid*). It's not surprising then that Felix should create inventions that have devastating destructive potential without any regard as to how other people would use them. In his case, it is entirely plausible that he would have never intentionally killed anyone with his inventions. This becomes most evident in the way he plays with his most terrible creation – ice-nine. Where the man 'Papa' Monzano wants to destroy the world and where in all likelihood the American and Russian governments are thought to be hard at work on how to weaponize the substance, Felix has the time of his life in the kitchen of his Cape Cod house turning puddles of water into *ice-nine* and back again, the way we'd expect a child to do.

Yet Dr. Felix Hoenikker's incapacity to comprehend the destructive ways in which others might use his inventions does not free him from being a monster. Marvin Breed is perhaps the first character to point this out through his rhetorical question "how the hell innocent is a man who helps make a thing like an atomic bomb" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:48). When the A-bomb exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the impact – both physical and on the whole of society – was so great, it can almost be regarded as incomprehensible, since it forever changed the way we as people could affect the world around us. It was from that moment on that man realized that he actually had the potential to destroy the world in the way that, up until then, it was thought only a deity could. In the light of this fact, it is understandably difficult to see how anyone who worked on the development of such a weapon could be completely oblivious to its impact. But while Felix Hoenikker's monstrosity may be overshadowed by his complete and honest obliviousness, yet it is reflected in his creations. Despite his one-time interest in turtles and his preference of ten-cent toys, Felix is known as "father of a bomb, father of three children, father of *ice-nine*" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:82). That the narrator chooses to group all five creations and to label Dr. Hoenikker as their father is not coincidental – it reflects both the fact that his so called innocent mind is only capable of producing horrors and the fact that the children, despite being alive, are just as potentially horrible as their unanimated siblings (the bomb and the substance). This link between the three children and *ice-nine* is not only suggested through the above-mentioned grouping, it is also further established through the fact that, after their father's death, Angela, Frank and Newt divide the deadly substance amongst themselves without wondering even for a second if it might truly be said to have belonged to them. It was theirs by virtue of the fact that it was their brother, that it was part of the family and so they could use it as they pleased.

If this paper would take on a psychoanalytical perspective (which it does not), we could argue that growing up in such an inhumane environment as that which was provided in the Hoenikker house drove Angela, Frank and Newt to understandably seek out their own personal happiness by any means possible. Whether or not this is true or even relevant, what the novel does make clear is that their crimes are that Frank "bought a job, just as you [Angela] bought yourself a tomcat husband, just as Newt bought himself a week on cape Cod with a Russian midget" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:174), all three using chips of *ice-nine* as currency.

Angela Hoenikker is physically characterized as *horse-faced*, which doesn't help in any way in alleviating the trauma that she went through while growing up. At the age of sixteen, after her mother dies giving birth to Newton, she is pulled out of school by her father, because Felix is wholly incapable of taking care of himself, much less his children. As Newton explains in his letter to John, "she had been the real head of the family since she was sixteen" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:11). Throughout the novel she certainly takes on the role of the mother in relation to her youngest brother and she's also described as having dressed everyone for school and work every morning as a child, including her father. So devoted is she to taking care of her family that Angela never socializes with anyone and, up until her father's death, it is understood that she has had no relations with any man. When Felix dies and Frank disappears, it's not surprising then that she explains that she "was sitting around that big old house, thinking [her] life was over" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:84), since the purpose of her life had died along with her father. And, rather than kill herself, Angela latched onto anything that could give her new hope. True to Vonnegut's style, it is impossible to label Angela Hoenikker a villain in this story because of the things that we come to know about her, things that humanize her to an extensive degree and cannot help but draw our sympathy. But, like her father, this does not excuse her from being a monster because of what she did to improve her existence. When Harrison Connors appears at her door and offers her what she probably never dreamed she would have – a partner – Angela does anything to make this dream come true, even give her husband, and thus the US government, had "something better than the hydrogen bomb" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:173).

In terms of his behavior, Newt is probably the least monstrous of the three children, but only because he is aware of his deformity (not just the physical but also mental one). In truth, little Newton, as Fumika Nagano so aptly noticed, "is a human character transformed into the equivalent of a scientific invention" (in Bloom 2009:128), more exactly, into the equivalence of the atomic bomb. Evidence of this is found early on in the book. We know that after their mother's death and ever since then Angela behaves as though she were Newt's mother. We also know that at some point in time Newton had a relationship with a Ukrainian midget who turned out to be a Russian spy and who was also "forty-two – old enough to be Newt's mother" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:14). Thus it happens that little Newt belongs in effect to two mothers – one American, the other Russian – in the same way in which the atomic bomb came to belong during the Cold War to both superpowers. As Nagano puts it, "Vonnegut's novel examines the

political abuse of technology as well as the narrative of the Cold War, introducing a midget man caught up between two women from the US and the USSR” (in Bloom 2009:128).

Like the other Hoenikker children, Newton’s life is a sad one. From the very beginning it is marred by tragedy. Before he was born, Newt’s mother goes one day to pick up the family car, which Felix had left absentmindedly in the middle of the road. As it happens, being unused to the car, the woman has an accident which affects her hip. As a result, according to Dr. Breed, there are complications during Newton’s birth and she dies. Thus it happens that little Newt becomes another project of his father’s inability to focus on the human, rather than the scientific, side of life. The tragedy of his existence, his upbringing and even his physical deformity follow him throughout every moment of his life and in many ways “Newton parallels the production of science, which, in the course of political conflict, may be abused” (in Bloom 2009:132).

Yet it would be too simple to boil down such a character as Newton Hoenikker to the image of a mere punching bag. As John points out at the beginning of his novel, he wanted originally to write a book that would “emphasize the *human* rather than the *technical* side of the bomb” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:5). And to a great extent Newton Hoenikker is that human representative, not only because he is alive but because, like all human beings, there are multiple facets to consider when characterizing him. For one thing, despite being as amoral as his siblings, Newt is also the most truthful and rational one of them all. At age six, when his father comes to him to show him *Cat’s cradle* (a piece of string looped together between a person’s hands in such a way in which the imagination might perceive the image of a cradle), instead of accepting his father’s game baby Newt “denounces his father who insisted on him seeing the cat” (in Bloom 2009:133). So traumatized is he by this event that later on, in Frank’s mansion on San Lorenzo, Newton paints a grotesque image of lines representing “a bunch of X’s between somebody’s hands” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:118), representing *Cat’s Cradle*, to which he adds the fact that children go crazy because they stare and stare at the thing and find “no damn cat, no damn cradle” (ibid). A bit later, Newton uses the realistic image of *Cat’s Cradle* as a representation his rejection towards the notion of faith. More to the point, when Julien Castle talks about *Bokononism*, Newt snorts and rhetorically asks Castle “see the cat? See the cradle?” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:130). He puts forth the same question earlier on in answer to the

narrator's surprise when the latter finds out that, despite appearances, Angela's marriage is a fiasco.

In truth, of the three Hoenikker children, Newton is the only one who consistently rejects any and all forms of *foma* (helpful lies), and, while Angela sees herself as a happily married woman (though she is being abused) and Frank sees himself as the faithful engineer (though he is in fact childish and incompetent), at no time is there any hint in the novel that Newton does not see himself every bit for what he really is. Moreover, while he is as amoral as the rest of them, Newt is nonetheless rational enough to understand that *ice-nine* is far too dangerous to be used for any reason, including as a bargaining chip. This fact is made evident both by his contempt towards his brother, who gives his fragment of *ice-nine* to the mad dictator 'Papa' Monzano in exchange for a high-level political function, and by the fact that he "didn't give [*ice-nine*] to" Zinka, the Ukrainian midget, "she stole it" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:175). As a result of this, Newton Hoenikker is presented in the novel as being duplicative in nature (a fact that mirrors his belonging to two wholly separate, antithetical mother figures), being at once both a monstrous representation of a bomb that has "turned everything upside-down and inside-out" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:24) and at the same time the only character that has the ability to maintain a shred of decency (even if it is purely rational decency) without having to resort to *foma* for comfort.

Frank Hoenikker, while simple in nature, is more complex as a character and may have a far more important role in *Cat's Cradle* than some would believe. The eldest of the sons, Franklin exhibits from an early age a propensity to perform experience without any heed to matters relating to ethics, similar to his father. As a child, for example, he would put insects in mason jars and have them fight to the death. Normally, as his younger brother Newt explains, insects won't fight each other, but one can force them to become bloodthirsty if one were to incessantly shake the jar, "and that's what Frank was doing, shaking, shaking the jar" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:11). Later on, deprived of any kind of affection in his family, Frank is taken in, essentially, by Jack in Jack's Hobby Shop. Here, Franklin seemed to have found some solace, since he spent thousands of hours working on a model, which he created with remarkable detail. When speaking to John, Jack remarks that his shop "was [Frank's] real home" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:54) and it is clear that he thought of Frank as his own son. The reality, however, as the reader learns much later in the novel, is that Franklin, far from showing gratitude for the

warm welcome, went over to the Hobby Shop so often because he was sleeping with Jack's wife. This does not undermine the importance of the model that he created; it merely presents itself as further evidence of Franklin Hoenikker's lack of human morals.

In truth, it is wise for the reader of this novel to keep Frank's model world in mind, because, in a sense, the island of San Lorenzo is a life-sized representation of it. The first evidence of this can be found when comparing the basic structure of both formations. When Jack first shows John the model that Frank built, the narrator describes it as "an island, as perfectly rectangular as a township in Kansas" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:53). Later on, while flying over San Lorenzo, he points out that the island "was an amazingly regular rectangle" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:94). In addition, just as the model from Jack's Hobby Shop is perfectly detailed, so does the image that the people of San Lorenzo pretend to create reflect one of perfection, as is made clear through their national anthem. To a degree, the people of San Lorenzo are the living embodiment of Frank's model in the same way as Newt is the living embodiment of the atomic bomb. The difference is that the parallels run in reverse – Newt is an overall descent human being who is meant to reflect a horrible invention, whereas the whole of San Lorenzo comes off as a horrible place which is meant to reflect a beautiful work of art.

One additional piece of evidence meant to show the reader that San Lorenzo is, in a way, Franklin's own creation is found in the figure of 'Papa' Monzano. Before ever arriving on the island, at Felix Hoenikker's funeral, Frank displays a lack of emotion that can only be the consequence of a lifetime of neglect. Without even waiting for the burial procession to end, he hails a cab and leaves, never to return to Ilium and without leaving any notice or explanation as to where he is going or why. This is the ultimate act of rejection – Franklin turns his back on his family and on his life and seeks out new ones, which he finds in San Lorenzo. The nickname given to the dictator of this nation, as the book initially suggests, has no noteworthy significance, and yet, when Monzano collapses in the airport shortly after the narrator's arrival, Franklin "protested loudly that 'Papa' wasn't dead, that he *couldn't* be dead. He was frantic, 'Papa! You can't die! You can't!'" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:103). If Felix's death was regarded as something wholly insignificant, Frank's refusal to accept 'Papa' Monzano's death coupled with the fact that he address the dictator as 'Papa', meaning *father* points to the idea that, in the young general's eyes, Monzano is his father. He is in fact the perfect father, one who gives Frank a home, a

purpose in life and even a mate, a father who gives Frank everything he's ever wanted precisely because he is Frank's own creation. This fact brings about the issue of whether we the readers can agree with Newton when he accuses his brother of selling *ice-nine* for power and wealth (especially baring in mind that Frank rejects the ultimate seat – the Presidency). Despite the fact that Frank admits that he bought himself a position (something that the others around him might at least understand), might we not consider that Franklin simply took his sibling *ice-nine* from one father who had been neglectful and given it to one that, in his mind, was more worthy? In any case, what is clear is that, as a creation, the island of San Lorenzo stands as a representation of Franklin's monstrosity, since, far from being a paradise, the island is a place of great sorrow and hopelessness.

There are other monsters in this novel that function as secondary characters in the tale. For example, Dr. Asa Breed (Vonnegut was obviously very careful in naming his characters) is so named because, as head of the Research Laboratory of the General Forge and Foundry Company in Ilium, he in effect *breeds* other monsters. Like Felix Hoenikker, it is understood that all the scientists working there are “pure research men [who] work on what fascinates them, not on what fascinates other people” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:35), or on what people need. These scientists are not kept, financed and intellectually nurtured because they seek to better the human race. They are encouraged because, having been spared any burden of social and moral responsibility, having been spared the burden of any responsibility at all, they are free to create all manners of inventions and substances that governments can then abuse.

Even the institution that Dr. Breed runs is described as an ominous place where we might expect horrible things to be brought into existence. From the moment John and Dr. Breed arrive there, the former relates how he smiles at one of the guards, but the man “did not smile back. There was nothing funny about national security, nothing at all” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:25). If laughing and crying are physiologically the same, then the one redeeming quality of most disastrous things is that one can make fun of them, as the author himself has done throughout his literary career. But in this case, where there is “nothing funny” to be found, it is understood that we as readers can only weep at the thought of what might be created within the walls of the Research Laboratory (like, for example, the substance *ice-nine*, which destroys the world). When the narrator moves our attention into the building, things do not get any brighter. Although, at

first, the inside is described much like any business would be – with offices and secretaries – things get darker when the reader finds out about the Girl Pool. These young women spend their lives in a basement listening to recordings of scientific research, which are brought to them by other serving girls. Though the space where they work is not actually presented, the text does create the silent image of a dungeon where these girls sit locked up and from where, only on Christmas, “once a year the girls left their cloister of cement block to go a-caroling” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:27).

One other aspect to keep in mind when analyzing the character Dr. Breed is his relation to his other relatives. The first person that the reader is indirectly introduced to is the scientist’s son who, on the day the A-bomb was dropped, “said he was quitting his job at the Research Laboratory. [...] Said he didn’t want to help politicians with their fugging wars any more” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:19). We learn later that he went on to become a sculptor in Rome. Thus, Dr. Breed’s son, the one who would be his heir at the Research Laboratory, rejects his father’s legacy because he realizes that his work and the work of all those that Dr. Breed and co. encourage “was sure to wind up a weapon, one way or another” (ibid). The second relative that the reader encounters is Dr. Breed’s younger brother Marvin, who is an undertaker. More to the point, he is “the fourth generation in this location” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:45) running a business that was built by his great-grandfather. The fact that the business sells tombstones reveals the fact that the Breed family has dealt with the dead for generations, suggesting, thus, that Asa’s career choice is just another form of the family’s dealing with death.

Even the narrator John (or Jonah) becomes monstrous towards the end of the novel. From the point of view of the character, throughout most of the text he appears as a neutral observer who is able to see through both the truth and the benefits of *foma* and who, in this way, is able to judge matters objectively as the narrator of a modern work of fiction might have done. But *Cat’s Cradle* is a decisively post-modern text and so, in the end, objectivity fails him. This occurs from the moment that John accepts to become the next President of San Lorenzo. From that point onwards the reader can witness his transformation clearly through the character’s acts of appropriation and manipulation. If upon arrival the narrator describes *the* island and *its* people, afterwards John explains how he “arrived at the uppermost battlement of *my* castle, and I looked out at *my* guests, *my* servants, *my* cliff, and *my* lukewarm sea” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:162 –

emphasis mine). ‘Papa’ Monzano isn’t even dead yet at this point and already John is so power-hungry that he even takes onto himself the sea, oblivious to the fact that the a body of water like the sea cannot be owned by any one single individual. His corruption is then deepened in more subtle ways. Even before this, still feeling the grandeur of absolute power over a nation, John sees himself akin to George Washington when he decides that as a first act he “would chop down the hook” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:152) that ‘Papa’ Monzano and his predecessor used to kill people, thus mirroring Washington’s fabled act of chopping down a cherry tree. After this, and after he joins his guests, John feels the hype of being leader fade away and then takes yet another step towards becoming a monster like ‘Papa’. If initially the narrator plans to herald in a new age of prosperity for his people, wherein he would even ask Bokonon to return to the capital and become a member of his political office, soon after that he decides that nothing would change and that “good and evil had to remain separate; good in the jungle, and evil in the palace. Whatever entertainment there was in that was about all we had to give the people” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:162). He thus accepts the idea that it is not his duty to help his people except by giving them more lies while carrying out his days in prosperity. Finally, what pretty much transforms John into a younger version of ‘Papa’ Monzano is found in the eventual ease with which he accepts the fact that Frank gave the former dictator *ice-nine* and in the fact that, far from being appalled by the way in which Monzano died, John decides that his funeral “should be done with pomp” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:179), as if the circumstances surrounding the former President’s demise need no longer be discussed. Thus John suffers in effect a transformation from an innocent bystander, an objective observer, towards one of the people that is in some way responsible for the destruction of the world, since, had he not accepted so deeply the morally indifferent aspect of his new political position, he would have most likely insisted that the body of ‘Papa’ Monzano be cremated immediately as opposed to the actual circumstances whereas John uses Monzano’s body to further his own political agenda.

From the point of view of the writer, John does not suffer an actual degradation, but is in fact monstrous to begin with, not because of what he does, but because of what he fails to do in light of what he is. Had John had any other common-man profession, if he had been just a narrator in *Cat’s Cradle*, there would be no issue to speak of up until the transformation that he suffers at the end. But John is a writer and people who choose this calling, or are chosen for it, “take on a sacred obligation to produce beauty and enlightenment and comfort at top speed”

(Vonnegut 2011[1963]:166). Bokonon may be an author who lives up to this decree, but John isn't. He has book that he never actually writes and another – *Cat's Cradle* – which he writes after the world has ended. Until the cataclysmic event, he is just a passive on-looker, or, as Peter Freese so aptly puts it, “John is a victim of apathy which causes one to give up the world as a lost cause. He is a convert to post-bomb cynicism. But Vonnegut, not John, is the real prophet [...] To Vonnegut, John's is the unpardonable sin” (Freese 2009:222). The narrator of this novel is not a villain, nor is he amoral – that first would in some way pardon him because he would be evil in nature, the second because he wouldn't know any better – instead he is a man of conscience who chooses to stand by as the world is destroyed and, from this perspective, he is worse than a villain or an amoral individual and so cannot be forgiven.

That ‘Papa’ Monzano is a monster needs little in terms of proof, coming as close to being a villain as possible. He is a dictator who not only profits off the misery of his people but, perhaps more importantly to the novel, he is the one who declares that he “will destroy the whole world” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:170) and makes good on his threat. The act of taking *ice-nine* in the hope that after his death more will follow as a result is not one done on the spur of the moment, rather it is the end result of a long laid plan. This is made evident by the fact that on his deathbed he “asks for ice” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:155) and mutters the word more than once. He is of course referring to the substance that Frank gave him. Like with any corrupt political leader, everything that ‘Papa’ Monzano says is a lie, save for his threat to destroy the world, as for example when he tells Frank to “teach them science” because “science is magic that *works*” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:156), despite the fact that he knows how useless science and truth are for his people, or when he tells John, who is to become the new President of San Lorenzo, to kill Bokonon for real, only to then confess that he, ‘Papa’, is “a member of the Bokononist faith” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:157). If one were to compare Felix Hoenikker to ‘Papa’ Monzano (Frank's real father and the one he created) what comes out is that the latter is an image of the former, but without the former's saving grace. As has already been pointed out, Felix is redeemed from being considered evil because of his innocence, which makes it possible to simply play with *ice-nine* the way a child might. He in all likelihood understands the destructive potential of the substance but could never willingly use *ice-nine* to such an apocalyptic end. ‘Papa’, on the other hand, not only understands the substances potential but acts precisely upon

this knowledge in the hopes of making sure that nothing is left of his country and of the world after he is gone.

Perhaps as a testament to the Dr. Felix Hoenikker's greatness, or at least to the impact that he had on his elder son, is the fact that creating his complete opposite requires two characters. Thus, while 'Papa' Monzano represents Felix the immoral man, Dr. von Koenigswald represents Felix the humane scientist. As the latter points out, he is "a very bad scientist [for he] will do anything to make a human being feel better, even if it is unscientific" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:157). Unlike Dr. Hoenikker, who wasn't interested in people and only cared about his research, Dr. von Koenigswald cares *only* about people. He is in all likelihood what Franklin thought a man of science should be like, even if he himself he not and even if this makes von Koenigswald "a bad scientist". And yet, it would appear that, in creating this character, Frank cannot move too far from what he grew up with, since it would appear that only through acts of horror that surpass human understanding can a scientist make the transition from amorality or immorality to possessing a strong code of ethics. And indeed, in contrast to Dr. von Koenigswald's grand altruistic statement the reader is provided beforehand with the knowledge that this man, before arriving on the island of San Lorenzo, was a Nazi war criminal. So devastating were his deeds during the war as a physician at Auschwitz that now when he has devoted the remainder of his days to saving lives, as Julien Castle explains, "if he keeps going at the present rate, working night and day, the number of people he's saved will equal the number of people he let die – in the year 3010" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:133). In other words, for a scientist to become a decent person he must first commit atrocities on a scale that make it all but impossible for him to redeem himself regardless of how hard he tries.

The 'heavenly' Mona Monzano is no saint either, despite the *foma* surrounding her image. When the reader first encounters this character directly it is at the airport and, from the way the narrator first presents her, we can already tell that something is off. Having become completely enamored by the mere sight of the young girl, John remarks that "there, God love her warm and creamy soul, was peace and plenty forever" and describes her as having "seemed to understand all, and to be all there was to understand" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:100). This gross hyperbolae that essentially inscribes Mona with the traits of a goddess of beauty and wisdom (a Greek goddess, since that is what she is dressed like) may express the way in which John sees

the eighteen year old girl at the time, but to the reader these exaggerations are also the means through which the narrator draws attention to their fallacy. The first clear indication that Mona is not what she appears to be comes shortly after her appearance. Soon after the ceremonies which would greet Mr. Milton, the US Ambassador, 'Papa' Monzano collapses on stage. As panic begins to take hold of those around him, John looks for Mona and finds "that she was still serene and had withdrawn to the rail of the reviewing stand" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:103). Clearly, she is not moved by the image of her adoptive father in pain. Even more, when the narrator looks at her again he notices her standing next to a pilot who in turn has an expression of ecstasy on his face because "Mona had slipped off her sandal. Her small brown foot was bare. And with that foot she was kneading and kneading and kneading – obscenely kneading – the instep of the flyer's boot" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:104). As the reader later finds out, Bokononists have a highly erotic ritual called *boko-maru*, in which two people "press the soles of their feet together" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:112), an act that the reader is to accept as some form of spiritual intercourse. In other words, back on the stand where 'Papa' Monzano is lying down due to pain, while this is all going on Mona Monzano is, in effect, engaged in sexual activities with the pilot right in front of everyone.

The reader comes to understand more of this character after John tentatively accepts the position of President. Mona's role in this affair is that of physical reward – Bokonon prophesized that "she'll marry the next President of San Lorenzo" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:145) – a position that she accepts freely. Then, after she and John engage in an act of *boko-maru* and he tells the girl that he loves her, Mona answers that she loves him too and does so *simply* (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:147). The idea that begins to take shape at this point for the reader of the text is that Mona's serenity comes from the fact that she is completely empty inside, like a character that was given outer features but whose creator couldn't figure out what to place within (perhaps this is an expression of the limitations of Frank's understanding of women). Within this perspective, Mona Monzano appears to be just as amoral and, therefore, just as monstrous as the Hoenikker children, if not more so, since she is devoid of any human sense of morality and decency. So detached is this girl from the human condition in fact that after the Apocalypse begins and she and John engage in actual sexual intercourse within the bunker, Mona dislikes the act thoroughly because "the girl was not interested in reproduction – hated the idea" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:190). Whether for animals or humans, or for humans as animals, reproduction is a

basic aspect of life, made perhaps even more essential during a time of crisis. But Mona Monzano in effect denies her own human condition – an act that is not difficult at all since her ties to humanity were from the beginning tenuous at best – and so it is no surprise to the reader that not long after that, upon seeing the devastation left behind by *ice-nine*, that she so easily accepts the notion of suicide.

Is Lyndon Boyd Johnson, aka Bokonon, a monster? The answer to this question is not as simple as it may seem. Without a doubt, this so-called spiritual leader preaches a faith that ultimately teaches his followers that it is better to believe that their lives are happy ones instead of them trying to improve upon their situation. So immersed are the people of San Lorenzo into Bokononism that when their guru tells them to all commit suicide, they do it without question, as he in all likelihood knew they would. This final command mirrors to an extent various moments in human history that the reader may have at least some knowledge of, like for example the Holy Crusades, where important Christian religious figures told their followers to fight and essentially die in the name of their faith, and the followers do so also without question. From this perspective, Bokonon certainly does come off as a monster that commands innocent people to die for no reason.

On the other hand, the very first words in *The Book of Bokonon* – in essence their Bible – sets this spiritual figure distinctly apart from those belonging to Christianity. Where a Christian Priest puts forward the dogma of his religion as unquestionable truth, the first lines of Bokonon's book state that “all the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:4). This counterfactual aspect of his religious doctrine stands at the heart of the text and is one that its author really seems to want to establish in the minds of his followers, since he obviously repeats it several times. Even, for example, when Bokonon provides his own version of Genesis – a mockery, of course, of the story found in the Bible – he ends the parable by pointing out that it is all “*foma!* Lies! A back of *foma!*” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:136). If everything in *The Book of Bokonon* is a series of harmless untruths and this fact is repeated several times for emphasis, one must wonder who is really to blame for the mass suicide at the end of the novel. Even the way in which Bokonon writes the account of the event indicates that the real culprits are the people themselves. As the spiritual leader explains, the citizens of San Lorenzo “made a captive of the spurious holy man named Bokonon” and “commanded him to

tell them exactly what God Almighty was up to and what they should now do” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:195). This would suggest that the people, frightened as they were and having never really understood that Bokonon is lying in his book, in a sense threatened to old holy man, to which the latter responded the only way he knew how, with more lies. He was defending himself against a frenzied mob that may have just as well killed him had he refused to answer to their demands. This is also suggested by the final page in *The Book of Bokonon*, wherein the holy man states that he would like, as a last act, to write a book on “the history of human stupidity” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:206), the only book still worth writing, since it is human stupidity that led to the mass suicide and it is human stupidity that has destroyed the world.

In conclusion, Bokonon’s monstrosity is a matter of perspective. On the one hand, he *is* a monster because he tells his followers to simply pretend that they are happy as opposed to striving to help them in actuality and because he tells them to kill themselves, most likely knowing that they are stupid enough to take him seriously. On the other hand, one could argue, as has in fact been stated more than once in the novel, that “God, in His Infinite Wisdom, had made the island worthless” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:89) and therefore in the face of the fact that there would never be any hope for a decent life for these people, *foma* really is the only alternative. And how much one can blame Bokonon for the suicide incident is debatable, as has already been established, since he was dealing with a threatening mob. Therefore, from this perspective, Bokonon comes off as a victim of circumstance rather than a promulgator, and even as a true holy man who does try to help his followers in spite of the truth, which is that “life was as short and brutish and mean as ever” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:124), a truth that is simply too hard to bare.

The rest of the characters in *Cat’s Cradle* cannot be called monsters. Julien Castle and his son Philip, while perhaps not wholly pleasant individuals – the former talks like a gangster (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:118), while both men almost constantly speak in a sarcastic tone – their only real crime is that of accepting the reality of their surroundings. The circumstances surrounding their deaths are even heroic, as John points out, since, “while the tornadoes still raged, they had set out on foot for the House of Hope and Mercy in the Jungle to give whatever hope and mercy was theirs to give” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:204). Lastly, the only minor character that is worthy of remembrance here – worthy, because she is perhaps the only truly innocent one

in the novel with a shred of character – is Miss Faust. This simple woman, while not embracing any strange religion like Bokononism (she, of course, has no knowledge of it), points out that she has “trouble understanding how truth, all by itself, could be enough for a person” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:38). By denying the praising of *truth*, which everyone else at the Research Laboratory seems to worship in one form or another, Miss Faust shows that she is a character that is strong enough to resist the influence of others. Thus she appears as a image (however minor, however small) of hope for anyone who would wish to stand apart and even against their surrounding reality, without excluding themselves from it, in the way that the writer Kurt Vonnegut himself struggled to do throughout his career.

What’s important to remember is that, despite the fact that, as seen above, most of the characters in the novel are monsters, none of them are actually evil. In fact, as Jerome Klinkowitz aptly points out, Kurt Vonnegut in general has no real heroes and no actual villains either. The irony in Vonnegut’s characters often lies in the fact that their crimes are committed unconsciously. But in Vonnegut’s world, crime serves a useful purpose. By means of what he calls *Dynamic Tension*, “it is the belief of Bokonon that good societies could be built only by pitting good against evil, and keeping the tension between the two at all times” (Klinkowitz 1973:126). Thus, it cannot be that any given character is either good or evil, but rather that what elements of one or the other that are tied to that character are needed only to maintain this tension and are not actually connected to the fictional person in question. As Klinkowitz again pointed out, the idea behind *Cat’s Cradle* is stated as “a recognition of the finite for what it is: an external repository of certain elements, some of which may be evil but none of which are egocentrically identified with Man” (Klinkowitz 1973:153).

3.2.3. Truth vs. foma

Ultimately, one of the things that characterize the novel as a whole is the struggle between the usefulness of truth versus that of comforting lies. From a historical point of view, his debate was still quite pertinent when *Cat’s Cradle* came out, since, despite the fact that it was already showing signs of decline, the hype surrounding scientific discoveries was still very present in

American society. Many people still believed that science would unlock the universe and some more years would have to go by before issues of moral ethics connected to scientific research would really emerge.

Kurt Vonnegut, true to form, takes a rather ambiguous stance in this debate. On the one hand, the text criticizes truth on several occasions, but really this comes off as merely a method through which the author removes *truth* from the high pedestal that society has placed it upon, so that it may be looked upon clearly by the reader. On the other hand, while much of the book focuses on Bokononism, “a useful religion founded on lies” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:4), the narrator is also quick to specify that he does “not intend that this book be a tract on behalf of Bokononism” (ibid). In other words, Vonnegut has no intention of trying to fill the empty pedestal that *truth* previously held with the *foma* he presents, but rather his wish is that the reader analyzes them both and makes his own decision as to which he favors and to what degree.

Bokononism itself, as Klinkowitz aptly points out, “is a refinement of Revered lasher’s anthropological understanding of human usefulness from *Player Piano* and Winston Niles Rumfoord’s Church of God the Utterly Indifferent in *The Sirens of Titan* (Klinkowitz 2009:45). The basic concept behind this faith is the so-called notion of Dynamic Tension, of pinning good and evil against one another. This is in fact the very basis of all religion, but, as Klinkowitz again mentions, while normally this conflict is carried out on plain of existence that humanity only sparsely interacts with, but is otherwise separate from our lives, Bokononism will have none of that (ibid). This is why, despite the fact that Bokononism appears in *Cat’s Cradle* as a religion, it would be wrong to consider that the *foma* that Vonnegut analyzes in his novel is strictly religious in nature. Rather, it is meant to express something a bit more general, and ultimately it draws its power from the author’s humanism. When John asks Frank “what *is* sacred in Bokononism?” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:151), the latter answers with “Man. That’s all. Just man” (ibid). The philosophical doctrine that in real life places man above all else, above God even, is that which was put forward by the Freethinkers to which Clemens Vonnegut was a devout member. Thus, Bokononism appears as a fictional religion of this doctrine, if, hypothetically, this doctrine would have a religion. In other words, since behind Bokononism stands the writer’s family legacy, in actuality the discussion that Kurt Vonnegut brings up regarding the benefits of *truth* and *foma* is done within the context of this Freethinker spirit. And since the beliefs that Clemens held so

strongly, and which Kurt embraced, extend to all aspects of life, so too must the reader's analysis of the discussion put forth in *Cat's Cradle* be open to considerations pertaining to all aspects of the human condition.

In order to see just what aspects are discussed in the novel, it would be useful to go through some of the instances of *foma* that appear in the text, so that we may then compare them to *truth* and then see which, if any, clearly benefits humanity more. The first time the reader encounters a mentioning (if not an actual example) of a harmless untruth is on the first page of the book, before the story even begins. Instead of a dedication of some sort, Vonnegut provides the reader with the caveat "Nothing in this book is true" and then quickly goes on to provide a mock quotation from the bible of his made-up religion which advises people to "live by the foma that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy". What is interesting about this is the fact that, while the reader may expect at this point a delightful tale about the joyful tales of some characters who follow this advice and are the better for it, are happy. The reality of the novel, as becomes clear early on, is more complex than that. In fact, due to this implied expectation, this opening statement creates a harmless untruth onto itself. If the reader were to just stop here, all he would be left with is this positive advice on the basis of which he might strive to make his life a better one. To a degree, this may be what the author wanted, which would explain the warning that *nothing in this novel is true*, which, in the truth-obsessed scientific world that Vonnegut refers to, is like saying that everything beyond this opening page is worthless. On the other hand, since no writer wants their texts to go unread, it is more reasonable to assume that, consciously, Vonnegut used this opening as a sort of negative advertisement, which would make the reader all the more eager to go on.

The next *foma* that appears in the novel is centered on the notion of the *karass*. As caricatures of the notion of religious destiny, of God's hand in the evolution of one's fate, the *karasses* are defined as "teams [of individuals] that do God's Will without ever discovering what they are doing" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:2). Who the members of any one *karass* appears to be completely random, or at least beyond human understanding, and, as the narrator explains, in the same chapter via a Bokononist Calypso, can include a queen and a lion hunter and a drunk. Understanding how a *karass* functions doesn't seem to be an issue – later on in the novel the notion is revealed that understanding in itself is just a human construct (Vonnegut

2011[1963]:130) – and so some obvious questions, such as how or why a *karass* is formed, are conveniently left unanswered. All that the reader is to take from this *foma* is that it is a comforting thought. In an age where what Vonnegut calls ‘The great American Experiment’ is very much in vogue, one is supposed to find it pleasant to think that God has placed each individual within an extended family with whose other members he or she is inevitably brought together, such that, if one were to accept this as fact, no person need be lonely ever again. At no point in time does *Cat’s Cradle* reject the existence of such a group in favor of whatever value individualism might bring. Such a rejection would, after all, run counter to Kurt Vonnegut’s fundamental belief in the joy of belonging to a Folk Society, of which he had learned so many great things during his anthropology studies. What the novel does bring to light, though, is the fact that, while it may be better than being alone, belonging to a *karass* does not mean being part of some utopian society. In fact, as the events that John narrates prove, the end goal that its members may be leading up to could be catastrophic.

The next great lie is that Dr. Hoenikker is a wholly innocent person because he would never willingly hurt anyone. Symbolically, Felix is a representation of the belief, which Kurt Vonnegut came across while working at General Electric, that scientists bare no responsibility for the way in which other people will choose to utilize their research. This includes the military. From this perspective, the fact that the US military dropped the A-bomb on Hiroshima, killing thousands and thousands of civilians, should in no way cast a shadow upon the stellar accomplishments of the bomb’s inventors. And this is how Dr. Hoenikker is seen at his workplace. Revered by many, admired by all, the general consideration is that “the importance of this one man in the history of mankind is incalculable” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:39) and it is assumed without question that admiration *is* the only acceptable emotion that one can have for such an individual. In contrast to this sentiment, as, again, has already been discussed, is the reality of the fact that Felix’s detachment from human society make him a monster that has turned his children into monsters and that creates substances of mass destruction. In light of this fact, I called Dr. Hoenikker’s innocence a *lie* and not *foma* because the latter is characterized as being harmless, whereas this image that Felix has can hardly be called that, since his apparent innocence is what prevents anyone from really questioning the merits for human society of his research (although the reader of *Cat’s Cradle* is expected to consider such doubts). Thus, in the discussion of the characteristics and values of *foma*, a discussion that is central to the novel, we

are presented with a second term of comparison (the first being *truth*), namely the *damaging lie*, which is identical to *foma* in perhaps every respect, save for the fact that it is not harmless in any way.

As a matter of diversity, in the sense that the novel's analysis of *foma* extends beyond important matters, the next example is Newton's rhetorical question "aren't the gorges beautiful?" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:10). It refers to the deep gorges that cut through the Cornell University campus and which, it would seem, are a sight to see. However, Newt is quick to add that "this year, two girls jumped into one holding hands" (ibid). As a result, the blissful nature of this serene scenery is besmirched by the truth that the gorges are also a place where periodically students will commit suicide, thus adding a deep sense of tragedy to these natural formations.

The next lie that appears in *Cat's Cradle* comes from Dr. Breed. While giving a speech at a high school, Asa states that "if everybody would study science more, there wouldn't be all the trouble there was" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:18). This goes hand in hand with his statement towards John during their interview that "the more truth we have, the richer we become" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:29). The two go together because good scientists are thought in this novel to be interested only in uncovering truths for their own sake, again, without any regard to how useful or beneficial towards the human race a given truth might be. The connection, therefore, is in the lie that everyone should become a scientist because science, through the uncovering of truth, can only enrich our lives and make the world a better place. The fallacy in this idea is revealed both through the atomic bomb and through *ice-nine*, one as a symbol for the end of the world, the second as the actual agent of the Apocalypse, both of them children of science. The *truth* is perhaps best touched upon by Dr. Breed's son, who states that "anything a scientist worked on was sure to wind up as a weapon" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:19). While this might be an exaggeration, it does point out the general reality of the fact that governments will try to weaponize any invention it can and the particular reality of the first half of the 20th century (to which Vonnegut points) where amoral or immoral scientists willingly provided governments with these great weapons, if nothing more than for the sake of their own scientific curiosity.

A *foma* that appears during the narrator's trip to Ilium is that this city "is a family town" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:20). This notion certainly does confer onto it a sense of peace and comfort, the idea that Ilium is a nice quiet town where people live together in harmony.

Unfortunately there are a few aspects that contradict this image. The first might be the seedy bar that John goes to, where he has drinks with a prostitute. The second factor is the existence of the General Forge and Foundry Company, which, as has already been stated, is a breeding ground for monstrous inventions. Last, but not least, there is the fact that Ilium is “where they held the public hangings of the whole county” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:21) back when America was still forming, which means that even then Ilium was a place of death.

Another *foma* that appears during the narrator’s trip to Ilium is expressed by Miss Faust, who states that “God is love” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:39). His comes out in the context of a conversation that she recalls having with Dr. Hoenikker in which it is revealed that Felix is incapable of understanding the notions of both love and God, because he cannot scientifically ascertain their existence. Miss Faust, on the other hand, needs no objective proof. She simply believes what she says and therefore to her it is true. Since Kurt Vonnegut was known to have rejected all forms of religion, it is obvious that these are not his words. What the author does want to point out here is the usefulness of a religious belief that makes someone a better person. In fact, this is the best kind of *foma*, a lie that is not only harmless but which also encourages Miss Faust to remain a good person, in spite of the fact that she is surrounded by monsters.

The first time that the narrator sees Mona Monzano is in the newspaper that reports on the events that are taking place on the island of San Lorenzo. As soon as he sees the eighteen year old girl, John falls in love with her and describes her as being “luminously compassionate and wise” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:57). At this point in the story neither he nor the reader has encountered this female character so it is too soon to state that lie has to do with the discrepancy between the superb image that John creates around her and the dark reality of her nature. Rather, what the author points to here is the lie behind love at first sight, about how a person is able to take some traits that he or she observes about another individual on first sight and to use them to create in their own minds an image of that person that borders upon perfection. Whether or not this is *foma* is unclear, or at least, it may depend strictly on the interpretation of the reader. On the one hand, this illusion is harmless, beneficial even, since for a while the enamored individual treats his or her beloved with utmost compassion. On the other hand, the reader may feel that this false image inevitably leads to pain when the imperfections of the revered person emerge and, as a result, this lie is a bad one and should be avoided. Where the author stands on the matter is

somewhat unclear, though one would perhaps be on the safer side when assuming that Vonnegut would have related to the second reader better, especially when considering the type of person that Mona Monzano turns out to be.

As *Cat's Cradle* shifts to the island of San Lorenzo, so too do many of the instances of lies (whether *foma* or not) begin to center around various aspects of life here or on various individuals. One such lie is the declaration that the people of San Lorenzo are “all fiercely dedicated to the ideals of the Free World” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:58). This goes hand in hand with the words of the national anthem, which speaks of a “land where the living is grand” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:99), which, all in all, creates the portrait of a society that has not only aimed for the ideals set forth by the American Dream (freedom, prosperity and justice for all), but has reached them. In reality the people of San Lorenzo are described by the narrator as *thin, oatmeal-colored* and *deathly silent* (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:97). As John learns while reading Philip Castle's book on the history of San Lorenzo, the island was populated throughout history by slaves and was wholly useless from every point of view. We also learn that, when Bokonon and McCabe land on the island and decide to make it into a utopia, they fail upon seeing that it is simply too destitute for there to be any real hope for prosperity. As a result, in order to provide the people with some joy, they create this *foma* about the blissful nature of the island. As Julien Castle explains, “truth was the enemy of the people, because the truth was so terrible, so Bokonon made it his business to provide the people with better and better lies” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:123). The conflict between the state and Bokonon, respectively the Bokononist faith, also plays into the realization of this *foma*, since “everybody on San Lorenzo is a devout Bokononist, the hook notwithstanding” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:122). In fact, Bokonon suggested the hook as the proper punishment for Bokononists” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:123) and for a while the entire island population were involved in a giant theater production in which they would pretend to hunt Bokonon down and the Holy Man would pretend to escape. Thanks to this *foma* the reality of the citizens' lives mattered less, especially since everything was an act, including the Hook.

Where the *foma* began to fail, however, was when McCabe stopped *pretending* to be “the tyrant in the city” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:124) and started *being* an actual tyrant, as evidenced by the fact that people did begin dying on the Hook. His brutal manner of leadership continued with

his successor, although neither dictator would try and actually kill Bokonon since “McCabe was always sane enough to realize that without the holy man to war against, he himself would become meaningless. ‘Papa’ Monzano understands that too” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:125). The failure then rests in the fact that this image of prosperity and happiness did not last long in the form in which it started. From a harmless untruth that was meant to give the people hope, McCabe and Monzano transform it into a lie which they use to control the people. This explains the deathly silence with which John and his companions are greeted with at the airport and the obedience with which the people begin to sing the national anthem and then become silent again, like machines, like the victim’s of terror that they are. And just how far off the lie trials away from *foma* is perhaps best expressed in the fact that, upon his deathbed, having become so detached from the needs of his people, ‘Papa’ decides to destroy them all, so that, if he can no longer rule, no one else will.

The two minor characters Philip and Julien Castle are a source of a multitude of small instances of *foma*, whether spoken directly or indirectly. For example, when he and John first meet, the former strongly advises the narrator to “not be one of those people who trusts his memory” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:108). Yet, while saying this, Philip is in the middle of creating a mosaic portrait of Mona and doing it all from memory. The first words that are given to the reader which are spoken by Julien are in fact narrated by his son. The latter recalls the time when he was much younger and there was an outbreak of the bubonic plague. At one point, after Julien had struggled to save so many and so many had died, the man takes his son out back to where the bodies of the dead were being gathered up and told the young boy that “someday this will all be yours” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:116).

When we first encounter Julien Castle directly it is at Frank’s mansion. There he tells the narrator and those around him that his lifetime hero is Jesus Christ (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:119), only to shoot the whole notion down a moment later. When reminded of his statement, Julien simply retorts that “people have to talk about something just to keep their voice boxes working” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:120). This statement in fact characterizes everything Julien Castle says and is perhaps the only really honest thing he utters. The rest is just *foma* created for the sake of having something to say. Here then we have another aspect of *foma* that is brought into the picture. Not only are harmless untruths meant to help people, they are also used for no better

reason than to have something to say. This is the kind of untruth that Julien is a master of, to the extent that it becomes difficult at times to tell just where he stands on one thing or another. For example, the first time he encounters Newt's painting, he appears to admire it, yet, soon after that, Julien declares that it is "Garbage, just like everybody else. And he threw the painting off the cantilevered terrace" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:121). At the party at 'Papa' Monzano's castle, it is Julien who proposes that they "call a general strike of all writers until all mankind finally comes to its senses" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:166). To this, his father answers that lack of reading would lead to death through "putrescence of the heart or atrophy of the nervous system" (ibid). It is obvious, especially in the case of Julien's reply, that this is all *foma* meant so that he might have something to say.

What is especially interesting in the case of Julien and Philip Castle is that they are also the sources of a lot of *truth* in the novel. It is from Philip's book that John discovers the history of San Lorenzo. From Julien the reader discovers the fact that everyone on the island is a Bokononist and of the theater act that takes place there. In a sense, then, the Castle's are among the most honest and wisest characters in the novel, alongside Bokonon himself. Like the holy man, they know full well what the situation is on the island and what the causes are. Despite knowing the *truth*, or perhaps because they know it, they turn to *foma*, whose usefulness they understand.

Bokonon's writings, despite his warning that everything in his book is lies, actually presents his reader with a lot of small truths. Many of the honest thoughts that he had while creating the state of San Lorenzo are expressed in his Calypso's. For example, when he arrived on the island he "wanted all things /T seem to make some sense / So we all could be happy, yes / Instead of tense. / And I made up lies / So that they all fit nice / And I made this sad world / A Par-a-dice" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:91). Faced with the misery he finds on the island, Bokonon chooses to create the image of a utopia, the physical embodiment of the modernist dream. However, just as they failed to create a workable image of a perfect world, so did McCabe and Bokonon fail in creating their utopia. This is because the modern utopia is based on a belief in universal truth, whereas the post-modern world recognizes that there is no singular truth, just multiple truths based on context and current human understanding. Bokonon is aware of this in

the moment he writes the Calypso above, which is why he doesn't speak of a *paradise* but of a *par-a-dice*, a pair of dice, a reality based on chance, on chaos.

Other *truths* that Bokonon is aware of are the fact that his saintly image is dependent on the villainous images of McCabe and 'Papa' (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:73), or the fact that anyone could become a saint, even him (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:74), or the fact that "a really good religion / Is a form of treason" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:123). All this shows that, like the Castle's, he knows what is going on in San Lorenzo and has adapted to the reality of his situation. His awareness of his reality is, in fact, what might also convince the reader that he is a monster, especially when he tells the survivors of the disaster to kill themselves. Then again, as has also been hinted at, Bokonon is perhaps only defending himself. Moreover, judging from this perspective, what happens in the end is not only the result of the recklessness that characterizes the entire Hoenikker family, but also, to a great degree, everyone dies because they began to mistake *foma* for reality. 'Papa' destroys the world because he stops pretending to be a mad tyrant and becomes one in actuality. At the same time, the people of San Lorenzo stop pretending that Bokonon is a holy man and instead place him on a pedestal and ask him what they should do, as if he really did commune directly with God. The lesson learnt here then is that untruths can remain harmless and beneficial as long as the individuals involved keep in mind the fact that none of it is real. The moment when people take lies and actually believe them to be reality is when things start to go awry.

It would seem that *foma* is not a perfect solution, and yet, neither is plain *truth* a better alternative because, as Bokonon explains, "A lover's a liar, / To himself he lies. / The truthful are loveless, / Like oysters their eyes!" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:167). While sweet lies can lead to love, the *truth* is distinctly cold and bland. Lies paint the world of *Cat's Cradle* as a place where scientists like Dr. Hoenikker are innocent creators, his children are all happy (Angela is blissfully married, Frank has his dream job and Newt has found his calling in art) and there is such a thing as a utopian society where everyone is happy. From this perspective alone, *Cat's Cradle* is a delightful modern-day fairytale in which Jonah embarks on a journey of discovery in order to find his place in the world and eventually ends up the King of Paradise. The *truth* is that this world is populated by monsters who either create weapons of mass destruction or use them or end up helping the creators or users of these weapons. Dr. Hoenikker is a mad scientist who

creates the seeds of Armageddon. Frank is a child in a man's body and acts accordingly, voluntarily handing over a super weapon to the mad tyrant 'Papa' Monzano. Angela is an idiotic woman who traded her piece of *ice-nine* in for a horrible marriage. Newton can only express the horrors of his childhood in his art and is, for all intents and purposes, the living embodiment of the atomic bomb. San Lorenzo is horrible place filled with a destitute people who follow a quack religious figure blindly to their deaths.

Ultimately, when putting the *foma* and the *truth* presented in *Cat's Cradle* back to back, what the novel really seems to want from its reader is for him to answer for himself the question *which is better? Which is more useful?* On the one hand, just about everything that we find out about the characters and the reality of the world portrayed in the novel comes mainly from characters like John, Newt, the Castle's and Bokonon. Without these characters stating things plainly, without them telling the truth, the reader would be left to make educated guesses based not on what is said, but rather on what is not said. While such a novel might have befitted the modern era, for Kurt Vonnegut this would simply not do, since his goal is not to trick the reader, or even strain him, but to send the reader a clear message. On the other hand, it is not at all coincidental that Dr. Hoenikker and Dr. Breed – one a monster, the other a creator of monsters – are the two characters for whom “truth, all by itself, could be enough” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:38) and we must keep in mind that one of the main purposes of *Cat's Cradle* was so that the author could convey the message that scientific research done without factoring in moral considerations can and in all likelihood will lead to disaster. In addition, at the end of the novel, after the world has been destroyed by *ice-nine*, the narrator emphasizes on more than one occasion the potential uselessness of *truth* – he tells Mona that the human body inhales oxygen and exhales carbon dioxide (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:191); he knows what happened to the world – when the information is not for some specific purpose. When considering this as well, the resulting image is one whereby knowing the *truth* is not so much a good thing. Rather, it is important in order to distinguish lies, or, more importantly, *foma*, the same way that it is important to know evil in order to really understand what is good.

This is not to say that *lies* are a valid alternative that would necessarily bring about happiness. The absolute benefits of *truth*, as presented especially by Dr. Breed, represent a lie that leads to the end of the world. It is also lies that maintain 'Papa' Monzano in power and that

create the heavenly image of young Mona. And if one considers the omission of truth as a kind of lie, then we can speak also of the fact that Felix invents *ice-nine* and tells no one but his children about it, and that the three take the substance with them in secret, a fact that, again, leads eventually to the end of the world. Therefore, it would seem that lies are every bit as harmful as the obsessive search for absolute truths.

On the other hand, harmless untruths, the lies known as *foma*, are a source of happiness, perhaps the only source of happiness in *Cat's Cradle*. It is, after all, *foma* that makes Miss Faust a decent person and makes Ilium a pleasant family town. It is also this type of lies that makes life on San Lorenzo bearable and that makes the natives love one another, via *boko-maru*, which in turn brings the island about as close to a utopia as any other place could. From this point of view, these white lies come off as not only a good thing, but just about the only *useful* thing that man has to offer man. Its limits – that is to say, where its usefulness fails – have to do with the moment when people begin to confuse these useful lies with truth, as it happens at the end of the novel, when the locals ask Bokonon what god wants of them. The tragedy of *Cat's Cradle* is that this confusion seems to be inevitable – that, given enough time, all *foma* becomes a simple *lie* – and so, in the end, although man is capable of saving himself, the *Apocalypse* is inevitable, not at the swing of some divine hand, but because of our human nature, which is inescapably self-destructive.

3.2.4. *Cat's Cradle* – what does it all mean?

The debate over the usefulness of *truth* and *foma* may be one of the central issues of the novel, but what is perhaps the main theme of the text is one of those big ones – the meaning of life. As Bokonon puts it in one of his Calypso's:

“Tiger got to sleep,
Bird got to land;
Man got to tell himself he understand”

(Vonnegut 2011[1963]:130)

It is on the basis of this human need to make sense of the world and of his own fate that Vonnegut creates the notions portrayed in *The Book of Bokonon*, like the *karass* or the *kan-kan*. Like any other religious concepts, they are meant to guide the believer so as to assure that he lives in accordance to what the respective faith considers to be proper behavior, depending on how the founders of one religion or another understand the world. And it is not just religions, in the strictest sense of the word, that adhere to this principal. Scientists, as portrayed in *Cat's Cradle*, also follow their own kind of religion, basing their faith on the belief that the truth about anything and everything can be discovered in time and that this *truth* is inherently and unquestionably good.

Yet, as Bokonon and, through him the author, reminds the reader time and again, it's all lies. It is true that Dr. Hoenikker created *ice-nine* and that Franklin brought it to San Lorenzo and that 'Papa' Monzano killed himself by swallowing it, but the way in which the deadly substance lands in the sea is by mere happenstance. And this is not the only coincidence that occurs in the novel. Felix Hoenikker happens to die suddenly, before he has a chance to put away his invention, thus making it possible for his children to get their hands on it. John happens to be given an assignment that takes him first to Illium and then to San Lorenzo. Before this, Franklin happens to wash ashore on the island, as does Bokonon before him. The *karass* is meant to explain how and why all these things occur, but this is just a lie whose purpose is to give man some sense of control. The *truth* is that "life as portrayed in *Cat's Cradle* possesses no inherent meaning, and the tangled string which binds individuals in constantly changing constellations is just a series of mere coincidences" (Freese 2009:197). A series of mere coincidences is really all that makes up the events that occur in the world around us, according to the novel. However, this truth, like so many others, is not only useless to mankind, it is really incomprehensible, unacceptable to the human mind and so, "when human beings [...] cannot discover a meaning inherent in the universe, they attempt to invent one which provides them with a purpose" (ibid). Looking at things from this point of view, one has to wonder whether, in the end, *truth* as expressed in science and *foma* as created by religion are not just two halves of the same coin. They both express mankind's need to not only understand the world around them but also to understand what place humanity in general and the individual in particular hold in this place. That this quest for meaning is in fact a frugal and futile one is perhaps the best reason for which Vonnegut turns to humor in his writing.

3.3. Slaughterhouse Five

3.3.1. Why Vonnegut wrote it

The beginning of the 1960's brought about all manners of changes in the world – America was finally coming to terms with World War Two and the Vietnam War was well under way. In terms of prosperity the population was still feeling the comfortable effects of the economic boom from the 1950's, however the death toll on the other side of the world of American soldiers was forever increasing and people were getting tired of it. A heterogeneous group of citizens, affectionately known as the Counter Culture Movement, had begun to emerge and would grow substantially, until members, consisting largely of young men and women who rejected the patriotic conservatism of the previous generations, would amass in rallies numbering tens of thousands of individuals demanding peace and an end to the war. At the beginning of this decade, for Kurt Vonnegut among the changes that affected his life was the unfortunate decline in slick magazines that had paid him so well for his short stories less than a decade earlier. To compensate for this loss of income, Vonnegut turned to writing essays which were a hit. The success he had in this field of public writing and public speaking was due not just to his charisma but also to the fact that he would interlace his themes with many bits of personal information, so as to narrow the distance between himself and the hearer/reader. This closeness to his audience quickly became the hallmark of his speeches. To hear it from them directly, audience members felt during Vonnegut's speeches less like they were present at a lecture and more like in a familiar circle where a dear friend was handing out useful tidbits of wisdom for their benefit alone. At ever one of his public appearances, Vonnegut's messages

“would include simple bits of folk wisdom meant to correct misapprehensions and put people more at ease, from such things as understanding the seasonal change of weather to lightening the burdens of misconstrued responsibility. He would speak on major social issues and address himself to concerns as specific as gun control, classroom size, and the need for people to identify in groups”
(Klinkowitz 2012[1998]:7)

In some ways the development of his speeches was an artifact of entertainment onto itself. As Klinkowitz explains, one of the most amusing aspects was the manner in which Vonnegut would take seemingly random elements belonging to his past experience – a bit from GE, a bit from the

war, some things from his time in Indianapolis or from the political framework – and proceed to “knit them together into a surprising inevitability that not only resolved the issue but did so with the shock of unsuspected necessity” (ibid).

This tactic of interweaving seemingly disjointed elements into a system that circumvented potential paradoxes by establishing its own internal sense of logic which, regardless of how strange, was still easy for the reader to digest, would later seep into his fiction writing, to the degree where Jerome Klinkowitz is right in observing that *Slaughterhouse Five* is “a novel whose structure shows the effects of all this personal essay writing” (Klinkowitz 2004:76). The earliest signs of this amalgamation of fact and fiction actually appear in an earlier short story, one the author’s last, which isn’t actually published in any magazine, but which came out directly in the collection *Welcome to the Monkey House*. The story is called ‘The Hyannis Port Story’ and in this piece the author introduces elements and characters, such as President Kennedy, which is “evidence that Vonnegut was developing in this direction well in advance” (ibid). This tactic becomes especially necessary when trying to write a novel about his Dresden experience because, if objectivity is out of the question, if “there is indeed nothing to say about a massacre, the author would have to talk about something else – namely himself” (Klinkowitz 2004:80).

In 1968, when Vonnegut was writing his novel, the Vietnam War was at its height. Every day he would turn on the television, only to see how his “Government gives [him] a count of corpses created by military science in Vietnam” (Vonnegut 1969:210). The scenes of horror that so characterized the war in Vietnam inevitably took the writer back to his own experience in combat and to his being one of the few survivors of the Dresden massacre. Moreover, although initially the American population was almost entirely in favor of the war as a means of suppressing the advancement of Communism, by the late sixties anti-war protests became more and more frequent as the population grew exasperated. Thus it was that “by 1968 America’s escalation of the war in Vietnam and the growing protest against the war had added to [Vonnegut’s] sense of urgency about completing the book” (Bly 1985:2).

The result was *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969), a novel that is considered by most to be Vonnegut’s finest work, although some, like Harold Bloom, profess to prefer older works such as *Cat’s Cradle*, “because it seems so well aware of the limits of its irony” (Bloom, 2009:2). Its

particularities are many (when compared to other novels), including the way in which the plot is laid out or its semi-autobiographical nature. Despite the fact that *Slaughterhouse Five* is not a very long novel, we only encounter the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, in the second chapter.

As far as critics were concerned, the novel was indeed celebrated as a true literary accomplishment and this book turned Vonnegut into an international celebrity, but it would be limiting to suggest that there weren't people who saw things differently. On the contrary, *Slaughterhouse Five* succeeded in stirring up some controversy when they were banned in several schools throughout America. The premise was that the novel was deemed unsuited for children due to what some called *explicit language*. While "it is true that some of the characters speak coarsely" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:318), the author points out that they do so "because people speak coarsely in real life. Especially soldiers and hardworking men speak coarsely, and even our most sheltered children know that" (ibid) and, all in all, Vonnegut's books only strive to "beg that people be kinder and more responsible than they often are" (ibid). The most radical of these negative reactions to *Slaughterhouse Five* occurred at a school in the city of Drake, North Dakota, where copies of the book "were actually burned in a furnace by a school janitor on instructions from the school committee there" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:316). In response to this act, Vonnegut wrote a letter to the chairman of the school board. True to Vonnegut's relaxed manner even in the face of anger and indignity, he endeavors to actually connect with this radical and even points out that "my publisher and I have done absolutely nothing to exploit the disgusting news from Drake" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:317). They say that even bad publicity is good publicity, but in this case it is Vonnegut who acts chivalrously by trying to no make any publicity from this event. Unfortunately the chairman of the drake school board did not appear to be moved by the author's sincerity and Vonnegut never received any reply. The only thing that followed was a law suit in which the school board's lawyers even went so far as to attack the First Amendment of the American Constitution "as though it were nothing more than a clause in a lease from a crooked slumlord" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:319). Fortunately for Vonnegut, such cases of negative response were isolated and even this event from Drake, North Dakota did not have any kind of far-reaching consequences.

3.3.2. Plot and style

Despite the above-mentioned urgency to finish his book – whose publication in 1969 rather than, say, ten years after that, certainly helped in assuring the novel’s fame – the problem that Kurt Vonnegut had to deal with, the problem he’d had with his war book ever since he returned from Dresden, was how he should write about what he went through in light of the fact that “there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre” (Vonnegut 1969:19). When a single event reaches such massive proportions as the complete destruction of beautiful and militarily useless city in a single day, resulting in more deaths than those caused by the atomic bomb at Hiroshima, what quickly became obvious to Vonnegut was that no amount of research and honesty could possibly provide him with a means of capturing that experience in some objective way that might in turn place the entire scene within the context of some higher meaning, as modernist writers like Hemmingway did for events in World War I. As Peter Freese points out

“The painful gestation of this unique novel can hardly surprise, since any writer who tries to reconstruct a historical atrocity of such unimaginable proportions by means of traditional fictional strategies, that is, by storifying the event through an individual narrative perspective, is bound to fail, for the sheer number of casualties transcends the limits of personal empathy. A historical novel about the destruction of Dresden, therefore, is not only beset by the genre-specific problems of recreating the past through the epistemological limitations of the present, but also defeated by the very limits of the human imagination”

(in Bloom 2009:18)

The bottom line is that conventional narrative forms simply did not have the means to capture the Dresden massacre without severely corrupting the image portrayed. Moreover, one should keep in mind that Vonnegut was a post-modern writer who embraced “the post-modern truism that there is no longer a generally shared *reality* for serious story-tellers to depict and that therefore no historic even can be recreated *as it really was*” (Freese 2009:304). Consequently, for Vonnegut “trying to write his novel the conventional way has brought the author nowhere, just as Billy’s attempts to bring the world into focus fail” (Klinkowitz 2004:87), and so a new way of writing would be needed in order to tell Vonnegut’s Dresden story, one which the author would have to work on for over twenty years, until finally it took shape in *Slaughterhouse Five*.

Chapter One describes the difficulties that Vonnegut faced in writing this book. In a wonderful line that expresses both what it means to be a writer and his frustration in creating his war novel, the author confesses:

“as trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue and suspense and confrontations, I had outlined the Dresden story many times. The best outline I ever made, or anyway the prettiest one, was on the back of a roll of wallpaper” (Vonnegut 1969:5).

Two things jump out in this sentence. The first is the portrayal that Vonnegut gives himself, which is in many ways the image of the classic novel writer, one which has in mind certain standard elements that have always belonged to prose, such as the ones above and what Vonnegut is really telling his reader is that all through the years in which he struggled to write his novel he was one of these writers, but such a writer was ill suited for the task of creating the kind of book that *Slaughterhouse Five* would and needed to become. The book actually circles back to this much later on through the words of Eliot Rosewater. When Billy and Eliot are together in the mental hospital in which they both were voluntarily committed thanks to the traumas they had suffered during the war, the latter tells the former that until now “everything there was to know about life was in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Feodor Dostoevsky. But that isn’t *enough* anymore” (Vonnegut 1969:101). As one of the greatest prose writers in history, it would probably be wholly reasonable to say that Dostoevsky captured the world he belonged to in his novels. But the world the world of Billy Pilgrim and Eliot Rosewater and ultimately the world of Kurt Vonnegut is no longer the one Dostoevsky knew. This is a world of global wars and atomic bombs and other such weapons that can kill tens of thousands almost in the blink of an eye and the devastation caused by such weapons, the rationale behind the fact that such weapons even exist, simply cannot be honestly expressed in Dostoevskian terms. And here I return to Vonnegut’s statement quoted above, which appears in the introductory chapter, to point out the second idea that is captured here, namely that, in light of the fact that classic narrative forms are inadequate, writing an outline of such a novel on a sheet of wallpaper makes about as much sense as writing it on anything else. If Vonnegut had created his classic outline on toilet paper it would have made no difference.

The style that he would eventually decide upon is not entirely an original construct. After years of struggle, in the late sixties Vonnegut finally had a breakthrough after coming into contact with Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s *Journey to the End of the Night*. Vonnegut admired the French writer greatly and even stated later on that Céline’s role in contemporary literature is so great that every writer is in his debt. As Philip Watts explains, what Vonnegut took from Céline was “a terminology of spectacle with which to represent and ultimately condemn the horrors of

war, as well as a protagonist who remains uncomprehending when faced with destruction” (in Bloom 2009:37). Rather than someone who might stamp his Dresden experience with some moral etiquette, Vonnegut, inspired from Céline, decides to create a protagonist who is also *uncomprehending when faced with destruction*, the result being the clownish character Billy Pilgrim. He even speaks of his source of inspiration in his novel, in Chapter One, where he mentions him as

“a brave French who fought in World War One – until his skull was cracked. After that he couldn’t sleep, and there were noises in his head. He became a doctor and he treated poor people in the daytime, and he wrote grotesque novels at night” (Vonnegut 1969:21)

The comparisons between this depiction of Céline and at least some of the characteristics of Billy Pilgrim are not hard to notice. Like the French writer, Vonnegut’s protagonist fights in a war and later (though not during the war) gets his skull cracked, this time in an airplane crash. After that he begins to talk about Tralfamadorians, leaving many to wonder if he isn’t simply hearing noises in his head. Moreover, As far as Céline was concerned, “time obsessed him” (ibid) and William Allen is correct in pointing out that “Billy’s Tralfamadore experience may be the equivalent of Céline’s – and Vonnegut’s – attempts to deal with the problem of mortality through writing fiction” (in Bloom 2009:12).

Now, with an uncomprehending protagonist in hand, Vonnegut still had to find a way to create a novel which would keep true to the amoral notion that nothing intelligent should be said about a massacre, because such devastation as witnessed in Dresden simply surpasses any attempt at logic. This neutral position (so as not to say *objective*, since the very notion of objectivity is one that Vonnegut, as a post-modern writer, rejected) was fortunately nurtured by his social background. Like any American, Vonnegut understood the need to fight against the Nazi’s, but on the other hand he was also of German descent, brought up in a community that had held on to and deeply cherished their heritage right up until the anti-German mentality after World War One had lead to the community’s systematic disassembly.

In many ways Vonnegut was placed in an impossible situation. On the one hand, there is his family’s legacy. More than once the author mentions that his parents did speak German in their home and in time he must have found out about his roots – if nothing else he learned a lot after reading his Uncle John’s history book – yet it is also true that

“the anti-Germanism in this country during the First World War so shamed and dismayed my parents that they resolved to raise me without acquainting me with the language or the literature or the music or the oral family histories which my ancestors had loved. They volunteered to make me ignorant and rootless as proof of their patriotism” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:333)

If anything, it would seem that Kurt Sr. and Edith strived to make their youngest son into a wholly American citizen so as to prove to their community that they had severed all ties to the European country that had become so hated for what had happened in the First World War and, to a degree, it worked because, when he was captured by the Germans and an enemy soldier asked him in German (which he could speak) why he was fighting his own brothers, the question seemed absurd to young Kurt (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:400).

At the same time, what Vonnegut was well aware of is that his loyalty towards the American country and views was purely circumstantial in the sense that his being born in America when he did and in that particular family under the given situation is merely accidental. Nowhere does Vonnegut best state this outright than in the introduction to his previous novel *Mother Night*, where he admits that “if I’d been born in Germany, I suppose I would have been a Nazi” (Vonnegut 1991[1976]:5). Adding on to this revelation that the author fought *against* the Germans and not *with* them only because of where he happened to be born is the observation he had made during the war that such conflicts were “fought by babies” (Vonnegut 1969:106), that on one side or the other it was innocent children who were being slaughtered, individuals still too young to fully comprehend their surroundings and to therefore be condemned for their actions. This is why one of the titles of the novel is *The Children’s Crusade*, as a reference to the age-old fact that for hundreds or even thousands of years wars have constantly involved grown men (the ones who can truly be condemned) sending uncomprehending children off to die, only to then justify their deaths as heroic because they were killed like men. Last, but not least, there is the impact of the fact that it was Allied soldiers, including Vonnegut’s own countrymen, who caused the Dresden massacre and then later tried to cover it up. Before the war, as the author explained in an interview with William Allen

“When we went into the war, we felt our Government was a respecter of life, careful about not injuring civilians and that sort of thing. Well, Dresden had no tactical value; it was a city of civilians. Yet the Allies bombed it until it burned and melted. And then they lied about it. All that was startling to us.”

(in Bloom 2009:4)

Vonnegut also recalls in *Fates Worse than Death* that, when they were finally released from German captivity and placed on a ship bound for the US, Bernard V. O'Hare told him that from that moment on he "will never again believe the Government" (Vonnegut 1991:108). In this case, he was referring to the notion that Allied bomber planes only performed surgical operations that aimed at specific targets and eliminated them with a minimum of civilian casualties. What Dresden had taught him however was that this precision was a lie and that the Allied forces were morally not much better off than their German counterparts. The revelation that the US Government was willing to murder so many innocent civilians for no valid military purpose made it impossible for Kurt Vonnegut to consider the relationship between Allied and Nazi forces in terms of pure good and evil, since the hands of the former were far from being clean. The end result of this revelation, the fact that wars are fought by babies and the personal implication of his German-American descent is an inability on Vonnegut's part to take any kind of side in this matter. This neutral stance can be argued to make itself known through several aspects of the *Slaughterhouse Five*, but perhaps the most obvious illustrative example lies in the easily overlooked observation that the young German guard from Dresden named Werner Gluck and the American Private Billy Pilgrim "were, in fact, distant cousins" (Vonnegut 1969:158). This seemingly coincidental fact creates a metaphorical bridge that places both fighting forces at equal level in the minds of author and reader.

The final stepping stone which made it possible for Kurt Vonnegut to create his new style of writing was made possible through science and the literature of science-fiction. Einstein's Theory of Relativity was making waves throughout the world, as it opened up the possibility of envisioning aspects of reality that went beyond that which the naked eye could perceive and lead to reconsiderations of elements of our universe which had up until then been considered as obvious, including the notion of time. In literature, the established linear progression of time had already been contested thanks to H.G. Well's *Time Machine*, however, now it became obvious that such three-dimensional notions of time were not limited to the world of fiction. Therefore, in 1968 Vonnegut knew that he had the necessary class of readers that he could appeal to which would be comfortable with the possibility that, as William Allen puts it, "characters' lives, like those of real people, do not themselves proceed in one direction" (in Bloom 2009:5), but can travel backwards and forwards from the present.

The end result of all the influences that left their mark upon the author is a style of writing that is based upon the notion of circularity, the idea that all things are happening, have happened and will happen. Such an approach might still be daunting even for the contemporary reader, but, again, Vonnegut appears at the ready to provide his audience in the introductory chapter with all the tools he or she will need. Thus, already on the second page of *Slaughterhouse Five*, Vonnegut characterizes his Dresden experience – the experience that is at the heart of the novel – as *useless*, thus completely undermining the potential gravity (and therefore potential meaning) that might be attributed to the event in question. He then proceeds to illustrate a humorous and at vulgar limerick about *useless old tools* (meaning both the man's private parts, but also at the same time illustrating the uselessness of the writer's old literary tools) and then passes on to the poem about Yon Yonson. This latter text is a circular poem that supposedly goes “on to infinity” (Vonnegut 1969:3) and thus prepares the reader for a novel that will keep going in circles.

One last remarkable aspect of the introductory chapter is that “looking back on it, Chapter One of *Slaughterhouse Five* is as jumbled and as jangled as anything that follows in the book” (Klinkowitz 2004:86). Taken bit by bit, the author begins his tale in 1967, when he and Bernard V. O'Hare return to Dresden, then the text jumps to 1964 when he has tracked his war buddy down and pays a visit to his home. After this the story moves to 1945, briefly, only to jump back to 1967, not to the actual trip, but to their return to the US. And yet, despite the convoluted journey, “the reader doesn't normally notice this because it's a smooth ride” (ibid). How Vonnegut assures this smooth ride is not only through his straightforward language, but also thanks to the position he takes in relation to his audience. Far from trying to create a tract of high philosophy, Vonnegut “makes his effort to write a novel as familiar as the task of anyone trying to get a job done” (Klinkowitz 2004:90). Thus he connects with the reader by making his job as an author no more difficult as that of the reader. He appears not as some pretentious educator looking down at the reader but as a common man facing typical middle-age male American problems, including getting in trouble with his wife because he drinks too much. In addition, Vonnegut litters his book with seemingly unimportant coincidences: the darkness in the Mammoth Cave is interrupted by the radium dial on Billy's father's watch, while the Russian prisoners that Billy sees in the German POW camp have faces shine in the same manner. The tent that is set up for Barbara's wedding has the same color and color pattern as the roof of the

train that transports Billy and his fellow Americans to the camp. Put together, all these elements “pull an otherwise diverse narrative together, making discrete events from many different times and places appear unified” (Klinkowitz 2004:93). Even the nature of Billy Pilgrim works to smooth over the impact that the novel’s innovative style has upon the reader. Being an essentially passive person, Billy is able to absorb all the new ideas he has to deal with without experiencing any violent change and “in this way the novel in which he is the protagonist manages to be thoroughly postmodern while never putting popular readers off” (ibid).

Throughout the actual story, which begins with Chapter Two, Vonnegut continually, almost obsessively reminds the reader as to how he should approach the novel, especially in terms of plot. Taken linearly, the plot of the novel is as follows: Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist, is an American soldier in Europe during the final months of World War II. He is captured and held as a POW. Eventually he is taken to the city of Dresden, where he is put to work. He is thus present at the moment when the city is firebombed by Allied forces, an attack which virtually destroys the city and leaves very few survivors. Billy is one of them, along with a few other POW’s and their guards, who at the time were safely hidden underground, inside Slaughterhouse Five. All this takes place across six months, during which time Billy becomes “unstuck in time” (Vonnegut 1969:23). He is thus able to travel into the past and into the future and so he catches glimpses of his entire life, including the moment he dies. Billy is also taken at one point by a race of aliens called Tralfamadorians – beings capable of seeing in four dimensions who explain to Billy the nature of his time-hopping predicament, as well as teaching him their philosophy about the universe.

Slaughterhouse Five, however, is not a linear-plot based novel. When he asks to read a Tralfamadorian book while on his way to their planet, Billy is presented with a text in which

“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 surprise, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time” (Vonnegut 1969:88)

Even the briefest overview of *Slaughterhouse Five* would reveal that this description of the Tralfamadorian novel can easily be substituted for that of Vonnegut’s text. Similar to the alien works, in this text we are given the life of Billy Pilgrim all at once (or at least as much as possible, given the two-dimensional – and thus, ultimately, linear to an extent – nature of the written text). Chapter Two, when we first encounter Billy Pilgrim, begins with the narrator

providing the reader with a summary in broad terms of everything that happens to the protagonist and by the end of the chapter we, as readers, will have already gained knowledge of all the important events in the novel. Thus if the plot were central to the novel, we could stop right here. We do not, however, do so, because it isn't central. Vonnegut makes sure it isn't by giving us the outcome of any event long before the event to even occur – Edgar Derby is executed in Dresden at the end of the novel (Vonnegut 1969:214), yet we find out about this far earlier (p. 5) – and by repeating this evocation of important events. The result is that, as we read on, we soon begin to have the impression that we are rereading the text, and that it is all simply an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep.

Based upon such a structure, Kurt Vonnegut is able to create a novel that is without climaxes or thrills or suspense or any real confrontations (since even the Germans that assault the pitiful American prisoners of war are in their turn made pitiful), yet still create a narrative that is easy for the reader to follow, again, thanks to the abundance of directions that the author and narrator provide.

One last thing about the style in *Slaughterhouse Five* that is worth mentioning is that, as William Allen notices, “paradoxically, in creating his cosmic, nonlinear narrative Vonnegut uses fragments from all sorts of traditional narrative forms” (in Bloom 2009:7), such as graffiti, jokes, songs, raw statistics and more. The most important classic narrative that underlines the novel is perhaps the Judeo-Christian Bible which, when it was written, attempted to provide the world with a new way of looking at the world, and in a similar way, to an extent, Vonnegut too tried in his work to prescribe his readers metaphorical corrective eye lenses through which to see things from a different perspective.

What is to be admired besides the fact that Vonnegut creates an innovative style of writing is that and despite the potential added effort which one might expect the reader to have to invest into comprehending this style, the actual difficulty that he or she faces is actually quite minimal. This is again thanks to the first chapter, in which the author “provides detailed directions for use” (in Bloom 2009:23). For example, four of these clues are given in the first two pages of the text. By beginning his story with the statement “all this happened, more or less” (Vonnegut 1969:1), the author already points to the occurrence of an amalgamation of fact and fiction which will appear throughout the novel. Soon after this, Vonnegut explains how, after the war, he went *back* to Dresden (ibid.) and the fact that the reader finds out about his return to this

city before being told about the initial journey is a first clue that temporal perspective is something that the novel will touch upon. During his return trip to Dresden he and his war buddy encounter a German cab driver named Gerhard Müller who during World War Two “was a prisoner of the Americans for a while” (ibid). This coincidence establishes the fact that the novel will not be taking sides in a potential debate on Allied Forces vs. Nazi Germany which would otherwise result in the juxtaposition between good and evil. This sense of neutrality in *Slaughterhouse Five* is in fact made more evident by what is missing in the context of this coincidence, namely a comparison between the manner in which Billy Pilgrim or Kurt Vonnegut were treated while in a German POW camp and the similar experiences of Mr. Müller. This comparison would again tilt the moral balance towards either one side or another, depending on which prisoners had been treated worse, and the fact that it doesn’t occur in the novel shows that such a comparison has no place here. The fourth helping clue that Vonnegut provides for his reader right at the beginning is found in the text of the postcard that the German cabby sends Bernard which says that the former would be happy to see them again “if the accident will” (Vonnegut 1969:2). This sentence establishes the premise that accidents, or occurrences that should be thought of as being random, will appear throughout the novel (like, for example the fact that Billy Pilgrim reports to his overseas unit right when it is being destroyed).

The clues in Chapter One of *Slaughterhouse Five* only continue to pile on, ranging from a historical account of an earlier moment when Dresden was besieged (which in turn alludes to the historically circular nature of destruction) and the history of the Children’s Crusade (which prepares the reader for the later scenes of children fighting in the war), to things like Vonnegut reading from the Bible, which indicates a connection between various holy figures and some of the characters of the novel. The end result is that, whether he is aware of it or not, the reader delves into the unusual story of Billy Pilgrim already armed with all the knowledge he needs to not get bogged down.

3.3.3. *Slaughterhouse Five* – land of the sickly

One of the most peculiar, though apt, metatextual observations made in this novel is the fact that “There are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations because most of the people are so sick and so much the listless playthings of enormous forces” (Vonnegut

1969:164). Before anything else, this is the point where the author is the most clear regarding the fact that there are no villains in *Slaughterhouse Five* or hardly any true heroes, and by extension neither were there any to be found in World War two on either side of the front. Be it Allied or German, the soldiers who fought and died and killed are described here as only *playthings*, puppets whose strings were being pulled by more powerful fingers belonging to those individuals that could be held accountable but who Vonnegut never encounters and who are therefore not in the book. The kinds of people that the author does recall and which he places in *Slaughterhouse Five* can indeed be considered sick in one way or another. Billy Pilgrim is certainly sick – during his time in captivity he is most often weak and wobbling, weeping and kicking or just bumping into people left and right. As for the years after that, Billy obviously suffers from bouts of insomnia and it remains unclear whether or not he is delusional. The first person that helps Billy after becoming lost behind enemy lines is the deranged young man Roland Weary, who dies of gangrene while on route to the prison camps. On the way to the camp the narrator presents the conditions in which the prisoners were being kept, locked up in boxcars on a train, an image filled with implied filth and disease. When they do reach the POW camp, the Americans come face to face with a fence system, and beyond that with a sea of dying Russians. Even the English officers that take the Americans in are sick, if not physically than certainly from a mental point of view (they actually prefer to remain captives), while the Germans guarding them all – old men, children and cripples – clearly have no place being in this war. The one exception in all this is Edger Derby. A middle-aged man who actually volunteered to go to war, his most shining moment comes in Chapter Eight of *Slaughterhouse Five*, when the Americans have already been taken to Dresden and are visited by Howard Campbell. As a character, Campbell made his first appearance in the novel *Mother Night*, where he plays the role of a man who is on trial for war crimes and who pretended to have been a deserter and Nazi propagandist during World War Two, although he was actually a spy. In the novel *Slaughterhouse Five* he appears once again and tries to “recruit men for a German military unit called “The Free American Corps”” (Vonnegut 1969:162). Like many interesting ideas, the one behind this scene came to Vonnegut from real life, namely from “a letter given to us by the Germans which urged us to join their army (and get plenty to eat) and go fight for civilization on the Russian Front” (Vonnegut 1991:107). In response to Campbell’s proposal, Edger Derby becomes “a character now” who speaks “movingly of the American form of government, with

freedom and justice and opportunities and fair play for all. He said there wasn't a man there who wouldn't gladly die for those ideals" (Vonnegut 1969:164). Though slightly over the top, especially towards the end, this heroic moment, if left unchecked, might have destabilized Vonnegut's intent at maintaining a sense of neutrality, since Derby's very words place American values so much higher than the German ones are implied as being and they seem to call for Derby to take on a more important role in *Slaughterhouse Five* as the hero of this tale. In order to circumvent this, the author makes the move of shifting the focus away from this character towards hints of the firebombing that the text was finally drawing close to. But the most direct way in which the text destroys Derby's prospects at becoming a hero is through the ridiculous nature of his death – condemned to death in the ruins of a burnt down city for picking up a teapot. All in all, a sick and twisted end to the only healthy person in this novel, killed by sick individuals.

3.3.4. Billy Pilgrim – the new Christ

One of the most daring things that Kurt Vonnegut does in *Slaughterhouse Five* is to structure his protagonist in such a way that eventually, as readers, "we see Billy as a latter day Christ" (in Bloom 2009:48). Evidence to this fact is fairly abundant, and perhaps nowhere is the comparison made more obvious than when the narrator presents Kilgore Trout's novel *The Gospel from Outer Space*. In this story a visitor from another planet analyzes Christian religion and, having found flaws in it, presents the earthlings with a new Gospel, in which "Jesus really was a nobody, and a pain in the neck to a lot of people with better connections than he had" (Vonnegut 1969:108). Having already seen Billy moving about clumsily both as a prisoner of war and as a post-war citizen (at least from the point of view of those around him) and having either angered people left and right with his demeanor (his daughter Barbara, Roland Weary, etc) or caused people to pity the retch they see before them (Edgar Derby, the English officers), at this point in the novel it will have become obvious to the reader that the image of Jesus created in *The Gospel from Outer Space* fits the description of Billy Pilgrim perfectly.

Even his name alludes to his saintly nature – it alludes to John Bunyan's Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* – and evidence to the fact that Billy is meant to portray the image of

a new Savior can be found earlier on in the novel. Not more than three pages into Chapter Two, where the narrator is still in the midst of the most unconventional tactic of presenting to the reader an outline of what happens to the protagonist throughout his life, he explains that Billy “went to New York City, and got on an all-night radio program” (Vonnegut 1969:24) where he begins talking about his experience as a person that is unstuck in time and about the aliens he encountered. Soon after that he sends a newspaper a letter and then begins composing a second article in which he reveals that “the most important things that [he] learned on Tralfamadore was that when a person dies he only *appears* to die” (Vonnegut 1969:26). What the text describes here is the first instances in which Billy begins to preach his revelations to the world. His motives for doing so are befitting those of a saintly savior. At this point in his life, Billy has surrendered his highly lucrative business over to his son-in-law, because “he was devoting himself to a calling [that is] much higher” and was “doing nothing less now, he thought, than prescribing corrective lenses for Earthling souls” (Vonnegut 1969:29). As an optometrist, both practically and metaphorically, Billy devotes his time and energy to helping people see through corrective lenses what he perceives as the truth about time and space. As William Allen rightly points out, “like Christ, Billy brings a new message to the world, although it is a very different one from his predecessor’s” (in Bloom 2009:8). Not long after this in the novel, though much earlier in Billy’s life, when he’s still a child, the narrator tells the reader about his mother who, although involved heavily in religious affairs, being an organ player, decided that “she was going to join a church as soon as she decided which one is right” (Vonnegut 1969:38). She never does decide and this is telling because it means that throughout her life Mrs. Pilgrim was unable to find a decent religious institution, which in turn speaks to a need for a new church, possibly even a new religion. And just as Vonnegut’s mother’s desire and failure to become a writer encouraged him to write, so too can it be said that Billy too was encouraged by his mother’s failure. Other evidence of Billy’s association with Jesus Christ can be found, for example, in the presentation of Billy’s speech before the other members of the Lion’s Club. Despite being very nervous, when he opens his mouth “his voice became a gorgeous instrument” (Vonnegut 1969:50). This separation of Billy’s voice from his body suggest the idea that he may have been guided here by some unknown force, as one would expect of a saintly figure and the fact that the text follows up by explaining that his oratory talents came from a public speaking class does little to diminish this sense of some higher hand at work. Another connection between Billy

Pilgrim and Jesus Christ is question that the former puts to the Tralfamadorians on the night of his abduction “Why me?” (Vonnegut 1969:76), meaning *why was he given the gift of being unstuck in time, why was he chosen?* In all likelihood, Jesus would have asked the same question when he first found out that he was the son of God, a question that he then put to rest during his time in exile, in the same way that Billy put the question aside after his time on Tralfamadore.

Billy’s very nature, the way he faces the world around him and his own fate, emulates the manner in which the Bible describes Jesus Christ. As someone who “has seen his birth and death many times” (Vonnegut 1969:23), Billy, like Jesus, “is an innocent who accepts his death, at the hands of an enemy who reviles and misunderstands him” (in Bloom 2009:8), just as the Romans misunderstood and crucified Christ. Early in the novel we learn that “Billy wouldn’t do anything to save himself” (Vonnegut 1969:34), precisely because he knows full well what is coming. Nowhere is his acceptance of fate made more evident than on February thirteenth 1976, on the anniversary of the Dresden firebombing, when at age fifty four, Billy is shot dead by Paul Lazzaro. At that moment, Billy is in the middle of “speaking before a capacity audience in a baseball park, which is covered by a geodesic dome” (Vonnegut 1969:142). This is evidently at the height of his messianic journey. Imagining Billy standing in the middle of this massive crowd, the reader of *Slaughterhouse Five* is in all likelihood meant to think of Jesus Christ’s famous Sermon on the Mount, and to draw obvious comparisons. Just as the Sermon presented in the Gospels of Mathew portray Jesus surrounded by the masses that make up his followers, so too does this novel present Billy among the thousands of people who, by now, have embraced his teachings and are presumably on their way to creating a new religion, with Billy as their center figure. At this moment, the novel’s protagonist knows very well that he is going to die and “laughs about it, invites the crowds to laugh with him” (ibid.) and is then shot in the head, thus assuring his martyrdom. As Allen points out, Billy, like Jesus, most forcibly teaches his followers that “one should face death calmly, because death is not the end” (in Bloom 2009:8). Where they differ at this point is in what happens after a person dies. Where Christ explains that a man’s soul, now separated from his body, will spend an eternity in either Heaven or Hell, for Billy there is no real *after*, since his would entail some form of linear progression of time. Instead of an after, a person who has died in one moment will “be dead for a little while – and then live again (Vonnegut 1969:143) at some point in what to human understanding is his past.

All in all, as Jerome Klinkowitz remarks,

“The ethic Billy adopts, of course, is one of simple perspective. Ignore the bad moments and concentrate on the good ones – by itself so banal but when voiced as Tralfamadorian physics having the dignity of the anthropological relativism Vonnegut employs in most of his work. As a cultural description these words beg to be taken seriously, just as in their science-fiction trappings they provide entertainment” (Klinkowitz 2004:92)

What is perhaps more remarkable than the subtle ways in which Kurt Vonnegut turns Billy Pilgrim into a contemporary Christ figure is that he goes through all that trouble only to then turn around and point out the fact that he does not share his protagonist’s views.

Unquestionably, Billy Pilgrim is the clown of this novel. Separate and apart from his physical image, which is about as common as the description of the Tralfamadorian aliens, this unlikely hero appears from the very beginning as being thoroughly out of place with the surroundings he happens to be in at the time. Chronologically, the earliest he appears in the novel is in 1944, when he is “a chaplain’s assistant in the war” and “a figure of fun in the American Army” (Vonnegut 1969:30). Then, after returning from his father’s funeral, Billy becomes lost behind enemy lines, with “no helmet, no overcoat, no weapon and no boots. On his feet were cheap, low-cut civilian shoes [...]. Billy had lost a heel, which made him bob up-and-down, up-and-down” (Vonnegut 1969:33). He is therefore once again a figure of fun in the American Army. After being captured, instead of acting like a regular prisoner of war, Billy “had smiles for them all” (Vonnegut 1969:64). The Germans at the prison camp give him a ridiculous coat, but Billy not only doesn’t catch on, but he doesn’t seem to care when he is made aware of the fact that “it was a deliberate attempt to humiliate him” (Vonnegut 1969:98). After putting on a pair of boots that were used in a parody production of *Cinderella*, he is led with the rest of the Americans to Dresden and “Billy again led the parade. He had silver boots now, and a muff, and a piece of azure curtain which he wore as a toga” (Vonnegut 1969:147), in other words, the most ridiculous outfit anyone could possibly imagine a soldier might wear. Even after he survives the Dresden massacre, and despite the social and financial success that he enjoys, Billy still seems out of place, with his marrying someone who is considered undesirable by just about any other man and his uncontrollable weeping.

Thus, at every turn, Vonnegut goes out of his way to denigrate and ridicule his protagonist so that it becomes very difficult, impossible even, to take anything he does or says

seriously. This is not to say that the reader is supposed to simply glance over him. On the contrary, it is vital that the text focuses at every turn on the protagonist, and, fortunately, Billy is such an enchanting fool that it is impossible to turn our focus away from him. More than anything else, the text centers the character-based humor on Billy Pilgrim, on this latter day Messiah, and so in trying to promote the Tralfamadorian perspective, Billy in effect only serves to denigrate it through his own image, and because Vonnegut's novels practically never contain self-undermining humor, ridiculing Billy Pilgrim only works to further set protagonist and author apart from one another.

3.3.5. Vonnegut vs. Billy Pilgrim

Among the most common misinterpretations of *Slaughterhouse Five*, which lead to the novel being banned from school libraries in several American states, is that through his hopelessly passive protagonist Billy Pilgrim, Kurt Vonnegut preaches a type of nihilism centered around the idea that all manner of progressive struggle in life is pointless. This is certainly one of the central thoughts behind the Tralfamadorian perspective. As being that see the past, present and future simultaneously, these aliens explain to their captive "among the things Billy Pilgrim could not change were the past, the present and the future" (Vonnegut 1969:60). According to the Tralfamadorians, nothing can be done because nothing can be changed. All time is, was and will be pre-structured, even the end of the universe is already known to them and, when asked why they don't stop the test pilot that destroys everything with the push of a button, the aliens simply reply that "he has *always* pressed it and he always *will*. We *always* let him and we always *will* let him. The moment is structured that way" (Vonnegut 1969:117). Even free will is to the Tralfamadorians an illusion and, upon being questioned in relation to the potential that is *free will*, one of the aliens explains that he has travelled all over the universe, has visited hundreds of other civilizations and that "only on Earth is there any talk of free will" (Vonnegut 1969:86). This idea of the false nature of free-will and the notion that one is consequently unable to change anything in his or her life because it's all been decided upon already are lessons that Billy takes to heart and includes in his preaching, but they are not ones that Vonnegut shares.

First and foremost, for someone to say that in *Slaughterhouse Five* Kurt Vonnegut himself preaches defeatism and nihilism is to show how little that person knows or understands about the author's philosophy and life. Not only did he grow up alongside his Uncle Alex and other relatives that actively believed in social progress and change, throughout his career Kurt was as known (at least in America) as much for his novels as for his public speeches. And in his speeches the writer frequently spoke of the need for peace and of the importance of community. All five novels written prior to this one express many of the warnings that he delivers in his speeches, such as the danger of letting machines control our lives, or the great American social experiment that has placed too high a value on the individual at the expense of family values, or the danger that unchecked scientific inventions can pose upon the entire globe. To imagine that in a span of just four years (from the appearance of *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater* in 1965) the author's views on life might have changed so radically does not make much sense.

More than anything else, Billy Pilgrim is an anti-hero, a shining example of the wrong direction that someone might take when faced with the kind of horrors that the author was witness to and, consequently, "Vonnegut is careful to dissociate himself from Billy as from no character before – signaled by the fact that the author speaks to us directly" (Broer in Bloom 2009:46). Billy Pilgrim may be the protagonist of this *Slaughterhouse Five*, but his is not the only story being told here. When asked about what it meant to finally write his war book, Vonnegut labeled the entire process as being therapeutic, a means through which he could finally come to terms with what he saw in Dresden and with the cruel reality of the post-war world. Therefore, *Slaughterhouse Five* is as much a story about life and death, or about war and faith, as it is about Vonnegut himself, and the author makes sure the reader knows this by framing Billy's story within narrative that is essentially autobiographical, since for all intents and purposes the person talking in Chapter One of the novel is Kurt Vonnegut

In terms of the differences that emerge between Kurt Vonnegut and Billy Pilgrim, a first aspect has to do with tears. In Chapters Three and Nine (both numbers carrying some ominous religious overtones) the narrator speaks of Billy's crying, first explaining that later in his life, after becoming a successful optometrist, "every so often, for no apparent reason, Billy would find himself weeping" (Vonnegut 1969:61). The second account of Billy's crying happens before the first if we look at the events of the novel from a chronologically linear point of view. Shortly

after the Dresden firebombing Billy is on a cart that is drawn by horses and some locals chastise him for the way the animals had been treated. Billy steps up alongside the horses and “when he saw the condition of his means of transportation, he burst into tears” (Vonnegut 1969:197). However, right after this the narrator is quick to point out that Billy “hadn’t cried about anything else in the war” (ibid.) and then points out (or perhaps it is the author that says it) that this is

why the epitaph of this book is the quatrain from the famous Christmas carol. Billy cried very little, though he often saw things worth crying about, and in *that* respect, at least, he resembled the Christ of the carol:

*The cattle are lowing,
The Baby awakes.
But the little Lord Jesus
No crying he makes.*

(ibid.)

Everything that Billy sees, not only during the war but after (the death of his father, of his wife, of his colleagues), should have him sobbing uncontrollably every day of his life, but instead Pilgrim’s eyes remain mostly dry and even in the worst of times he has “smiles for them all” (Vonnegut 1969:64). Instead of crying, Billy simply embraces the Tralfamadorian perspective that makes even the greatest atrocities out to be perfectly acceptable moments trapped within the amber of time, leaving his tears to fall only on those occasions when his faith in his alien teachings is at its weakest.

At the other end of the emotional spectrum, all of Vonnegut’s writing up to and including *Slaughterhouse Five* is in some ways an artistic illustration of the author shedding tears for the horrors that he witnessed both during the war and after. Kurt Vonnegut uses writing as a sort of therapy through which he might tackle with the emotions brought about by his experience and learn how to grow as a human being with the help of the lessons he stands to learn. This is a completely different approach from one the one Billy Pilgrim embraces, since a person like this fictional character would conclude that there are no lessons to be learned from personal experience because from the passive point of view of the Tralfamadorian philosophy, the destruction of a city is qualitatively no different than backing an apple pie. Where Vonnegut struggles for years to write his famous Dresden story, even taking a trip back to the city with another veteran that experienced what he had, all in the hopes that he might “remember Dresden and save it from being forgotten, whereas Billy Pilgrim is intent on suppressing his memories so

as not to be bothered” (Freese 2009:335). The novel’s protagonist would want nothing more than to “spend eternity looking at pleasant moments” (Vonnegut 1969:117), while ignoring the unpleasant ones, whereas its author struggles to confront his demons, which is why “in 1967 Vonnegut flew to Dresden to visit the palace of the massacre, whereas Billy flew to Tralfamadore to escape into a better fantasy world” (Freese 2009:335). Kurt Vonnegut, as he appears in the novel, is not only concerned by his past but is also deeply troubled by current events and worries about the future. The Vietnam War is especially on his mind (Vonnegut 1969:210) and he teaches his children to never fight in whatever wars may appear in the future. Billy Pilgrim on the other hand doesn’t seem to care about current conflicts and is obviously proud that his son joins the Green Beret, which meant that he “straightened out, became a fine young man, and fought in Vietnam” (Vonnegut 1969:25).

Of course, one of the most important characteristics of Vonnegut’s writing of *Slaughterhouse Five*, as has already been established, is that it basically takes the book of conventional storytelling and throws it out the window, or at least burns every third page of it in order to achieve his goal. One of the ways in which he does this is by inserting himself directly into the narrative. Thus the novel opens and ends with elements pertaining to the real world, although the introduction of factual information in the first chapter differs greatly in form from what is found in the tenth. While the former is understood to be completely autobiographical, the final chapter in *Slaughterhouse Five* contains a blending of fact and fiction. It begins with the announcement that both Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King had been shot recently and that every day reports of more deaths in Vietnam come streaming in. This is Kurt Vonnegut speaking about the events of his time. Bernard V. O’Hare appears in the picture once again and the author returns to the trip they took back to Dresden long after the war. But then, just as the reader is getting re-immersed into the autobiographical world, Vonnegut glides back into his fictional universe with the help of the fact that “Billy Pilgrim was meanwhile traveling back to Dresden, too, but not in the present” (Vonnegut 1969:212). The use of the words *meanwhile* and *too* link the factual and fictional world together and creates “the bewildering blending of two narrative strands with different degrees of ‘reality’ and of two different time levels which convention demands should be clearly distinguished, namely those of the narrated action and the narrative process” (in Bloom 2009:18). Instance s of this type of blending occur at other moments throughout the text as well. When the narrator describes how Billy and the other American

prisoners are being sorted out and placed in box cars, the author temporarily breaks the narrative process by blatantly pointing out “I was there. So was my old war buddy Bernard V. O’Hare” (Vonnegut 1969:67) and the same statement “I was there” appears again at the end of the novel, when the narrator describes Billy back returning the Dresden to work at clearing dead bodies after the massacre (Vonnegut 1969:212). Between these two is a third instance where the author’s voice comes in. When Billy stumbles out of the prison infirmary and comes across the grotesque scene of American soldiers defecating and vomiting from the welcome feast that the English officers had prepared for them, he hears one of the US privates claiming that he had just excreted his brains. At this point it is Vonnegut who points out “that was I. That was me. The author of this book” (Vonnegut 1969:125). Then there are more subtle ways in which Vonnegut the author makes his presence felt in his novel. When Billy Pilgrim is alone downstairs at night in his house after Barbara’s wedding, the phone suddenly rings and “Billy answered. There was a drunk on the other end. Billy could almost smell his breath—mustard gas and roses” (Vonnegut 1969:73). This mirrors back to Chapter One, where the author explains his habit of getting drunk and calling up the men he knew had also survived Dresden and the implication is that person that Billy hears on the other end of the line is Kurt Vonnegut. Lastly, when his time traveling is first introduced at the beginning of Chapter Two, the text contains the line “he says” (Vonnegut 1969:23), which is repeated for emphasis, so as to make it clear that it is Billy that says he travels in time, not necessarily the narrator, and by extension the author.

The purpose of this interweaving of the author’s presence within the narrative may be subject to various interpretations by the reader, but one reason for this is most likely as a means of assuring that Kurt Vonnegut is seen by us as standing separate and apart from Billy Pilgrim, especially in terms of their views concerning the world around them and humanity’s place in the universe. By periodically uttering the statement *I was there, I am here, I am me* in one form or another, Vonnegut tries to make sure that at no point in time should the reader consider that Billy Pilgrim is somehow a fictionalized extension of the author’s own point of view. Nowhere is this desire to separate the two made more evident than in Chapter Ten when Vonnegut states that “if what Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadorians is true, that we will all live forever, no matter how dead we may sometimes seem to be, I’m not overjoyed” (Vonnegut 1969:211).

This is not to say that there are no similarities at all between Kurt Vonnegut and Billy Pilgrim – this could be possible only in such a case where the latter was not at all a construct of the former. The connection appears by means of a tertiary persona, namely Kilgore Trout. Having already appeared in *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater*, Trout actually embodies the image of the crazy outlandish writer that Vonnegut himself once feared he might become, especially after having been labeled a science-fiction writer. This hermit makes his presence physically known in chapter Eight and has undergone violent change in both his image and his attitude as a result of his lifestyle, spending his time writing insane stories that apparently no one reads except for Eliot Rosewater. On the other hand, if we consider the protagonist of *Slaughterhouse Five* a kind of writer, “Billy remains thoroughly normal. The device of time travel [which by now is well known to the reader] lets him live on Tralfamadore while still fulfilling his duties as husband, father, civic figure, and optometrist on Earth. In becoming a storyteller of his own life Billy is no more removed from normality than is Kurt Vonnegut” (Klinkowitz 2004:95). However, as has already been stated, ultimately the two part ways significantly, because Billy’s extreme sense of pacifism ultimately makes him a nihilist, whereas Kurt Vonnegut only wants to point out to his reader that “if life seems without purpose, perhaps it is because we have tried (and failed) to impose a purpose inappropriately. The quest for meaning can be self-defeating, especially when pursued with the rigidities of conventions that in truth no longer apply” (Vonnegut 1998:8). *Slaughterhouse Five* is after all a book about life and death and the seeking of this meaning behind our existence. Billy Pilgrim’s solution is to postulate the possibility that there is no purpose whatsoever, that everything is meaningless because everything just *is*. In contrast, the novel’s author postulates only the possibility that our finding a workable purpose is possible, and the difficulty that we are facing is merely rooted our searching methods.

Perhaps one of the most ironic aspects of *Slaughterhouse Five* is that the narrator sets out to capture and present an entirely innovative religious concept preached to both the fictional masses and the reader of the novel by a rather unique character, only to have the author of the novel himself intercede and shoot the entire Tralfamadorian philosophy down. The result is a text that is actually meant to teach its readers one way of viewing life – in which people should make the most of their time and dedicate their efforts towards making the world around them a happier place – by illustrating across the better part of the novel how an individual, in this case Billy Pilgrim, ends up when he embraces a view on life that is opposite to Vonnegut’s, one

which passively accepts the promulgation of man-made atrocities and considers that any attempt at improvement in life is futile.

3.3.6. Vonnegut vs. Job

The notion of a certain balance between good and evil, that misfortunes can fall upon the innocent just as well as luck can shine upon the wicked is nothing new, nor is the fact that mankind must learn to live with it. Being well aware of this, Vonnegut circles back even further than the life of Jesus Christ, to the Old Testament, to the story of Job. In the Book of Job, the protagonist is a good man who suffers a series of personal tragedies and as a result, as Donald Morse points out, he asks of God the fundamental questions “Why do the innocent suffer?” only to first be met with silence. The answer from God that he eventually receives is no less discouraging at first, because His words “implied that a person’s goodness does not guarantee that he or she will escape evil nor that he or she is incapable of doing evil” (in Bloom 2009:86). Where *Slaughterhouse Five* best mirrors Job’s dilemma is in the question “Why me” asked first by Billy towards the Tralfamadorians and then by an American prisoner towards a German soldier. In the former case the aliens answer Billy by asking in return “Why you? Why *us* for that matter? Why anything?” (Vonnegut 1969:76), whereas in the latter the German guard also poses the question “Vy you? Vy anybody?” (Vonnegut 1969:91). In both cases the rhetorical questions that are meant to serve as answers serve the function of illustrating the randomness of events in terms of good and evil, both as far as the quality of the occurrence and that of the recipient are concerned. It is in fact the Tralfamadorians who bring the point home by stating, in continuation to their response to Billy’s dilemma and in answer to their own question, that Billy is chosen and his kidnapping occurs “because this moment simply *is*” (Vonnegut 1969:76). And while this answer may not have much in the way of practical value, it is nonetheless meant to encourage a sense of comfort for both Billy Pilgrim and Job (who receives a similar lesson from God), since it at least teaches them that one should not take too much to heart these moments of tragedy because they are merely moments in time and hold little importance in the grand scheme of life.

The problem with adopting a view on life similar to the one that the Tralfamadorians bestow onto Billy and that God bestows onto Job is that it ultimately casts a veil of acceptability

upon willful atrocities that one might have the misfortune to suffer. In the former case, for example, everything that happens to the humble, good man of faith is done by God solely for the purpose of teaching Job the lesson that it rains on the just and the unjust alike. In *slaughterhouse Five* the implications, as far as justifications are concerned, are not only found in the passive nature of the Tralfamadorian philosophy as this paper has previously analyzed it, but also in the rationale put forward by Professor Rumfoord. This military historian's answer to what happened in Dresden is simply that "It *had* to be done", that "that's war" (Vonnegut 1969:198) and that, in fact, it is the Allied pilots that were ordered to do it are the ones that we should really pity. His position concerning war-time atrocities is enforced by a text written by President Truman, in which the latter explains that the reason behind dropping the atomic bomb onto Hiroshima was in order to assure that the Japanese "have been repaid many-fold" (Vonnegut 1969:185). In addition, Truman points out in his speech that the atomic bomb represents "the force from which the sun draws its power [which then] has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East" (ibid). The fact that President Truman here ends this section of his speech on *those that brought war to the Far East* effectively shifts the focus of his readers away from the destructive force of the atomic bomb and over to the fact that it was the *other*, in this case the Japanese, that struck first, which establishes any and all future actions on the part of American forces as nothing more than justifiable acts of retaliation, no matter how massively destructive they may be. Thus Vonnegut presents here an illustration of the consequences of one rationale following another, whereby the first is the notion taught to Job and to Billy that things just happen and so, as Rumfoord tries to explain, in war certain events are labeled as inevitable byproducts that need not be debated upon. This annulment of culpability makes possible the second rationale, which is the notion that the atrocities committed in the name of *good* are perfectly justifiable. The reader of *Slaughterhouse Five* is of course expected to perceive that, just as Billy Pilgrim's Tralfamadorian philosophy is fundamentally flawed and rejected by Vonnegut, so too should the notion that the ends justify the means be understood as nothing more than faulty reasoning that serves the function of providing a sense of logic and meaning to tragic events which are beyond justification or forgiveness.

3.3.7. Tralfamadore – real or imaginary?

One of the most delightfully frustrating aspects of this novel (I say it is delightful because it adds so much to the flavor and level of complexity of the text) is the fact that, as Peter Freese puts it, “it is impossible to decide whether Billy really travels in time or only hallucinates his extragalactic journey, whether *Slaughterhouse Five* is a science-fiction novel or a novel with a mentally disturbed protagonist who is haunted by science-fiction fantasies” (in Bloom 2009:19). On the one hand, the narrator insists that Billy’s time travel must be taken at face value. The very first line in Chapter Two, where the story actually begins, asserts that “Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time” (Vonnegut 1969:23) without any indication that this statement should be taken as anything other than plain truth. A few pages later, while recanting Billy’s wandering through German-occupied territory shortly after the Battle of the Bulge, the narrator tells the reader that “Billy Pilgrim was having a delightful hallucination” (Vonnegut 1969:49) and is then quick to point out that “this was not time-travel (ibid). Later on, after the plane crash, Billy “dreamed millions of things, some of them true. The true things were time-travel” (Vonnegut 1969:157). So it seems obvious from these examples that Billy Pilgrim is indeed a time traveler and, by extension, that the Tralfamadoreans he encounters are real.

Unfortunately for the reader (or fortunately, depending on one’s perspective) Vonnegut doesn’t permit him to rest his head upon any such certainty but instead proceeds to throw in elements that point to something different all together. The first such monkey wrench is again found on the first page of Chapter Two, where no sooner had the narrator stated that Billy is a time traveler than the author comes in to state that protagonist’s intergalactic adventures take place in the manner that presented only based on what “he says” (Vonnegut 1969:23), an observation made by Vonnegut that has as much the role of differentiating between him and Billy, as shown above, as it serves the function of casting a certain level of doubt in the mind of the reader as to the validity of Billy’s claims. Despite the narrator’s insistence on the authenticity behind Billy’s experiences, the reader’s doubts are only meant to grow as he moves through the pages. Whether it be the events that take place during the war or after, we find out very quickly that Billy has had to deal with scenes of almost unimaginable horror as a prisoner of war (such as the treatment he and his fellow captives receive while on board the train, the sea of starving Russians and, of course, the destruction of Dresden coupled with the morbidly named “corpse mines”), the

tragic deaths of his father and wife and a plane crash thanks to which he is left with “a terrible scar across the top of his skull” (Vonnegut 1969:25). It also doesn’t help Billy’s case that he has two nervous breakdowns, one during his captivity and the other while a student, and, for the second time around, he voluntarily commits himself into a mental hospital. Last, but not least, as Barbara points out, it is suspicious that Billy only begins talking about the Tralfamadorians and about being unstuck in time after the plane crash, a fact that can only compel the reader to think back on Chapter One where Vonnegut explains how Céline began expressing his thoughts on paper only after the head trauma that had left him hearing noises.

The fact of the matter is that the impossibility to definitively fall back upon one point of view or another is completely deliberate, for the two perspectives work in tandem, however paradoxically, to only enrich the novel even further. If the Tralfamadorians are real and Billy Pilgrim can travel through time, then *Slaughterhouse Five* provides its reader with a highly imaginative alternative to the way we typically view the universe around us. Just the fact that Tralfamadorians can see in the fourth dimension leaves one to ponder and fantasize about what other spectacular things a kind of alien as portrayed in this novel could teach humanity about who and what we are and what life is all about. Even the Tralfamadorian philosophy, whether the reader agrees with it or not, still presents us with a fascinating alternative to how people live their lives. Last, but not least, in order for Kurt Vonnegut to deliver his message by means of what can probably be best characterized as reverse psychology, it is imperative that the reader neither buys into this philosophy nor attempts to dismiss it as just another delusion concocted by a sick, pathetic mind. It would be kind of like trying to explain the concept of *good* without mentioning the notion of *evil*, an endeavor which, if nothing else, Bokonon in *Cat’s Cradle* already showed is impossible to accomplish.

If these aliens are merely a figment of Billy’s deranged imagination, this can only provide the reader with insightful clues regarding this peculiar protagonist. For example, rather than try and deal with the horrors he witnesses, as Vonnegut does, Billy Pilgrim attempts to “re-invent [himself] and [his] universe”, a task for which “science fiction was a big help” (Vonnegut 1969:101). And in this new fictional world that makes it possible to simply glide over the unimaginable by simply trivializing it, the Tralfamadorians are presented as higher beings; god-like creatures that, in their benevolence, provide Billy with the tools he needs to be happy in

spite of himself. In this sense the Tralfamadorian philosophy is presented as a manifestation of the complex psychological defense mechanism that Billy's mind employs in order to be able to cope with experiences that would otherwise drive him to suicide, or at least to a situation similar to that of Eliot Rosewater who is in the mental hospital alongside Billy because he "shot a fourteen-year-old fireman, mistaking him for a German soldier" (ibid).

Ultimately, it all circles back to the postmodern view of a deconstructed reality, where antithetical elements may be paired off and meaning in paradox can be found. In light of this consideration, as Jerome Klinkowitz points out,

"the circumstance Billy Pilgrim finds himself in at novel's start sounds familiar. We are what we pretend to be, so we'd better be careful who we pretend to be. Pretend to be good, and even God will be fooled. You think life must have purpose? So then go invent one. These sentiments, from *Mother-Night*, *God Bless Mr. Rosewater*, and *Cat's Cradle*, respectively, indicate how Billy's time travel is more than just a science-fiction device" (Klinkowitz 2009:58)

Since human reality, seen through postmodern eyes, is a construct, it follows that the Tralfamadorians exist and are at the same time a figment of Billy's imagination, just as he is able to travel through time *and* his journeys are an illusion.

3.3.8. Death in *Slaughterhouse Five*

Without a doubt, the most predominant element to be found in *Slaughterhouse Five* is death. The word itself, along with various references to it appear close to two hundred times and Lawrence Broer is right in observing that "if one counts deaths that are predicted or imagined as well as those that occur, there may be a greater proliferation of corpses in *Slaughterhouse Five* than in any other twentieth-century novel" (in Bloom 2009:48). Indeed, across just 215 pages of text, the reader has to contend with

"death by starvation, rotting, incineration, squashing, gassing, shooting, poisoning, bombing, torturing, hanging, and relatively routine death by disease. We get the deaths of dogs, horses, pigs, Vietnamese soldiers, crusaders, hunters, priests, officers, hobos, actresses, prison guards, a slave laborer, a suffragette, Jesus Christ, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Billy Pilgrim's mother and father, his wife, Edgar Derby, Roland Weary, the regimental chaplain's assistant, Paul Lazzaro, Colonel Wild Bob; we get the deaths of a bottle of champagne, billions of body lice, bacteria, and fleas; the novel, entire towns,

and finally the universe; we encounter individual deaths, the death of groups en masse; accidental, calculated, and vengeful deaths; recent and historical deaths.”

(ibid.)

The end of life, its inevitability and the way in which it fits into our existence are situated at the heart of *Slaughterhouse Five*, inevitably so because of what Kurt Vonnegut once again took from Céline. As the former explains in Chapter One of *Slaughterhouse Five*, the French author considered that “no art is possible without a dance with death” (Vonnegut 1969:21), that any artistic consideration that contains any kind of truth must inevitably take on the grand finale, which is why another subtitle of Vonnegut’s novel is *A Duty-dance with Death*.

Billy Pilgrim’s new religion is also centered around death, more specifically his central goal as a new Messiah is, similar to that of the old Messiah, to deliver onto his followers the comforting knowledge that he had been given about the end not being the end after all. One thing that is worth mentioning here is the way in which, through both his preaching and his actions, Billy in effect creates (or rather, the author creates through Billy) ironic overtones regarding the above-mentioned *dance with death*, which again sets him apart from Vonnegut’s personal considerations. In contrast to the serious depth that a subtitle such as *A Duty-dance with Death* might impose upon the reader’s mind, Billy Pilgrim’s new religion in effect nullifies the very importance that death might have in our world by describing it as “just violent light – and a hum” (Vonnegut 1969:43), after which the individual simply swings back to life as if nothing ever happened. The process of parodying the implications of this subtitle is then carried further through Billy’s actions which emphasize the word *dance*. Thus, while in constant mortal danger as a soldier trudging through enemy territory, the protagonist engages in “involuntary dancing” (Vonnegut 1969:33) and when walking through the snow he and his companions inevitably “leave trails in the snow as unambiguous as diagrams in a book on ballroom dancing” (Vonnegut 1969:39).

Ultimately, the issue of death is one that is very personal to the author himself and in order to understand this we have to circle back to the difficulties that Vonnegut faced when writing his novel. If an author decides to write about the end of life, no human invention with the capacity to turn the living into corpses quite matches up to war. So, if the person’s goal was to create a work that celebrated life and condemned man’s thirst for killing, it would make sense to

write an anti-war book. However, to this matter, Vonnegut writes in his introductory chapter about a supposed discussion he once had with the producer Harrison Starr. In it, the latter asks Vonnegut if his book will be an anti-war novel and then suggests that the latter should write an anti-glacier book, because it would be just as useful. His point, as the author is quick to explain, is that “there would always be wars, that they were as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that too. And even if wars didn’t keep coming like glaciers there would still be plain old death” (Vonnegut 1969:3). The inevitability of war and death then become a central issue because, if they are inevitable, then there is no point of criticizing them, and in the above statement Vonnegut admits that he believes this as well. The millions of deaths during World War Two and even the massacre of Dresden become impossible to outright condemn. This is shown outright first when the author brings up the time when a university professor tells him about the concentration camps and the horrible things that the Nazi’s were doing, while, as Vonnegut explains, “all I could say was, ‘I know, I know, I know’” (Vonnegut 1969:10). This acceptance is then mirrored much later in the novel in regards to Dresden. While in the hospital, recovering from his plane crash, Billy Pilgrim encounters General Rumfoord who tells him that “it *had* to be done” and that “that’s war”, to which Billy, like Vonnegut, answers only with “I know” (Vonnegut 1969:198). The answers in both cases are honest ones and are a testimony to Vonnegut’s ability to see the bigger picture.

Getting to this point did not entail a brief journey. As Donald Morse observes, it is inevitable that, right after his war experience, a young Kurt Vonnegut struggled with such questions as “Why was I allowed to survive when so many innocent, good people perished?” and “How could this terrible destruction have been allowed to happen?” or “How could human beings do such awful things to one another?” (in Bloom 2009:87). Indirectly, his earlier novels all tackle with these issues. In *The Sirens of Titan*, for example, Vonnegut looked into human history to find answers but came up with hardly anything at all. In *Mother Night* he contemplated the possibility of making use of evil for a greater good, but was left only with the epitaph “You are what you pretend to be, so be careful what you pretend to be” (Vonnegut 1973[1961]:1). In *Cat’s Cradle* he concluded that if people really wanted to destroy themselves they certainly had the power to do so, but that in this case writers had a sacred duty to warn people of these possible cataclysmic dangers. In this case, however, Vonnegut was met with disappointment in learning just how little mankind paid attention to the warnings of authors. In *God Bless You Mr.*

Rosewater the author tries in a sense to go the opposite route and to show how a person with money can help the needy, thus making the world a better place, but in the end Vonnegut obviously couldn't make peace with the overly-utopian characteristic of such a scenario, promulgating Eliot to give up his wealth in order to save himself.

What is safe to say, in the light of this context, is that when Kurt Vonnegut characterized the writing of *Slaughterhouse Five* as therapeutic, he was not simply referring to the fact that he was finally able to face up to his experience in Dresden, the memories of which, as the author points out, had been suppressed for many years, no doubt due to the trauma that he had to deal with. More than that, the novel is a testimony to Vonnegut having come to understand and be acceptant of the inevitability of death, which does not imply a sense of futility towards life. On the contrary, the lesson that Vonnegut has learned and wishes to share with his readers is that, while we cannot stop the coming of death, or of pain and tragedy for that matter, what we can do nonetheless is to constantly find ways to improve upon our lives *despite* the perils that it contains. The alternative is the nihilism of Billy Pilgrim, which fails to create anything of worth and promotes a passivity that inevitably would lead to a global destruction that no one would care about.

Later on in life, Kurt Vonnegut would become increasingly discouraged by the persistent level of violence and destruction that would characterize the latter half of the twentieth century. Perhaps in his eyes, human beings either continued to embrace the kind of cynical perspective that surrounded characters like the Chicago University Professor and General Rumfoord, or they embraced in ever increasing numbers a philosophy on life similar to that of Billy Pilgrim, according to which it is ok to turn a blind eye on the suffering of others because, after all, "everything is all right, and everybody has to do exactly what he does" (Vonnegut 1969:198). But as far as Kurt Vonnegut was personally concerned, he had solved the issue of how he should approach the world around him and this freed him up to tackle more closely the demons of his own past. Never again would his novels struggle with *the hard questions* in quite the same manner and depths as they did in his first six books, but I consider it wrong to criticize Kurt Vonnegut for this fact, as some critics have done. By the beginning of the 1970's, in terms of life and death and humanity's position in dealing with these matters, Vonnegut had said what he had to say, and where they appear in his later novels it is simply as a reminder of the points he had previously made.

3.4. Deadeye Dick

3.4.1. Getting personal

It has already been established that *Slaughterhouse Five* can rightfully be thought of as Kurt Vonnegut's most celebrated novel, not only because it's innovative style and approach but also because it expresses the author's ability to finally deal with the trauma that he suffered during his war-time experience. This process of coming to terms with what essentially determined the subject matter of his writing up to that point – the massive, even unimaginable destruction that humanity can inflict upon each other and the world – marks a pivotal moment in Kurt Vonnegut's career. Now, freed of this traumatic burden that had been stewing in his mind since he was first sent overseas, the author must have felt that his career had reached a crossroads from which he was unsure of the direction he should take. *Slaughterhouse Five* and all his previous novels, now reprinted, were selling all across the world and the rights to a film production of his most famous novel had been bought. During this period, Kurt Vonnegut toyed with new means of expressing himself, such as film, theatre writing and even painting. It wasn't long though before such endeavors were met with less than favorable reviews. His play *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*, despite its numerous productions, was not well received, and as for cinema, the author ran into a beast that he was by now well familiar with, which is financial burden. To tell it in his words,

“film is a hideously expensive way to tell anybody anything – and I include television and all that. What I more: healthy people exposed to too many actors and too much scenery may wake up some morning to find their own imagination dead” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:476)

A rather harsh description of the film industry, this statement nevertheless represents a warning regarding the negative effects of television, which, as he previously pointed out, had already destroyed the short story industry and was now crippling man's imagination.

In light of the difficulties encountered and the revelations he has, Vonnegut finally returns to the art form that he is well familiarized with and uses his newly discovered autobiographical style to explore subject matters that fall much closer to home for this middle-class American citizen of German descent that has essentially lived all throughout the twentieth century. It is in light of this career shift that we can state the fact that, while *Slaughterhouse Five*

may deal with Kurt Vonnegut's most protruding scar, novels such as *Breakfast of Champions* and especially *Deadeye Dick* are far more personal, because they represent a fictional reconstruction of his childhood environment.

True to his philosophy that reading is a difficult enough chore without the writer making it any more complicated, Kurt Vonnegut Starts off his novel by explaining "the main symbols in this book" (Vonnegut 1982:xii). Thus, he mentions the fact that

"There is an unappreciated, empty arts center in the shape of a sphere. This is my head as my sixtieth birthday beckons to me.

...

There is a neutron bomb explosion in a populated area. This is the disappearance of so many people I cared about in Indianapolis when I was starting out to be a writer.

...

The neutered pharmacist who tells the tale is my declining sexuality. The crime he committed in childhood is all the bad things I have done." (Vonnegut 1982:xiii)

These four remarks, while they cannot be denied of containing some degree of truth, are nonetheless deceptively simple. The first explanation, for example, certainly illustrates the disappointment that Kurt Vonnegut must have felt after the poor reception of both the novel *Slapstick* (1976) and his attempt at theatre *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* (1970). As the author himself comments in relation to the critical reviews of the novel, what hurt more than the negative opinions was the fact that the critics "wanted people to admit now that I had never been any good" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:416). Yet, even considering the setback he must have felt, calling his head *unappreciated* and *empty* is a bit too explicit and thus it calls into question to what degree the reader should take his words seriously. The reading of the neutron bomb symbol is also called into question later in the novel, as it becomes more and more obvious that, beyond being a representation of the loss of dear people from Indianapolis – which is in itself slightly odd, since Kurt Vonnegut himself stated that he left the city because there was too little left for him there – is also another warning directed to his readers of the dangers surrounding weapons of mass destruction and the increased apathy or complacency that people feel towards their existence. This becomes especially obvious towards the end of the novel, at Celia Hoover's funeral, when it becomes clear that Rudy's neutered state is shared by all the citizens of Midland City. As he points out, despite the sad occasion,

“there was no reason to expect that anything truly exciting or consoling would be said. Not even the minister believed in heaven or hell. Not even the minister thought that every life had meaning and that every death could startle us into learning something important, and so on. The corpse was a mediocrity who had broken down after a while. The mourners were mediocrities who would break down after a while. The city itself was breaking down. Its center was dead.”

(Vonnegut 1982:197)

The world has become bereft of joy, just like Rudy, and will soon be destroyed, and to this Susan Farrell is correct when she adds that “the neutron bomb, then, becomes a metaphor for what is happening already in Midland City. It pushes a place that is already filled with the walking dead one step further, merely hastening the breakdown that is already taking place” (Farrell 2008:108)

The idea of Rudy’s neutered state being a symbol of the author’s declining sexuality is not wholly beyond consideration, although keeping this comparison in mind certainly does undermine the tragic value of the circumstances in which the protagonist makes the decision to become a neuter. Lastly, the proposition that the young boy’s crime is a representation of everything that Vonnegut did in his life that is bad is so general, left suspended in midair to such a degree, that it is perhaps the most obvious indication that this list of symbols should be taken with a heavy grain of salt. What we *can* take from here is, again, that *Deadeye Dick* is to be read as a deeply personal text that draws numerous parallels to Kurt Vonnegut’s childhood. As William Rodney Allen puts it, “*Deadeye Dick* is Vonnegut’s most intently personal fictional exploration of his unhappy relationship with his parents” (Allen 2009[1991]:139).

Connections to the history of the Vonnegut family can be made from the very first page of Chapter One, when the protagonist Rudy introduces himself. His full name is stated to be Rudolph Waltz and he is said to have been born in 1932, in Midland City, Ohio. He is thus an American who, in accordance with his name, is of German descent and who is born in the inter-war period in a city from the State of Ohio, which is incidentally right next to the State of Indiana, where Kurt Vonnegut was born. The text then takes the comparison between author and character one step further, with the introduction of Rudy’s father Otto (another distinctively German name) who in turn was considered “the heir to a fortune” (Vonnegut 1982:2). He is then born into a wealthy family, which had accumulated its riches through industry, in the same way as Kurt Vonnegut’s family rose to financial prestige. The Waltz family is famous in Midland City for its outrageous wealth and their extravagant display of that wealth. For example, in a city

filled with middle-class laborers and only one single rich neighborhood (that eventually disappears), it is reasonable to presume that few, if any, could afford a six-month honeymoon or desire to spend so much on extravagant things. In the case of Kurt Vonnegut's parents, things weren't much different. After all, when they were married "Edith and Kurt's wedding celebration was one long remembered in Indianapolis. It was probably the biggest and most costly party which the town had ever seen or is likely ever to witness again" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:363). In both cases, that same wealth would be gone not long after Kurt, respectively Rudy, would come into the world.

Although the details of their lives are significantly different – Vonnegut even warns the reader that "this is fiction, not history" (Vonnegut 1982:xiii) – nonetheless, it is easy and expected for us to consider Otto as being "a psychological though not factual portrait of Vonnegut's father" (Allen 2009[1991]:139). Both men are artists (although, unlike Kurt Sr. he is not successful at all), both suffer through life-altering moments that effectively destroy their artistic capacity (for Otto it is going to jail for letting his son handle guns, for Kurt Sr. it was the effect of the Great Depression) and both are portrayed as having become moody and paternally distant afterwards. When Kurt Vonnegut Jr. went to his father with the idea of becoming an architect, the latter persuaded him to become instead a scientist, because Kurt Sr. considered that his failure was due also to the fact that he had strayed from the family trade area, which had been distinctly practical, rather than artistic. In a similar fashion, Otto tells his son to become a pharmacist rather than a writer, and the reader of *Deadeye Dick* cannot help but sense an echo of the author's own father's voice when Otto says to Rudy:

"You and I and your mother and your brother are descended from solid, stolid, thick-skulled, unimaginative, unmusical, ungraceful German stock whose sole virtue is that it can never leave off working. You see in me a man who was flattered and lied to and coddled out of his proper destiny, which was a life of business, in rendering some sort of plodding but useful service to his community." (Vonnegut 1982:117)

Kurt Vonnegut Sr. may not have been fooled into thinking he was an artist as Otto is, but other than that, this is a spitting representation of what the real man must have felt was at the root of his professional failure.

Just as Otto Waltz is a fictional representation of Kurt Vonnegut's father, so too is Rudy's mother a recreation of the author's mother, in fact even more so. Born under the name

Emma Wetzel, Rudy's mother is brought up in a rich family and marries a man who, although an artist, also belongs to a wealthy family with a distinguished name. For half her life Emma lives under the distinct impression that "nothing bad was supposed to happen to her – ever" (Vonnegut 1982:93). She is described by her son as being "purely ornamental" (ibid), never really showing affection towards her children, who end up being raised by servants. When disaster strikes and the Waltz family becomes poor, Emma becomes completely useless, essentially giving up on life, until shortly before her death, when tiny brain tumors compel her to become an active member of society in the area of local arts. This is essentially a frame by frame reconstruction of Edith Vonnegut, right down to the attempt at entering the artistic world. What sets the two apart are that the fictional character is involved in the criticism of fine arts and dies of cancer, whereas Kurt Vonnegut's mother tries her hand at writing and commits suicide, but these differences are reasonably insignificant and it is obvious that the author had his mother in mind when creating this character.

Then there are other aspects that more or less mirror the environment and circumstances in which the author grew up. When presenting the marriage between Otto and Emma, the narrator points out that "the Wetzels and the Waltzes were proudly agnostic" (Vonnegut 1982:22), which is what can be said in real life about the Vonneguts and the Liebers. Like Kurt Vonnegut, Rudy is the youngest offspring and, although he doesn't have a sister, he does have an elder brother. In addition, Rudy Waltz may have belonged to a wealthy family until age twelve, but thanks to the Great Depression the neighborhood around his home has deteriorated, as other rich families lost their fortune or simply moved away. Thus, as a boy, Rudy would bring home such friends as "the eight-year-old son of a tool-checker" (Vonnegut 1982:38). Inviting friends over is not something that Rudy would do for long, since his father, clearly unable to relate to the less fortunate and less educated society, would make Rudy's friends uncomfortable with references to pieces of literature they can't possibly have read. In a similar fashion, Kurt Vonnegut Jr's childhood friends are average kids, belonging to middle-class citizens who must have been far different in upbringing and character than the author's previously wealthy parents. It is conceivable then that Kurt's friends may have felt awkward in a similar fashion when visiting, at least in the sense that Kurt Sr. would know have known how to approach them.

On Mother's day 1944, Kurt Vonnegut suffered a tragic loss with the suicidal death of his mother. In many ways this marked the real end of his childhood. In a similar fashion, for Rudy Waltz this is the day he "had been initiated into manhood" (Vonnegut 1982:61), a day of death and tragedy as the protagonist of *Deadeye Dick* shoot a round of into the distance and a mother dies. Everything that comes after falls in relation to this event, in the same way as Vonnegut's impulse to dedicated his life to writing fiction is fueled, at least in the beginning, by his desire to make his mother's dream come true. Of course, while his mother's death may have been the initial propulsion factor, Vonnegut later wrote for wholly different reasons, such as using the literary word to express himself in relation to matters that troubled him. Rudy too uses literature to deal with the painful moments in his life, this time through theater rather than prose. Using the play format helps Rudy to distance himself from traumatic events, but later on he would go on to write an actual play that is put to stage and which "was a catastrophe" (Vonnegut 1982:129). This in turn might mirror back to the poor reception of Vonnegut's first play *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*.

Years before writing *Deadeye Dick*, Kurt Vonnegut wrote in the Preface to the novel *Breakfast of Champions* that the text represents his attempt to "clear [his] head of all the junk in there" (Vonnegut 1999[1973]:xi), to get rid of some of the psychological baggage that he had accumulated over the years. In this sense, the tale of Rudy Waltz may very well be an expression of the author's desire, now almost at the age of sixty, to finally put aside the *junk* associated with his childhood, so that he may perhaps in turn move on to bigger and better things. This need for catharsis, first expressed in *Breakfast of Champions* and now reiterated in *Deadeye Dick* may be the reason behind Vonnegut's decision to place both novels in the same setting – Midland City, Ohio – and to resurrect many of the characters that appeared in the former novel – Dwayne Hoover, Celia Hoover, Bunny, Fred T. Barry – and place them in the latter. In a sense, "*Deadeye Dick* is a penance of sorts for *Breakfast of Champions*" (Tomedi 2004:106), an expression of Vonnegut's desire to take the earlier novel, which had been poorly received, and to give it a more well-rounded shape. Connections between the two novels is made through the setting and the characters, as has already been pointed out, but also in a more subtle way that occurs at Celia Hoover's funeral. During these sober proceedings, Rudy daydreams and even finds himself smiling. He immediately stops and looks around to see if anyone had noticed. He realizes that "one person had. He was at the other end of our pew, and he did not look away when I caught

him gazing at me. [...] He was wearing large sunglasses with mirrored lenses” (Vonnegut 1982:198). The unknown character is obviously Kurt Vonnegut sneaking himself into his own fiction. The mirrored lenses serve in fact two functions. On the one hand they provide him with a distinct advantage, since they assure the intruder’s anonymity; Rudy may notice the man, but beyond that all he or anyone else can see is in fact a reflection of themselves. On the other hand, as Tomedi observes, the man with the mirrored sunglasses creates “the allusion to Kurt Vonnegut of *Breakfast of Champions*, where the author is described as wearing the same mirrored lenses” (Tomedi 2004:108). What’s more, “Kilgore Trout sees mirrors as leaks – holes into another universe. Here, then, Vonnegut places his avatar in the text as a link to his other fictional universes” (ibid).

3.4.2. Reviving Celia Hoover

As one of the characters that reemerge in *Deadeye Dick*, Celia Hoover nee Hildreth is also an example of Vonnegut’s tendency at the time to introduce important female characters within his fictional repertoire. As stated, she first appears in *Breakfast of Champions*, but only indirectly; she is mentioned at certain times as being the wife of Dwayne Hoover, the protagonist of that particular novel, who killed herself prior to the novel’s beginning. The later novel, *Deadeye Dick*, which in part explores the history of Midland City from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, in doing so dedicates a substantial amount of time and consideration in particular to Celia, to the point where she “threatens to take over the second part of the book” (Allen 2009[1991]:142).

As readers we first find out about her in Chapter Six, when the narrator mentions that his father had the habit of greeting Rudy’s and Felix’s friends in unusual ways and that “he gave his most dumbfoundingly inappropriate greeting [...] to a young woman named Celia Hildreth” (Vonnegut 1982:39). The greeting in question takes place on the night of Felix’s prom, when Celia, his date, is horrified by the theatricalities created by Otto and runs away, throwing away her expensive shoes and yelling that “she would like to claw away her face so that people would stop seeing things in it that had nothing to do with what she was like inside” (Vonnegut 1982:49). In that moment the narrator describes her as “a goddess of discord” (ibid.) and so she

will remain throughout the rest of the novel. Her condition is understood to be brought about by circumstance. She is initially described as “the prettiest young woman anybody had ever seen” (Vonnegut 1982:40), whose family, though white, was “so poor that they lived in the black part of town” (ibid). She then appears again a year after Felix’s prom night, at a crucial moment, alongside her date, the Pontiac dealer Dwayne Hoover, when Rudy is in the cage and being humiliated after he had accidentally shot Mrs. Metzger. The next time Celia is mentioned, she is married and the leading actress in Rudy Waltz’s single significant creation, a play that might pull him out of his condition as a neuter. At this point in time “she hadn’t yet been made all raddled and addled and snaggletoothed and haggard by amphetamines” (Vonnegut 1982:122). When the great blizzard strikes Midland City and hundreds are injured or dead or dying, Celia Hoover appears again as a volunteer nurse who is “a robot in back of the counter” (Vonnegut 1982:164), a shining example of efficiency coupled with civic fortitude that give her an almost heroic aura. The same cannot be said in relation to her next appearance, when in the pharmacy late at night, where Rudy, upon seeing the wreck that she has become, refers to Celia as *it* rather than *she* (Vonnegut 1982:179).

From Rudy’s youth, through the infamous pivotal moment (when he becomes a double murderer), followed by his most crowning moment (the best staging of his play) and the moment his father dies, Celia Hoover nee Hildreth appears, like a defining marker for every stage of the protagonist’s life. Even the climax of *Deadeye Dick* is connected to this character, occurring at her funeral “when Reverend Harrell forgave me in public for having shot Eloise Metzger” (Vonnegut 1982:210). All in all, her constant presence throughout the novel is an indication of “how much [Vonnegut] wanted to get her right” (Allen 2009[1991]:143), and of how he must have felt he had not done her enough justice first time around. Not only does the author turn Celia into a “more fully developed character than in *Breakfast of Champions*” (ibid.), he also grants her with a symbolic value that adds on to one of the major themes of then novel – that of gun control. The symbol has to do with advancements in medicine; Celia is a young woman who is not only naturally and exceptionally pretty but also it is understood that her character makes her utterly unique. She is to be regarded in *Deadeye Dick* as a thing of beauty, who is, however, transformed towards the end into a monster “as ugly as the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*” (Vonnegut 1982:177). What brings about this drastic transformation is due to amphetamines, thus Celia’s tragic journey becomes a symbol for a certain kind of degradation

that society as a whole is in the process of suffering. Again, it is Vonnegut that states his argument plainly when he writes that “the late twentieth century will go down in history, I’m sure, as an era of pharmaceutical buffoonery” (Vonnegut 1982:191). Like the act of testing out weapons without a proper understanding of their long-lasting consequences, so too does society indulge in the experimenting with various substances, which in turn can only lead to disaster.

3.4.3. *Deadeye Dick* – a farewell to arms

This novel may be about the author’s childhood, but the real theme of *Deadeye Dick* is also “highly political, being at least implicitly Vonnegut’s plea for gun control and putting an end to the arms race” (Allen 2009[1991]:138). The way in which he organizes this plea is in fact multi-faceted, involving several characters and even scenery. Certainly the first and most obvious segment involves Rudy Waltz in particular, and the entire Waltz family as a whole. First of all, we should begin with Otto Waltz, the man who filled his attic with two hundred weapons and then proceeded to hand the key to this gun room over to his twelve-year-old son. While in other respects he may represent the failed artist, in this case he is the embodiment of the ignorant American individual who considers the teaching of minors about how to handle deadly weapons as being a part of some significant time-honored tradition without which a boy cannot become a man. In this case Vonnegut ridicules this image to the fullest, firstly by revealing that this buffoon Otto doesn’t even know how old his child really is and secondly by making Rudy, the under-aged murderer, out to be the son of a man who, on the very day of the tragic accident, tells the First Lady of the United States of America that his boys “will never have a shooting accident because their respect for weapons has become part of their nervous system” (Vonnegut 1982:60). The author is also quick to make certain the reader understands that these words spoken by Otto have further reaching value, by having the narrator point out that the man “said most of the things the National Rifle Association still says about how natural and beautiful it is for Americans to have love affairs with guns” (ibid). It is thus pure ignorance that leads the man to provide his son with the environment in which “it becomes too easy to make perfectly horrible mistakes” (Vonnegut 1982:6).

Rudy Waltz is the victim in this novel as much as the woman he shoots, and this fact is made evident by another character that adds to Vonnegut's anti-gun plea, the dead woman's widowed husband Mr. Metzger. A writer who ends up profiting financially off of a deep personal tragedy, who has little to no interest in wealth and is more concerned about getting his word out to whomever will bother to read it, George Metzger is in many ways a self-portrait of Vonnegut, who more than once claimed that he is the only one who ever made a profit off of the Dresden massacre, often joking that he "got three dollars for each person killed. Imagine that" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:406). So it is reasonable to assume that it is in fact the author's voice that the reader is meant to perceive more than a character's when the narrator quotes Metzger in saying that "we cannot get rid of mankind's fleetingly wicked wishes. We can get rid of the machines that make them come true. I give you a holy word: DISARM" (Vonnegut 1982:87).

This disdain for weapons that Vonnegut learns is also expressed by the author himself in *Palm Sunday*, where he explains that

"When Charlton Heston tells me in TV commercials about all the good work that the National rifle Association (to which Father and I both belonged when I was a kid) is doing, and how glad I should be that civilians can and do keep military weapons in their homes or vehicles or places of work, I feel exactly as though he were praising the germs of some loathsome disease, since guns in civilian hands, whether accidentally or on purpose, kill so many of us day after day" (Vonnegut 1991:81)

The proliferation of guns is therefore a disease that is willfully encouraged to spread. In this light, what both Vonnegut and Metzger say in *Deadeye Dick* in relation to Rudy the boy murderer is not that he is wholly innocent, but that the real crime committed is that of making it possible for a weapon like the Springfield rifle to exist and to make its way into the hands of a twelve-year-old. Rudy Waltz is thus a victim in that he has been brainwashed into believing that it is perfectly ok to fire a gun over a city because "if I aimed at nothing, then nothing is what I would hit" and because "the bullet was a symbol and nobody was ever hurt by a symbol" (Vonnegut 1982:64).

Within Midland City worship of weaponry is so prevalent that condemning Rudy and even Otto for the murder of Mrs. Metzger almost seems hypocritical. One cannot help but wonder, after all, to what extent the citizens of this fictional world have the right to accuse someone of killing another human being, when it is understood that just about everyone has

contributed to somebody else's death. Though somewhat amusing within context, we cannot, for example, consider it ironic when we discover that the Chief of Police, who is supposed to be the first shining representative of legal upstanding, "had accidentally killed August Gunther with a firearm when he was young" (Vonnegut 1982:65). The reader is in fact not permitted to condemn Chief Morrissey, since the narrator urges us to "let sleeping dogs lie" (Vonnegut 1982:167), and so in retrospect one has to wonder to what extent Rudy and Otto are to blame within the context of the world portrayed here.

In terms of symbols found in *Deadeye Dick* and pertaining to man's obsession with weaponry, John Fortune's farm acts as a staging ground, since it is representative "of the kind of 'progress' enjoyed in the United States from the thirties through the seventies" (Morse 1992:85). From a thriving, self-sustaining farm in the thirties, it becomes a proving ground for tanks in the forties, then the area set for a housing project made up of "little shitboxes", as Rudy calls them, and finally the area becomes ground zero for the neutron bomb. What the bomb in turn represents in this case is the end result of the arms race. This is not just in terms of physical destruction – the ominous Apocalyptic flash that Vonnegut and others have warned mankind about for decades – but also in terms of the jaded, cynical response that the population has to this cataclysmic event. Far from being appalled by the prospect that in the blink of an eye "about one hundred thousand people died" (Vonnegut 1982:34), the rest of the population instantaneously accepts the notion that it was all just an accident and, the height of callousness, "one newscast [...] called it 'a friendly bomb'" (Vonnegut 1982:33). Thus the end result of man's obsession with weapons, Vonnegut warns his readers, is a world where a massacre is deemed acceptable so long as material goods are left untouched. When the narrator, for whom this ominous time is his present, asks "Does it matter to anyone or anything that those peepholes were closed so suddenly? Since all the property is undamaged, has the world lost anything it loved?" (Vonnegut 1982:34) The implied answer is "No", which is also the reason behind the last statement in the novel, whereby "we are still living in the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages – they haven't ended yet" (Vonnegut 1982:240). In some ways this passive reaction and this ominous declaration reflect back to an earlier statement which Vonnegut makes in 1979 and is presented in *Palm Sunday* that

"Americans have guided our destinies so clumsily, with all the world watching, that we must now protect ourselves against our own government and our own industries" (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:383)

The warnings found in *Deadeye Dick* must have already been taking shape in the author's mind when he made this statement. It suggests that the manner in which the American society has driven itself and has let itself be guided, has led to the point where their own government feels that it has, by some divine or natural law, the right to do whatever it pleases, which includes performing experiments on the very people it pretends to be serving. What's more, those same people, according to Vonnegut, have let this happen and have come to tolerate all types of abuse, even, perhaps, the destruction of a city.

Even if the end result, this mass explosion doesn't occur, there remains the problem that guns kill and that, as Farrell points out, "weaponry in the novel is depicted as having particularly far-reaching and lasting effects" (Farrell 2008:109). Otto Waltz buys a gun collection during his honeymoon, which facilitates the murder of Eloise Metzger, an accident that is understood to have been inevitable. It may not have been Rudy at the trigger or Eloise at the other end, but sooner or later one of those guns was going to kill someone because that is their purpose. Even greater proof of Farrell's point is the fact that Emma Waltz dies of cancer brought about by radiation poisoning of all things. The radiation comes from their mantelpiece, which in turn was built using the cement left over from the Manhattan Project, where scientists developed the Atomic Bomb. Thus, elements from the creation of a weapon of mass destruction make their way from New Mexico all the way to a little town in Ohio and succeed in killing a woman decades after they had come into being.

The problem with America's and the world's obsession with guns becomes therefore twofold in Kurt Vonnegut's opinion. On the one hand, the proliferation of weapons and the endeavor to develop ever more destructive weapons inevitably leads to disaster and senseless death because no degree of security measures can contend with the chaotic factor that influences our lives, in a world where it is just far too easy to make a perfectly horrible mistake. On the other hand, the way in which some people react to the senseless deaths caused by weaponry is to effectively *neuter* themselves, to become desensitized. While this certainly solves the issue of emotional pain, it in fact plays a central role in the facilitating of mutually assured destruction, as evidenced by the ease with which the rest of the world in *Deadeye Dick* tolerates the annihilation of the population of Midland City. In the face of this inevitability of destruction in a world and of a world filled with weapons, any kind of gun control becomes inadequate and even pointless.

The only viable solution is disarmament and for people who “are not inherently moral creatures [...] to behave as if we were” (Farrell 2008:109).

The alternative to the arms race and to man’s obsession with guns, as far as Vonnegut is concerned, is art. This notion is first of all meant literally as the recognition of the importance of creating and appreciating the value of art. Evidence to this importance is given by means of a counter-example, namely Midland City and the consequences of its people considering that all art is so unimportant that a man wanting to become a painter, as Otto wants in his youth, “might as well have been a scholar in Sanskrit, as far as the rest of the town was concerned” (Vonnegut 1982:3). In many ways, the state of living dead that the townspeople are described as being in at Celia’s wedding is a result not only of the apathy brought about by death through weaponry, but also because of the steady degradation of the soul, which is otherwise fed by art. It echoes back to *Cat’s Cradle*, where Julian Castle explains that a lack of reading – and by extension of the consumption of art in general – leads to “putrescence of the heart or atrophy of the nervous system” (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:166).

In addition to this literal perspective on art, Vonnegut also means to point out in *Deadeye Dick* that “we all see our lives as stories” (Vonnegut 1982:208), and “just as there are good and bad dramas, aesthetic forms for one’s life can have varying degrees of success” (Klinkowitz 2004:121). As Klinkowitz further points out, Rudy’s life may not amount to much. Indeed, the speculation is that, were he an actual human being, he might have accomplished a lot more in life had it not been for the shooting and his subsequent period of exile as a neuter. However, Rudy’s life is nonetheless one of success because “he has taken control of [his life] and re-created himself by means of art. [...] His life has been traumatic, but from those traumas, when handled artistically, come self-knowledge and self-responsibility, the two of which can heal deep emotional wounds” (Klinkowitz 2004:122). Rudy becomes the writer of his own story – this much is made obvious through the fact that he tells his tale from the same hotel where Vonnegut states that he is writing his novel – and so with the help of art he is able to give concrete shape to his existence.

3.4.4. Rudy Waltz – last decent man standing

Aside from the two novels that are riddled with death and destruction – *Cat's Cradle* and *Slaughterhouse Five* – no Vonnegut text creates a text that is quite so full of darkness, with so few positive characters. Despite his entertaining nature, Otto Waltz is ultimately a fool who unwittingly aids in the proliferation of death, one way or the other (be it that he gives his son the keys to the gun room or that he saves the life of and befriends Adolf Hitler). His wife Emma is a useless human being who only really comes to life once tumors begin growing in her brain. Chief Morrissey is a murderer at least because he blew the head off of Arthur Gunther, who in turn is a degenerate pervert and even John Fortune, the would-be hero becomes an outcast and dies bitter and alone on the other side of the world. Celia Hildreth, perhaps the most innocent person here, the protagonist's one true hope for love, is turned by modern medicine into a hag that eventually becomes borderline psychotic. The only other decent person in *Deadeye Dick* is the woman that teaches Rudy about how being born is like opening up a peephole and dying means closing it again, the only person who shows any sort of compassion for what the young boy must be going through after the accidental murder. But she in turn is also in prison, and guaranteed to not be treated fairly because she isn't white and the novel makes several references to the fact that this is a racist society.

Under such bleak circumstances, one has to wonder whether becoming a would-be neuter, regardless of the shooting incident, is not the best thing that Rudy Waltz could have done. It is true that the traumatic event leaves him with the belief that he mustn't touch anything because it “was very likely to be connected to a push-pull detonator and an explosive charge” (Vonnegut 1982:112), or, in other words, that any interaction he has with anything in the world would inevitably lead to disaster. In a sense, Otto and Emma Waltz come to the same conclusion, for after they lose everything during Mr. Metzger's lawsuit against them, the two “were zombies. They were in bathrobes and bedroom slippers all day long [and] they stared into the distance a lot” (Vonnegut 1982:108). These are truly neutral people, unwilling to do anything lest they should cause another disaster. Rudy, on the other hand, despite claiming to be every bit the neuter his parents have become, is far different. More important than his fear of doing bad things is his desire to not cause his parents any more pain than they've already had to endure and so he decides to make sure that “as long as they lived, they never had to prepare a meal or wash a dish

or make a bed or do the laundry or dust or vacuum or sweep, or shop for food. I did all that, and maintained a B average in school, as well” (Vonnegut 1982:98). Rudy takes on the Herculean task of taking on the workload that was previously done by a team of servants while still studying hard enough for school to get good performances. Thus he becomes the ideal son – altruistic, hardworking and kind – and later, as a grown man, Rudy maintains the same level of humanism that makes him an upstanding individual. The irony therefore of *Deadeye Dick* is that, while being “a quiet lament for his unlived life” (Morse 1992:81), the novel is also evidence of how tragedy can ennoble a person and in a sense, Rudy Waltz is not only a decent individual, he is perhaps Vonnegut’s only real hero.

3.4.5. *Deadeye Dick* – a postmodern (Tralfamadorian?) novel

Like *Mother Night*, the novel *Deadeye Dick* is one of Kurt Vonnegut’s few literary works that is essentially realistic, in the sense that it contains almost no elements of science-fiction. Even the neutron bomb is a weapon that exists in real life, with the only difference in the novel being that Vonnegut has portrayed it as “a sort of magic wand, which kills people instantly, but which leaves their property unharmed” (Vonnegut 1982:xiii), whereas the author knows full well that the detonation of such a weapon would cause substantial damage. The notion that the US Government would intentionally detonate such a weapon in a city and that the rest of the world would be fine with it is perhaps a bit far-fetched, but not impossible, and so the plausible nature of this event and of all the events in the novel remains. As Allen puts it, “while Vonnegut warns the reader that *Deadeye Dick* ‘is fiction, not history’, he could easily have said that it is both” (Allen 2009[1991]:138). And yet, there is a distinct discrepancy between the clear nature of the themes in this novel and the structure of the text, which is anything but straight-forward.

First off, while *Deadeye Dick* may present the history of the Waltz family from the late nineteenth century to the present, the timeline is not at all linear, but instead the text jumps from present to past in a way that is reminiscent of Billy Pilgrim’s travels. The reader gets a first clue of this on the first page of Chapter One (it was typically Vonnegut’s style to arm his readers right from the start), when the narrator provides a quick overview of when he was born in 1932, then immediately jumps to the present, in the year 1982, and then goes back to 1892, when his father

is born. What follows is an illustration of Otto and Emma's formative years, taking the reader through each one's childhood, how they met and were married and how their lives had been up until and including the years when Rudy is a very young boy. Although these first five chapters are easy to go through for the reader, they are only deceptively simple. At fixed points in the text, the narrator jumps ahead in time, like for example when Otto's foot getting crushed by an oak timber reminds Rudy of the time his father said, as an old man, that he regretted having never served in the military or when the narrator jumps back for a moment to his present time, trying to remember the Nazi flag his father had put up. These little skips are minor compared to the beginning of Chapter Six, which suddenly jumps to the near present in order to illustrate how Midland City has been depopulated by the neutron bomb. Rudy proceeds to give information about the Creole people he comes to know in Haiti, and then simply rolls back in time to the Great Depression and why his family hadn't suffered during that harsh period. From here on the pattern is fairly consistent; as Rudy goes through the history he is presenting, at those moments when something reminds him of an event that is not connected to the point in time where his story has reached, he simply performs one of these skips in time, before resuming where he had left off. This is very reminiscent to Joyce-like stream of consciousness and, if it weren't for some other elements of the text, we might argue that *Deadeye Dick* could be considered a modern novel.

One of the ways in which *Slaughterhouse Five* is made to mirror a Tralfamadorian novel is through giving away pivotal moments of the story beforehand, so that we might have the impression that our act of reading is one of rereading and therefore it might all appear in front of our eyes simultaneously. The aliens may not be present in *Deadeye Dick*, but to a degree, the same thing happens here. At the end of Chapter Three, when the history of the Waltz family has only gotten to the point where young Otto has just met the Maritimo brothers, we already find out that he will some time later become "disreputable and poor" (Vonnegut 1982:17). In the next chapter the tale is interrupted again and the reader discovers not only that Rudy is a pharmacist and that his father will go to prison, even though at this point, from a linear chronological point of view, the narrator has not gone past the point when Otto's parents die and the young artist becomes a major share holder in the family business. We find out about the trick Otto plays on Celia Hildreth a full chapter before the actual event and long before this, back in 1916, in Chapter Four, the reader is informed that Rudy "would become a notorious murdered known as

‘Deadeye Dick’” (Vonnegut 1982:21). Of course nothing makes this novel quite like a Tralfamadorian one than the beginning of Chapter Six. In *Slaughterhouse Five* Vonnegut gives away what would have been the natural climax of the novel from the first chapter. In *Deadeye Dick* he waits a while longer, but both the action and the effect is the same in either case. By beginning Chapter Six with the moment after the neutron bomb has been detonated and by calling it “a friendly bomb” (Vonnegut 1982:33), the author effectively deflates this event of all its dramatic value to the point where we might as well be looking at it through Billy Pilgrim’s eyes. Coupled with the premature news of Otto’s imprisonment and Rudy’s murder act, the result is one similar to that found in the 1969 novel, which makes *Deadeye Dick*, like its predecessor Tralfamadorian to a significant degree.

The final element that adds to this novel’s postmodern nature is its metafictional nature. The most obvious evidence to this fact is made up of the four miniature plays that are found throughout the text. They appear when Rudy is caged like an animal in the basement of the Police station, when Genevieve unwittingly humiliates him (thus further diminishing Rudy’s hope of escaping the world where he is to be forever ‘Deadeye Dick’), during his confrontation with the hag Celia Hoover and the scene at Celia’s funeral. Thus, by engaging in what he playfully calls a “trick for dealing with all my worst memories” (Vonnegut 1982:83), what Rudy is actually doing is adopting “this fiction that he is merely an actor speaking lines in a sequence of events written and directed by someone else” (Morse 1992:83). But by identifying himself as an actor in a play, Rudy in fact succeeds in drawing attention back upon himself as a character, whose words *are* in fact written and directed by someone else, by Kurt Vonnegut.

Yet a much earlier clue that the novel is metafictional in nature is actually provided in the Preface to the novel. The warning that the reader should not take the information in *Deadeye Dick* as being historical in nature is rendered through the statement “this is fiction” (Vonnegut 1982:xiii) and, despite the fact that this is Vonnegut talking, it is also the case of a fictional text identifying itself as fictional. As a result, the suspension of disbelief – which normally is so important in the reader’s reception of a work of fiction – is in turn suspended, as the author strives to make it clear to us that at no point in time are we to forget that we are dealing here with events that are made up.

Vonnegut proceeds to remind us of this fact not long after the story per se begins. In Chapter Four the reader first encounters the phrase “somewhere in there” (Vonnegut 1982:18), which is repeated several times until such time as Rudy Waltz actually comes into the picture and is old enough to remember facts. While this phrase is used in relation to time, its actual purpose is to make the reader reflect upon the fact that the narrator is speaking about things that take place before his time and that he is working from second-hand sources, thus the implication is that, where gaps appear in his knowledge, Rudy has chosen to fill them with what he *thinks* happened, in other words with fiction.

In addition to these clues there is the matter of the recipes that appear scattered throughout the text. They appear eleven times, including the moment when the narrator informs the reader about the relations that the Waltz family has with the Nazis, the moment Otto decides to play his trick on Celia Hildreth (thus setting in motion the events of her life and the emotional impact they have on the other characters), the one after the murder incident, and during Rudy and Felix’s visit to their now depopulated home. What these moments all have in common is that they represent instances of heightened emotion, turning points that influence the rest of the novel and thus they act like steps on a stair that might draw the reader deeper into the fictional world. By introducing these recipes, disguised in fact as mere “musical interludes for the salivary glands” (Vonnegut 1982:ix), the text denies any such decent and once again reminds the reader of its own nature.

4. Humor in Kurt Vonnegut's novels

4.1. Cat's Cradle

4.1.1. Linguistic interpretation of humor

Narrative Levels in *Cat's Cradle*

Given the nature of the text, it is not surprising that the novel's structure is rather complex. In *Cat's Cradle* this complexity is rendered through a system of narrative frames. Attardo (2001) has already touched upon narrative frames (or, *narrative levels* (NL) as he calls them). Within the system postulated by Attardo *Levels* are attributed to each narrative in order to illustrate their relationship to one another. In this sense, a macro-narrative at level₀ is usually the main storyline of the text, the level at which the story typically begins and ends. If within this narrative a character begins to tell a story, the events of that story are placed at level₋₁.

Working within the same system, in *Cat's Cradle* NL₀ presents the present time – that is to say, the period where the world has ended and when John (or Jonah) is writing his diary-like account of his journey – as well as the events that took place beginning roughly one year before and leading up to the present. Thus, the bulk of the text presents to the reader the narrator's journey to Ilium, then to the island of San Lorenzo, as well as his transition from a small-time freelance writer to the president of a nation and finally one of the last survivors of the human race. NL₀ also includes two additional levels. The first is made up of the history of the Hoenikkers, while the second presents the history of San Lorenzo, including the lives of its more prominent figures (Bokonon, McCabe, Julien Castle etc). Because the two narrative levels have no connection to each other and because their role in this novel is to complement NL₀, it makes sense to consider them as being on an equal level, which I will call NL_{-1a} and NL_{-1b}. Therefore, in the most abstract way, *Cat's Cradle* can be rendered into a simple formula: NL₀ [[NL_{-1a}] + [NL_{-1b}]]

Two observations need to be made here. The first is that the choice of color in the representation above is merely to aid in distinguishing the framework of each narrative level. The second observation is that the separation between narrative levels is nowhere near as clean

as the formula above could imply. This is most evident in relation to the places where the two secondary narrative levels (NL_{-1a} and NL_{-1b}) come into play. The formula might make one believe that the first of these two appears, evolves and is concluded at the beginning or at least during the first half of NL₀, after which the second emerges. In reality, instances of both these appear periodically and intermittently, as cases appear where events pertaining to NL₀ require additional information.

Formal representation of humor in *Cat's Cradle*

If we look at Attachment 1, pointing out only the formal representations of humorous fragments, the novel looks something like this:

[↪ - J - [↪ - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - J →] - [↪ - P →] →] - [↪ - P →] - J - [↪ - P →] - J - J - J - J - J - [↪ - J - J →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - [↪ - J →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - J - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - J - J →] - J - [↪ - J →] - J - [↪ - J →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - J - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - [↪ - J →] - J - J - J - [↪ - J →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - J →] - J - [↪ - P →] - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J →] - J →]

Right off the bat, two observations can be made. The first is that there is a correlation between the value of each narrative level and the number of humorous fragments of text which they contain. If one were to not read the novel at all, but simply look at the formal model, he would still be able to realize what the narrative structure of the text is. He would be able to see that, there is a main storyline (in blue), which is interrupted at certain moments by two secondary narrations (in green and red). The importance of one narrative level over another is here determined by nothing more than the number of jab lines and punch lines provided. In this sense, the main storyline is obviously the most important, followed by the secondary narrations.

The second clear observation is that, both in the case of NL_{-1a} and NL_{-1b} there is a reasonably larger concentration of humorous fragments when each narrative level is introduced (which is to say, when the reader is first told about the Hoenikkers, respectively about San Lorenzo) and then only sporadically throughout the novel. This would suggest a high level of intentionality on behalf of the writer when positioning the punch lines and jab lines within each of the secondary narratives. Why exactly Kurt Vonnegut chose to position the bulk of the

humorous fragments belonging to NL_{-1a}, respectively NL_{-1b}, in the beginning (or, for that matter, why the author chose to use humor at all) is open to interpretation. It is a generally accepted fact that Vonnegut used humor as a means of underplaying the gravity of the notions and events that his novels portray (see Allen (1988); Freese (2008); Klinkowitz (1973); etc). For example, in *Cat's Cradle*, Felix Hoenikker represents the embodiment of evil made manifest through ignorance. He is portrayed as being "harmless and gentle" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:48), since he never worked on anything with the intent of hurting another human being. At the same time, neither did he pay any attention to how his inventions might be used by others and so, in his quest to satisfy his own intellectual curiosity, he invents *ice-nine*, which ends up destroying the world. In order to underplay the gravity of Felix's actions and the actions of his children, who, in their selfish endeavors to find personal happiness, made the end of the world possible, a heavy dose of humor is required. It is therefore conceivable that Vonnegut's tactic of ensuring this dose was that of bombarding the reader from the beginning, after which only sporadic reminders are required in order to maintain the mood of the story at a reasonably light level. The history of San Lorenzo may not possess the kind of global impact that of the actions of the Hoenikkers have, but it makes up for this lack through the misery of the island's inhabitants and the savagery of their leaders. The inhabitants are portrayed as "oatmeal colored, [...] thin and [...] every person had teeth missing" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:97). Past rulers include Emperor Tum-bumwa, "a demented man, an escaped slave" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:152), and various dictators, such as McCabe and 'Papa' Monzano. All in all, San Lorenzo is a miserable third-world country. It is therefore understandable to imagine that undermining the depravity of this society would require the same tactic used to restrict the gravity of the actions carried out by the Hoenikkers.

Another observation is that, regardless of the *narrative level*, the punch lines and jab lines in the text appear for the most part evenly spaced apart, with an average of one to three humorous bits of text per chapter. There are, of course, exceptions in a few places. Chapter 99 'Dyot Meet Mat', for example, can be seen as a humorous text in its entirety, while Chapter 118 'The Iron Maiden and the Oubliette' has no humorous fragments at all. These discrepancies seem, however, to have more to do with the author's choices rather than with any underlying structure. And since we cannot ask Kurt Vonnegut in person about the matter (nor is it certain that he would have a useful answer were he still with us), the safest decision would be to ignore these discrepancies entirely.

Knowledge Resources in humorous fragments of text in *Cat's Cradle*

As a quick reminder, the RTVH is a general linguistic one that is based on distinct *Knowledge Resources* (KRs) that “must be tapped into when generating a joke, in addition to the script opposition from the SSTH” (Attardo 1994:223). These resources are (i) *Language*, (ii) *Narrative Strategy*, (iii) *Target*, (iv) *Situation*, (v) *Logical Mechanism* and (vi) *Script Opposition*. The first includes all the verbal information that goes into the construction of the text, including its lexical structure and semantic values. This is the resource that the reader uses in order to make sense of the text itself before any humorous interpretation is carried out. The second resource accounts for the fact that a text is by definition “cast in some form of narrative organization, either as a simple narrative, as a dialogue, as a (pseudo-)riddle, etc” (Attardo 1994:224). Resource (iii), as the name suggests, pinpoints the “butt of the joke”, which is especially important when dealing with aggressive forms of humor. In this case the absence of this KR would mean that the reader/hearer would understand that the text is meant to be humorous but fail to comprehend what it refers to. Of course, not all humorous texts have a specific target in mind. In this case, the KR still exists, but is rendered empty. The fourth KR, *Situation*, illustrates that any humorous text is about something in a broad, rather than specific sense. In joke (7), for example, it is about a rogue who is on his way to be executed. The *Logical Mechanism* KR “is the parameter that accounts for the way in which the two senses (scripts, isotopies,...) in a joke come together” (Attardo 1994:225). This is not, of course, limited to jokes, but comes into play when dealing with any instance where two senses are paired and lets the reader/hearer comprehend whether this union is in the form of a juxtaposition or false analogy, and so on. The last KR contains the same notions of script opposition illustrated by Raskin's SSTH. This is also the most important resource when dealing with humor. The other five KR's may vary in form or value, some of them may play no role in the perception of humor at all (such as the *Target* resource in non-aggressive humor), but “any humorous text will present a SO” (Attardo 1994: 226). Nevertheless, the existence of all six KRs as components that make up the GTVH is what makes this theory succeed where the SSTH fails (or at least runs into difficulties), namely in dealing with texts other than jokes.

Attachment 2 shows a breakdown of the six KR's for each humorous fragment of text found in *Cat's Cradle*. While it is true that the SO resource is the most important to the existence

of humor in any given fragment, the verity, when looking at the text of the novel as a whole, is so large that no significant overarching observations can be made. The SI and LA KR's also render insignificant data, since the first is merely dependent on where the narrative is at the point when the humorous fragment of text appears, while the latter would simply state that the fragments use the same language repertoire found in the rest of the novel. Fortunately, more can be said in regards to the LM, NS and TA Knowledge Resources. In the first case, we may notice a wide variety of Logical Mechanisms (LM) used by the author in *Cat's Cradle*. The frequency of occurrences for each differs significantly though, and, after a simple count, it would appear that the two most common LMs in the novel are Reasoning from False Premises and Missing Link (each having been used for fourteen humorous texts), followed closely by Ignoring the Obvious (with ten cases used). The question as to why these are favored should therefore be examined.

The most obvious reason would be that through these mechanisms the author is best able to transmit his ideas. This would make sense, since we would expect Vonnegut to choose the systems that he is most comfortable with in order to make sure that his thoughts get through to his readers. Unfortunately, the data cannot confirm this hypothesis. If we look, for example, at the Missing Link group of humorous texts, some of them refer indeed to the amoral characteristic of unchecked science (as portrayed by the fact that Felix is asked to create something as deadly as *ice-nine*) or that utopias are in fact dreams that go terribly wrong (San Lorenzo is portrayed as a paradise but is in fact a horrible place). However, this LM group also contains the matter of Zinka's age or the fact that Mrs. Crosby thinks Newt is a nice midget, both of which are separate and apart from the novel's main themes. The LMs Reasoning from False Premises and Ignoring the Obvious also contain elements that are both basic to Vonnegut's warnings and elements that are secondary. As a result, there doesn't seem to be anything to support the hypotheses that Vonnegut chose these LMs specifically to get his message out to his readers. The possibility that texts with the same LM also have similar Script Oppositions (SO) also falls flat. For Reasoning from False Premises, for example, we have things like the SO thanking wife/tipping waitress for when Felix tipped his wife for breakfast, or the SO historical achievement/tyrannical endeavor for the manner in which the castle on San Lorenzo was built. Neither can it be said that all the humorous fragments of text belonging to a single LM group are *jab lines* or that they are all *punch lines*. The only plausible explanation left then is that Kurt Vonnegut favored these three

LMS unconsciously, though an analysis of the author's other novels would be needed in order to definitively consider this hypothesis.

A count of the Narrative Strategy KR's of the text show that the greatest number by far are examples of *expository text*, which is to say that the humor of the fragment of text is rendered by means of a standard narrative, as for example when the narrator reveals Zinka's actual age (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:14) or when Mr. Crosby explains that the people of San Lorenzo are poor enough to be decent (Vonnegut 2001[1963]:64). The fact that this type of NS is predominant is in all likelihood a result of the fact that the larger text of the novel is in prose format. The same reason might stand behind the fact that the next most predominant type of NS – 13 cases (far less than expository text, but still significant) – is that of *conversation*. The difference between the two is that the humor in these cases is dependent upon an exchange between at least two characters. For example, when John and Mona declare their love for one another (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:150), the apathy that assures the SO is dependent upon the combination of what they both say, since, if one would eliminate the words of one of the characters or if the entire conversation would be rendered through narrative the humor would fail.

The third significant NS is of the *question/answer* type, meaning that the humor of the fragment is assured by the posing of a question by one character followed by a quick and unexpected answer by another. For example, when the narrator asks the undertaker at the Ilium cemetery what his relation to Dr. Breed is, the man answers that he is his brother (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:45). The most interesting fact about the texts that contain this NS is that they most resemble the structure of a joke. More than anything else, their presence in the novel is a reflection of Kurt Vonnegut's affinity towards jokes and perhaps also stand-up comedy. Interestingly enough, the *trigger* of the humorous fragments of text that contain a *question/answer* type NS is not always a *punch line*, which would indicate that just because the Narrative Strategy makes the humorous fragment of text look like a standard joke text does not that it actually functions like one.

As far as the *Target* of the humor is concerned, a look at Attachment 1 shows that, despite a level of diversity – proof that Vonnegut is willing in his fiction to poke fun at just about anything – certain elements do appear more often than others. Most significantly, there are a total of eight accounts of humorous fragments of text in which Felix Hoenikker is undoubtedly the target, six examples where science in general is being mocked and three cases where research in

general is the target. But, since the first is the character representative of the second, and research is simply an element of science, it is reasonable to combine them and thus state that a total of seventeen humorous fragments of text target science in general. This makes up close to a quarter of the total number of fragments and, if nothing more, it represents added proof that the humor in the novel has as a primary purpose the act of undermining the value of scientists and scientific research. Apart from this focal point, a decent number of humorous fragments of text aim at making fun of certain aspects pertaining to religion, however the bulk of the fragments is undoubtedly character oriented. Even if one were to not include Felix due to his already established link to science, a rough estimate still produces thirty five examples, nearly half of the instances of humor, which have as a target one specific character or another, including the narrator which is targeted nine times (I should note however, that this is not meant as self-deprecation, but rather as a means of bringing the narrator closer to his surroundings). This shows that, while the main ideas targeted in *Cat's Cradle* are related to science, overall the humor in this text remains character-based, rather than situational or ideological.

4.1.2. Literary interpretation of humor

Apart from the discrepancy between the easy style that Vonnegut uses and his complex issues, what often mesmerizes the reader is the process of delivering grave messages by means of humorous retort. As I have mentioned previously, the purpose on the part of the author is to lighten the tone of the text so that his readers should receive his message without confusing his work for tragedy and, on the basis of this confusion, reject his novels or simply become too saddened to act. What remains to be seen is just how this is accomplished as far as the reader is concerned.

While it is certainly impossible to judge every reader's impression of *Cat's Cradle*, what can be analyzed is how the text itself leads the reader to the most likely of outcomes. In order to see this, we turn again to Attachment 1. A general look at all the examples of humorous texts in the novel will show that, essentially, we can separate the fragments into two major categories. The first relates to what the reader would most likely interpret as examples of what the text focuses on in terms of main themes, such as the amoral/immoral nature of pure science, the misery of life on San Lorenzo or simply the monstrous nature of most of the characters in the

novel. For the sake of simplicity I have named this group *Thematic Humor* (TH). The second group encompasses examples of humor about other things, such as Zinka’s real age or Philip’s remark about envy. As these examples are not strictly related to the major dark elements of the novel, I will call these examples of *Non-Thematic Humor* (NTH).

If we go through Attachment 1, placing each instance of humor in one category or another, we might end up with a two-column table that would not render much in the way of noticeable traits. However, if we combine them in a formal rendering, as seen below, which shows how each appears in the novel, things get more interesting.

NTH:P3 – **TH:P9** – **TH:P10** – NTH:P11 – **TH:P13** – NTH:P14 – NTH:P15 – NTH:P16 – NTH:P18 – NTH:P20 – **TH:P21** – NTH:P25 – **TH:P27** – **TH:P29** – **TH:P30** – **TH:P34** – **TH:P37** – NTH:P40 – **TH:P41** – **TH:P42** – NTH:P43 – **TH:P45** – NTH:P46 – NTH:P52 – NTH:P56 – **TH:P58** – NTH:P59 – **TH:P64** – **TH:P68** – NTH:P70 – NTH:P72 – NTH:P74 – NTH:P76 – **TH:P79** – **TH:P79b** – NTH:P87 – **TH:P89** – NTH:P89b – **TH:P93** – **TH:P97** – **TH:P99** – **TH:P102** – **TH:P106** – NTH:P107 – NTH:P108 – NTH:P109 – NTH:P110 – **TH:P116** – **TH:P120** – NTH:P121 – NTH:P124 – **TH:P127** – **TH:P132** – **TH:P133** – NTH:P134 – NTH:P136 – **TH:P143** – **TH:P144** – NTH:P146 – **TH:P150** – **TH:P152** – **TH:P156** – NTH:P158 – **TH:P162** – **TH:P162b** – NTH:P166 – NTH:P168 – **TH:P175** – **TH:P180** – NTH:P187 – **TH:P188** – **TH:P192** – **TH:P195** – **TH:P204** – **TH:P206**

To clarify, the letter ‘P’ stands for *Page*, meaning the page on the edition of *Cat’s Cradle* used for this paper where one humorous fragment of text or another may be found. The letter ‘b’ represents the second humorous fragment found on the same page as a previous one, so that the order in which the two appear can be accurately represented. For the sake of further convenience, I’ve highlighted in ‘bold’ the instances of TH.

A quick count will show that there are 44 examples of TH and 32 examples of NTH. While the difference is noteworthy, in that it means the author favored one over the other to a degree, it is still not nearly large enough to consider the existence of NTH as marginal. Also, despite the existence of clusters (three or more of the same type of humor placed one after another) examples of both types are fairly evenly spread out across the text. In conclusion, looking at the numbers and positions of the fragments of humorous text does not help in showing that the humor in question is meant to diminish the reader’s sense of horror when confronted with the novel’s warnings.

Instead of raw data, let us look at the actual ideas and themes expressed in the fragments in question. Rather than view every case in point, for the sake of this analysis, it is sufficient to

present only the clusters of both groups. So, then, the first cluster of *Non-Thematic Humor* (NTH:P14 – (NTH:P15 – (NTH:P16 – (NTH:P18 – (NTH:P20) is made up of John finding out Zinka’s real name, Dr. Breen expressing the impossibility of taking charge of a brilliant scientist like Dr. Hoenikker, John’s getting drunk with a prostitute in Illium, the notion that the basic secret of life might be protein and John’s next-day hangover. The second cluster ((NTH:P46 – (NTH:P52 – (NTH:P56) is comprised of Marvin Breed’s comment that life is simple in the ground, that the stone angel in the store has John’s surname on it and that Mr. Krebbs succeeded in steering the narrator away from nihilism. The third cluster ((NTH:P70 – (NTH:P72 – (NTH:P74 – (NTH:P76) presents Mrs. Minton’s remark that to criticize Americans in any way is considered treason, Bokonon’s idea that Caesar should not be given his dues because he is clueless, that Bokonon became a saint in the same way as St. Augustine did and the way in which Bokonon rose from the sea. The final cluster of *Non-Thematic Humor* ((NTH:P107 – (NTH:P108 – (NTH:P109 – (NTH:P110) is made up of Philip’s remark to John about someone envying him, his idea that people should forget everything once they are dead, the idea that writers are like drug salesmen and the fact that Crosby demands that the owner of the hotel be kicked out.

The first cluster of *Thematic Humor* (TH:P27 – TH:P29 – TH:P30 – HrE:P34 – TH:P37) presents Dr. Breed’s remark about the girl pool (which would suggest that the girls in a way prostitute themselves in the name of science), his statement that more scientific truth makes humanity ever richer, the US Marine General’s request towards Dr. Hoenikker that he do something about mud (man), the exclamation that science would help the marine’s march on, and finally John’s remark that the Hoenikker children already had “seeds grown from their father’s seed” (which links the family to the destructive weapons invented). The next cluster (TH:P93 – TH:P97 – TH:P99 – TH:P102 – TH:P106) is made up of Crosby’s remark about pissants (which only reveals that he is one, and which highlights his monstrosity), the depressing sight of the destitute San Lorenzians, the outrageous lie brought about by the overly optimistic words that make up the national anthem, the lie that is meant to have people believe that the world cares about the Hundred Martyrs to Democracy, and the fact that the ship carrying the martyrs was sunk right outside the harbor (which further diminishes their value). The third cluster of *Thematic Humor* (TH:P127 – TH:P132 – TH:P133) contains Julien Castle’s remark that in a poor country like San Lorenzo everything is recovered, even a ruined painting and the butt of a

cigar, his retort towards Angela that these are cheerful times we live in and the idea that the Nazi war criminal Dr. Schlichter von Koenigswald might repent for his deeds if he could live until the year 3010. The fourth cluster (TH:P150 – TH:P152 – TH:P156) is made up of the emptiness that characterizes John and Mona's declaration of love for one another, the horror surrounding how 'Papa' Monzano's castle was built and Monzano's statement that science is magic that works. The last cluster (TH:P188 – TH:P192 – TH:P195 – TH:P204 – TH:P206) presents John's overly obvious remark to Mona "here we are" when in the shelter, his scientific fact that people inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide, the testament to the mass suicide (which proves that its writer did not follow his own advice), Newt's remark about neat ways of dying, and Bokonon's thoughts on human stupidity.

With the themes presented in both *Non-Thematic* and *Thematic Humor* clusters, one very useful observation can be made. The ideas that appear in the first set of clusters have a high level of verity to them, with no obvious thematic link between them. It would be difficult to find any connection between Zinka's real age, John's hangover and the comparison between writers and drug salesmen in terms of theme. In fact, the level of diversity here is so high, to the point where, were it not known that Kurt Vonnegut meant to place them where they are, one might consider their existence as mere random happenstance. In contrast, all the clusters of *Thematic Humor* follow three themes – the destructive force of morally unchecked scientific progress, the horrible reality of San Lorenzo, and the monstrous nature of one character or another – which are also the ideas that Kurt Vonnegut wished to convey to his readers.

Of course the most important of these three ideas, the actual theme of *Cat's Cradle*, is the first, the consequence of ignoring the moral implications of scientific progress. It is little wonder in this case that Dr. Felix Hoenikker, who represents science in the novel, is also given the most memorable puns – those self-sustained humorous fragments of text that are meant to linger in the mind of the reader long after the story is over – and is by far the most outlandish, clownish character that appears in the text. After all, I believe it is reasonable to presume that, should the reader be asked to reproduce from memory something other than the end Apocalypse, should he be asked to remember something humorous, he would most likely recall the man who left his car in the middle of the street because he got an idea, the man who tipped his wife for serving him breakfast, Felix Hoenikker. In modern times, when science has become such an integral part of

our lives, and especially at the time when Vonnegut wrote *Cat's Cradle* when the faith that humanity placed upon science (which was to unlock the secrets of the universe, to tare the mask off of nature and stare at the face of God) took on religious proportions, one might have expected a scientific genius to be a man of conscience and vision, who struggles to the end to uncover as much truth as he can. Instead the reader is presented a beautiful-mind-type character that is so detached from the purpose of his profession that he'll pursue anything that he finds interesting like a curious puppy and can only be guided towards any meaningful work if his momentary distractions are taken away from him, as in the case of the turtles. What is perhaps equally fascinating is the fact that the character of Felix Hoenikker is modeled off of a real scientist that the writer briefly met, but heard a lot about when he worked for General Electric. As Vonnegut explains in *Palm Sunday*,

“Dr. Felix Hoenikker, the absent-minded scientist, was a caricature of Dr. Irving Langmuir, the star of the G.E. Research Laboratory. [...] He was wonderfully absent-minded. He wondered out loud one time whether, when turtles pulled in their heads, their spines buckled or contracted. I put that in the book. One time he left a tip under his plate after his wife served him breakfast at home. I put that in” (Vonnegut 1994[1981]:414)

It also turns out that this Dr. Langmuir is the one that postulated the possibility of an invention like *ice-nine*, which he pitched to the writer H.G. Wells one time when the former played host to the latter. Wells never used the idea however, which was fortunate for Vonnegut, who could appropriate the idea for himself. Of course, in *Deadeye Dick*, not only does Dr. Felix Hoenikker invent the apocalyptic substance, but decides to play with it in his kitchen sink of all places, shortly before his death. Then again, one should not forget that Felix Hoenikker is simply a symbolic representation of the foolishness of all those real-life, serious scientists who choose to delve into such unstable and uncertain territory throughout their research, that they might as well be playing with deadly substances in their own homes because, sooner or later, it won't make any difference.

As far as the text of the novel per se is concerned, an additional interesting observation to be made is the fact that John, the narrator and protagonist of *Cat's Cradle* appears very rarely as the target for humor, the vast majority of the humorous fragments of text being focused on other, more colorful characters, such as Dr. Hoenikker and his children. This creates a sense of detachment on the part of the narrator from the story he is presenting. It is a constant and

necessary reminder that someone *is* telling a story, that there is this second timeline, this second narrative level that includes the outcome of the events that John spreads out before his reader. Thus this focus of the humor more on other characters and less on the narrator is indicative of a lingering trace of more traditional forms of moral fiction. This trace will not last long, however. Already with his next novel, in the aftermath of the impact that his essay writing has over his fiction writing, Vonnegut will begin to employ a process of interweaving autobiographical elements which bring author, narrator and reader far closer together. With *Cat's Cradle* it will be the last time that a narrator who is also a protagonist (and not the author interceding in his own fiction) will have the luxury of assuming the high moral ground. From now on, it will be Vonnegut himself that makes fun his characters and everyone, even when the narrator is the same as the protagonist, is a target.

4.2. Slaughterhouse Five

4.2.1. Linguistic interpretation of humor

Narrative levels in *Slaughterhouse Five*

The book itself is for the most part split up into two distinct narratives – one depicting some of the events from the life of the author of the novel, the other representing the novel itself. In the first narrative the protagonist is an unnamed narrator who appears to be Kurt Vonnegut himself (a claim that is strengthened by the insertion of numerous autobiographical elements, such as the writer's imprisonment during the war, or his return to Dresden using Guggenheim money). In the second narrative we have the story of *Slaughterhouse Five* per se, with the protagonist being Billy Pilgrim and the author appearing only sporadically. Just as *Cat's Cradle* could be depicted through a simple formula describing the relationship between its four *narrative levels*, so too can *Slaughterhouse Five* be represented as follows: [NL₀][NL₁]. Ironically this depiction is much simpler than that of the earlier novel, despite the fact that, in truth, this novel is far more complex. If nothing else, this speaks to the dangers of relying on simple formulas.

Formal representation of humor in *Slaughterhouse Five*

In what follows, I will present the events of one story (pausing, once again, on the humorous fragments of text), and then pass onto the next. Fortunately this sequence is made easy by Vonnegut’s own decision to keep the two separate (with the exception of a few points where elements of the first narrative slip into the second and vice versa).

When we look at the novel taking into consideration only the formal depictions of humor, we are left with:

↳ ...- J - J - J - J - J - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - J - J - J - J - [↳ - P →] - J - J - [↳ - P →] - J - J - [↳ - P →] - J - [↳ - J - [↳ - P →] - J - J - [↳ - P →] - J - J - J - [↳ - P →] - J - J - J - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - J - [↳ - P →] - J - J - J - J - J - J - [↳ - P →] - J - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - [↳ - P →] - J - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - J - J - J - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - J - J - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - J - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →] - [↳ - P →]

However, given the complexity of *Slaughterhouse Five*, the above formal representation is in reality an incomplete model of the humor found within the novel. This is because there is an important component missing, which has less to do with any one specific fragment of text – because it is created by groups of fragments – and more to do with the narrative approach towards *death*. The discrepancy, or script opposition, that creates the humor is between what humans perceive as a natural reaction towards death – fear, grief – and the reaction that the text silently brings forth – acceptance, indifference. The principal group of textual fragments is made up of the same three words – *so it goes* – but, once again, the script opposition is not found within the three words themselves, but rather in their excessive use. Here are just some of the places in the novel where they appear:

“His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire-storm. So it goes” (1969:2).

“He has taken these from dead people in the cellars of Dresden. So it goes” (1969:7).

“Lot’s wife [...] turned to a pillar of salt. So it goes” (1969:22)

“The plane crashed on top of Sugarbush Mountain, in Vermont. Everybody was killed but Billy. So it goes” (1969:25).

“Billy’s Christ died horribly. He was pitiful. So it goes” (1969:38)

“The champagne was dead. So it goes” (1969:73).

The tagline *so it goes* appears in the novel a total of 106 times. It is, however, not the only textual element that brings about this important script opposition regarding death. Another has to do with the tactic of making the novel seem like one written by a Tralfamadorian, where every past, present and future event is taking place at the same time, or is at least repeating itself over and over. For our case in point, this illusion is rendered by having the narrator casually inform the reader that an important character is going to die and then periodically reminding him of this, so that by the time it does actually happen, the event is both sad and irrelevant at the same time. A good example of this is the death of Edgar Derby. Early on, we are told that “Poor old Edgar Derby [...] is shot by a firing squad” (Vonnegut 1969:5). Then we are reminded that “Derby’s son would survive the war. Derby wouldn’t” (Vonnegut 1969:83). Again, we are told that “poor Edgar Derby was shot in Dresden” (1969:92), and finally we are casually informed at the end of the novel, when the event actually does happen, that “somewhere in there the poor old high-school teacher, Edgar Derby, was caught with a teapot he had taken from the catacombs. He was arrested for plundering. He was tried and shot” (Vonnegut 1969:214).

The repetitive use of the term *death* and those that relate to it also contributes to the establishment of the script opposition. The term itself appears in the text 32 times, while its derivations and related terms – *die*, *dead*, *kill* – appear a total of 141 times. This overuse works to desensitize the reader, so as to make the second script – [INDIFFERENCE] – come to light. There is some debate in the field of literary criticism as to whether the text means to make the transition from *grief* to *indifference*, or whether Vonnegut wanted to point out the importance of feeling sympathy and sorrow towards death, despite its inevitability, in which case the transition would actually be from *indifference* towards *grief*. For the purpose of this linguistic analysis, however, which semantic script comes first is irrelevant. Because the *trigger* (the part of the text that finally brings forward the second semantic script – see Raskin (1985)) here does not disrupt the flow of the text (on the contrary, the humor is arguably the most integrated one found in the novel), it is a *jab line*. In addition, this element of humor is not exclusively connected to either the narrative level belonging to the author, nor the narrative level belonging to the tale of Billy Pilgrim, but is instead spread out across both. Lastly, because, as has been stated, the humor is not found in one single fragment of text but within the combination of all the fragments, a derivation of Attardo’s symbolic representation of a *jab line* is needed. I will therefore use the

symbol J_f to mean *fragment of the jab line*. If we include the instances of J_f into the formal representation, the result is as follows:

$\mapsto \dots - J_f - J - J_f - J - J - J_f - J - J - J_f - [\mapsto - P \mapsto] - [\mapsto - P \mapsto] - J_f - [\mapsto - P \mapsto] - J - J - J_f - J_f - J_f - J$
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 $- J_f -$
 $J_f - J_f - J_f - J_f - [\mapsto - P \mapsto] - J_f - J_f - J_f - J_f \mapsto$

Slaughterhouse Five is universally regarded as Vonnegut’s most complex novel. Now, with the added jab line fragments, the above formal representation clearly reflects this fact.

Regarding the above formal representation itself, perhaps the most interesting observation here has to do with the positioning of the jab line fragments themselves. More to the point, it has to do with the fact that they start, at the beginning of the novel, as sparse elements which merely fill in the gaps between specific humorous fragments of text, but eventually taking over, so that, towards the end of the novel, they make up the vast majority of the humorous elements of the larger text. If we compare the novel to the text of a standard joke, and thus think of the script opposition [GRIEF] / [INDIFFERENCE] as belonging to this joke about death, then this shift of dominance actually makes perfect sense. In a joke, with the emergence of the *trigger*, one can imagine the reader or listener of that joke making the transition from the initial semantic script to the second one. Since the trigger itself is found at the end of the joke, the reader must first go through the entire text, which, in turn, slowly builds up to the point when the second semantic script is made fully evident. The novel *Slaughterhouse Five* functions in a similar fashion. One could say that Chapter 10, the last chapter, functions as the *trigger* for the joke, since it is dedicated primarily to dealing with death.

The Knowledge Resources in humorous fragments of text in *Slaughterhouse Five*

A quick count of the Logical Mechanisms used in the creation of the humor in each humorous fragment of text, as shown in Attachment 2, shows that once again we are dealing with a large variety, however the most numerous are the cases of *Implicit Parallelism* (19 cases) and *Ignoring the Obvious* (15 cases). The proliferation of *Ignoring the Obvious* LMs work in tandem with the obliviousness of the characters involved, not only in relation to the particular scenario depicted in the humorous fragment of text in question but in relation to the events portrayed in the novel as a whole. Thus we have the idiotic Englishman whose lack of teeth are suggestive of the fact that he endured great hardships throughout the war and yet what he is excited about is a clock he took that's in the shape of the Eiffel Tower. There is also the moment when Billy Pilgrim now forty-four asks himself where all the years have gone, even though, in the context of the Tralfamadorian religion that he preaches, the question is devoid of value. However, the best examples that illustrate this sense of obliviousness involve the instances in which Billy, despite the sorrowful situation he is in, has smiles for everyone and generally goes about passively accepting everything that is done around him and to him. Of course, in light of the alien philosophy this attitude does make sense, but the fact that the narrator makes little to no reference to the Tralfamadorians during these moments when Billy is portrayed as the figurehead in a parade shows that the reader is expected to take in these sense as they are, as proof of the degree to which the protagonist and other characters around him are capable of ignoring all the obvious horror.

As previously mentioned, *Implicit Parallelism* LMs make up the major group of humorous fragments of text. Examples of such fragments, as can be seen in both Attachment 1 and 2, involve inferentially comparing a writer to a drug dealer, the first paragraph of Chapter Two, which implies an alternative narrative style, the degraded condition of the would-be German soldiers that capture Billy and Roland Weary, and so on. If *Ignoring the Obvious* type LMs aid at transmitting some of the ideas that the author wants his readers to receive, the *Implicit Parallelism* type LMs play an important hand at narrative construction. By using this type of LM, the writer is able to position the reference point of the textual fragment, and essentially the second semantic scrip, outside the confines of the novel itself, thus essentially gaining the possibility of expressing more than he writes by relying on the inferred contextual

knowledge of his reader. It is little wonder then that this type of LM is prevalent in the novel, considering the fact that Kurt Vonnegut had in mind when working on *Slaughterhouse Five* not only to write a novel that would be short – thus catering to the TV-addled minds of his contemporaries – but also one that would transmit far more information than the text might literally be able to do, by adopting the postmodern tactic of inviting the reader to engage his own contextual knowledge in the possible interpretation of the novel.

Looking at the *Narrative Strategy* Logical Mechanism, we can see that, like in the case of *Cat's Cradle*, by far the most predominant form is that of *expository text*, which is to say that the text simply narrates the humorous fragment of text. The only other two types are *conversation*, which make up eight humorous fragments of text, and *poem*, which only appears twice. In this context alone, *Slaughterhouse Five* is actually a more straightforward novel than its predecessor and perhaps the author, knowing this text is already highly experimental as is, did not wish to further complicate his text by adding more diversity to the types of narratives that the book might contain, such as the *question and answer* type text that does appear in *Cat's Cradle*.

As far as the *Target* Logical Mechanism is concerned, Attachment 1 shows twenty three examples of humorous fragments of text that target Billy Pilgrim specifically, which goes a long way to show that this character and everything he stands for are the main objects of ridicule in *Slaughterhouse Five*. The aliens of Tralfamadore are aimed at specifically only three times in the novel, however, the fact that Billy represents their Messiah means that the humorous fragments of text that deal with either can be placed in the same group, namely those that target the Tralfamadorian faith in passivity and ignorance. With twenty six examples, this group thus makes up a third of all the humor in the novel. Another third of the humorous fragments target specifically the concept of war, where I include Roland Weary, who in many ways is the character representative of the war-mongering mad man, and sparse examples of soldiers, officers and the military that are occasionally found. This, among others, is an indication of just how preoccupied Vonnegut was with the issue of war in the making of the novel. Put together with the group of humorous fragments of text that refers to the Tralfamadorian philosophy, the conclusion is that the humor in *Slaughterhouse Five* is oriented towards ideology rather than being character-based, which is yet another indication of just how adamant Vonnegut was to get his ideas out in the open and into the reader's mind.

4.2.2. Literary interpretation of humor

In *Slaughterhouse Five*, Kurt Vonnegut establishes his moral beliefs not by presenting some utopia that might be based them (as one might expect of a novel that belongs to previous generations) but by presenting a counter example – in this case the philosophy of Billy Pilgrim and the Tralfamadorians – and illustrating the outcome of embracing such a belief. As previously shown, embracing this morally passive mentality means accepting everything that happens in universe and denying the human capacity for change. It means accepting the fact that a Tralfamadorian pilot eventually destroys everything by pressing a button and their statement that the pilot “has *always* pressed it and he always *will*. We *always* let him and we always *will* let him” (Vonnegut 1969:117). The author of course does not accept this philosophy and, in order to make sure that the reader understands his position, he ridicules the Tralfamadorian mentality by associating it with those characters that would come close to being considered villains in the novel. For example, a link is established between this passive philosophy and the mentality of Nazi soldiers by means of the repetition in two specific points of the question “Why me?” (Vonnegut 2009:76,91). In the first case, the aliens answer Billy’s question with the question “Why you? Why *us* for that matter?” in manner that is almost identical to the answer that the German soldier gives the American captive “Vy you? Vy anybody?” The very fact that Vonnegut chooses to spell the German guard’s question as phonetically rather than using correct English is an indicator that he is mocking what is understood to be the soldier’s entire moral stance and therefore, by circling back to the first instance where the initial question appears, the author humorously undermines the Tralfamadorian philosophy.

Vonnegut then takes this mocking even further through the introduction of General Rumfoord. As Donald Morse points out, quoting from Merrill

The scene involving Rumfoord and Billy Pilgrim is positioned at the end of *Slaughterhouse-Five* because it is the real climax to Vonnegut’s complex protest novel. The object of satiric attack turns out to be a complacent response to the horrors of the age. The horror of Dresden is not just that it could happen here, in an enlightened twentieth century. The real horror is that events such as Dresden continue to occur and no one seems appalled.

(in Bloom 2009:89)

This over-the-top character is first of all satirized by the fact that he is a Harvard history Professor – a title that would presume to entail not only high prestige but also great wisdom –

who is recovering from a broken leg that he got at age seventy while skiing with his fifth wife who is twenty-three years old. As if the notion of having a fifth wife in the early twentieth century wasn't depraved enough, the author has the young wife Lily out to be "a high school dropout" (Vonnegut 1969:184) whose I.Q. is a mere 103. The criticism here is of course not directed to the simple girl but rather towards the supposedly highly esteemed scholar who clearly "resolved to make her his own" (ibid.) purely for her looks and so that she may cater to his needs. His image is only meant to be worsened in the eyes of the reader when he takes for his research the foreword by military officers to David Irving's *The Destruction of Dresden*. In this foreword note is the callous remark by Lieutenant General Ira Eaker who "finds it difficult to understand Englishmen or Americans who weep about enemy civilians who were killed" (Vonnegut 1969:187) and that by Air Marshal Sir Robert Saundry who considers that the Dresden firebombing "was one of those terrible things that sometimes happen in wartime, brought about by an unfortunate combination of circumstances" (ibid). The opinion of these distinguished military figures is therefore that, at most, one should view the massacre in question as an inevitable event for which people should not feel any kind of remorse, and at best it was the result of a series of random circumstances, an innocent calculated error. Such a viewpoint is only possible within a system of belief that places instances of horror under a universal category of mere happenstance. And when Rumfoord says that "it *had* to be done" this statement mirrors back to Tralfamadorian considerations about the inevitability of events. Therefore, as Rumfoord and his ilk are made out to be detestable characters, their link to the aliens in turn makes their philosophy out to be subject to reproach.

While Billy Pilgrim's portrayal as "a funny-looking child who became a funny-looking youth – tall and weak, and shaped like a bottle of Coca-Cola" (Vonnegut 1969:23) and his subsequent humiliation, as already illustrated, makes up, together with these two cases, the most evident means of undermining the Tralfamadorian philosophy, the multitude of other instances of humor only piles on to the negative image formed around it. Thus, for example, Roland Weary, who is the very definition of the overly zealous homicidal soldier "had every piece of equipment he had ever been issued" and "looked like Tweedledum or Tweedledee" (Vonnegut 1969:39). The two scouts who are supposed to have the highest chances of surviving behind enemy lines, since this was their element, are shot in the back by "three inoffensive bangs" (Vonnegut 1969:54) and Edgar Derby, whom the narrator calls the only true character in the

novel “is arrested in the ruins [of Dresden] for taking a teapot and he’s given a regular trial, and then he’s shot by a firing squad” (Vonnegut 1969:5). All of this is meant to illustrate the absurdities of war and of the Tralfamadorian notion of blindly accepting them as simple facts of life.

The rest of the instances of humorous fragments of text all (or at least almost all) have to do with *death* and how one should deal with the inevitability of it, whether it is in accordance with Billy’s religion or along the lines of Vonnegut’s perspective. *Slaughterhouse Five* is after all a book about death and, like with war, once again the author’s tactic is to elaborate upon the Tralfamadorian perspective on it, to essentially engage in a process of *reductio ad absurdum*, meaning the method of proving the falsity of a premise by showing that its logical consequence is absurd. The tagline that the Tralfamadorians use when witnessing a moment of death is *So it goes*, one which also epitomizes the absolute level of their indifference, appears at first in connection to deaths that may hold some importance in the novel, such as that of Billy’s father or of his wife. Eventually, however, the text comes to the point where it links this tagline to champagne (Vonnegut 1969:73) and body lice and bacteria (Vonnegut 1969:84) and even dead water in a painting (Vonnegut 1969:101). By the middle of the novel, the idea of taking the tagline *So it goes* seriously becomes absurd, and because it stands at the heart of Tralfamadorian considerations towards death, so too do these considerations become absurd.

In terms of the humorous fragments of text in themselves, we can engage in a similar process as done for *Cat’s Cradle* and divide them in terms of their relevancy to the main themes of the novel. For this exercise the tag line *So it goes* will be ignored since, as previous analysis has already shown, the humor that it creates only appears in time. In light of this aspect and from going through each humorous fragment there results the following:

NTH:P1- **TH:P1b** - **TH:P2** – NTH:P3 - **TH:4** - **TH:4b** - **TH:5** – NTH:5b – NTH:5c - **TH:6** - **TH:8** – NTH:11 – NTH:13 - **TH:14** - **TH:19** – NTH:20 – NTH:22 - NTH:22 – NTH:22b – NTH:23 – NTH:23b - **TH:24** - **TH:26** – NTH:26 – NTH:30 - **TH:30b** - **TH:31** - **TH:31b** - **TH:32** - **TH:33** - **TH:34** - **TH:34b** - **TH:34c** - **TH:38** - **TH:39** – NTH:42 – NTH:47 – NTH:49 - **TH:51** - **TH:52** - **TH:52b** - **TH:52c** – **TH:53** - **TH:53b** - **TH:54** - **TH:55** – **TH:57** - **TH:57b** - **TH:64** - **TH:65** - **TH:70** - **TH:70b** - **TH:72** - **TH:72b** – **TH:73** - **TH:73b** - **TH:75** - **TH:79** - **TH:80** - **TH:81** - **TH:84** - **TH:90** - **TH:93** - **TH:95** - **TH:97** - **TH:101** - **TH:105** - **TH:111** – NTH:112 – **TH:114** - **TH:117** – NTH:132 – NTH:138 - **TH:142** - **TH:147** - **TH:149** - **TH:167** – NTH:171 - **TH:193** - **TH:214**

In this case, *thematic humor* (TH) pertains to those humorous fragments of text that deal with the horror and absurdity of war, the inevitability of death and the outlining of Tralfamadorian philosophy. Non-thematic humor (NTH) refers to the humorous fragments that are connected to the difficulties that the author had when writing his novel, as well as some cases of description where the imagery created does not relate back explicitly to any of the major themes of the novel.

Not surprisingly, instances of TH greatly outnumber those of their counterparts, with there being 58 cases of this first type, as opposed to only 22 examples of NTH. This is a further reflection of the urgency with which Kurt Vonnegut desired to make his opinions known and to expand upon them. While the NTH-type fragments can be found scattered throughout the whole text, the majority of them are concentrated at the beginning of the novel, which is only natural since it is here that the author explains the method behind his madness, after which no reminder regarding issues of style are needed. Some of the examples of NTH-type humorous fragments that appear later in the novel include the moment when Billy is too drunk to notice that he is sitting on the back seat of his car (Vonnegut 1969:47), the useless information on how many miles there are between Earth and Tralfamadore (Vonnegut 1969:112), which can be another illustration of the new style that Vonnegut creates, or the notion that Barbara takes pleasure in taking away her father's dignity in the name of love (Vonnegut 1969:132). Since by definition they are not connected to the main themes of *Slaughterhouse Five*, it remains uncertain why Vonnegut might choose to include these bits of humor in a text that is otherwise wholly devoted to delivering his message to his readers. One can only speculate that at the time of writing the author thought at each of these moments that an example of more *innocent* humor might be needed. One could even argue that, for example, the incident in the car and Billy's relationship with his daughter *are* connected to the main themes since they add more color to the disturbing nature of Pilgrim's life, but such an argument would be rather thin, since if Vonnegut wanted these humorous fragments of text to point to the issues he analyzes he would have made it more obvious, as is the case in all the examples of TH.

4.3. Deadeye Dick

4.3.1. Linguistic interpretation of humor

Narrative Level in *Deadeye Dick*

Despite the fact that the novel tells the story of both his parents' lives and his own, because there is constantly only one narrative voice, that of Rudy Waltz, which provides all the information in the text, we can only speak, in the case of *Deadeye Dick*, of a single *narrative level*. In other words, this is a straightforward tale that has something to tell the reader and says it outright.

Formal representation of humor in *Deadeye Dick*

From a linguistic point of view, if we take into consideration only the formal representations of humor in Attachment 1, we are left with the following model:

[↪ ... - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - [↪ - P →] - J - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - [↪ - P →] - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - P →] - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - J - [↪ - P →] - [↪ - P →] - J - J - J - [↪ - P →] - J - J →]

As this seems to indicate, despite being a humorous novel, *Deadeye Dick* does not in fact contain very many humorous fragments of text, making the formal representation above a rather thin one. If we go through the text itself, it becomes obvious that this is due to the large gaps that exist between each humorous fragment. With few exceptions, no page of the novel contains more than one such fragment, and some gaps even span across twenty pages in the edition analyzed in the present paper.

The Knowledge resources in humorous fragments of text in *Deadeye Dick*

Looking at the Knowledge Recourses in Attachment 2, we can notice that the simplicity of the humor in *Deadeye Dick* is enhanced by means of the Narrative Strategy used for each humorous fragment of text. With the exception of six cases (five based on 'conversation', one a Q/A-type narrative), all of the texts are created as 'expository texts'. This implies that, apart from the

obvious postmodern traits presented above, the author wanted in this case to create a fairly straightforward novel that his reader would have very little trouble comprehending.

As far as the Logical Mechanisms are concerned, once again one can see a wide range of them and once again some of them are more numerous than others. In this case ‘missing link’ and ‘reasoning from false premises’ appear to be the most numerous, with eleven cases each. Like in the case of *Cat’s Cradle*, where ‘missing link’ was also used for numerous humorous fragments of text, the variety of circumstances and textual structures (which is to say, the manner in which a particular fragment is constructed) may be a testimony to the multitude of ways in which the author can choose this logical mechanism to facilitate the creation of humor, but otherwise it does little to offer any basis for any observations that can be made in general concerning humor in the novel as a whole.

The ‘reasoning from false premises’ LM yields better results. Whether it be a matter of crossing a Pole with a Negro to get an amusing laborer (Vonnegut 1982:29) or Otto considering that a tragic accidental murder might be an opportunity to act bravely (Vonnegut 1982:69), in each case the humor is created, as the denomination of the LM suggests, out of the misplaced, inappropriate logical conclusion that one character or another draws from the situation presented to him. The really interesting part, however, is that, apart from one or two cases – like for example when the Maritimo brothers journey to America because they believed that the streets of America are paved in gold (Vonnegut 1982:15) – all of the humorous fragments of text that adopt this particular LM are centered around the character Otto Waltz. This suggests clear intentionality on the part of the author, who was eager to make sure that the humor which appears around Otto reflects the character’s most enduring trait, which is his inability to perceive the world around him in a rational, realistic way. Focusing this LM onto Otto prevents him from becoming a negative character in *Deadeye Dick* because it implies that to a certain degree, the damage that he creates is nothing more than an effect of his own short-comings, rather than the result of any malicious intent.

In terms of the Target of the humorous fragments of text in *Deadeye Dick*, twenty one of them are aimed at Otto Waltz, and since he has in the novel the function of a character representation of the gun-loving fool, we can add the humorous fragments that refer to Otto to the ones that target either guns in general or the arms race in particular. Thus the novel reveals

thirty one out of fifty five humorous fragments of text have as a target the proliferation of weapons and its consequences. This means that over half the humor in *Deadeye Dick* is focused on the novel's main theme, far more than in either of the previous texts studied. Some of the humorous fragments that refer to guns also target the narrator, particularly in the paragraphs that cover the shooting. This leads me to another particular observation concerning the humor in *Deadeye Dick*: there are a total of sixteen fragments of text that have Rudy as their target and in five of these the narrator actively mocks himself, which means that a considerable proportion of the humor deals specifically with this character. This means that, when taken as a whole, the humor in *Deadeye Dick* is as much an ideological one, since it tackles the issue of guns and gun control, as it is character based, focusing on the evolution of the narrator himself.

4.3.2. Literary interpretation of humor

The principal theme of *Deadeye Dick*, as has already been suggested, is the importance of disarmament and the consequences, both factual and potential, of ignoring this 'holy word' and continuing with humanity's obsession with weapons. As before, if we think of the humorous fragments of text in terms of *thematic* and *non-thematic humor*, the following emerges:

NTH:P1 – NTH:P2 – **TH:P2b** – **TH:P2c** – **TH:P5** – NTH:P5b – **TH:P7** – **TH:P7b** – **NTH:P7c** – **TH:P11** – NTH:P15 – NTH:P19 – **TH:P20** – **TH:P21** – **TH:P24** – NTH:P25 – **TH:P27** – **TH:P29** – **TH:P33** – NTH:P35 – NTH:P37 – NTH:P37b – **TH:P38** – **TH:P47** – **TH:P53** – **TH:P53b** – NTH:P58 – **TH:P60** – **TH:P60b** – **TH:P61** – **TH:P64** – **TH:P64b** – **TH:P64c** – NTH:P66 – **TH:P68** – **TH:P69** – **TH:P70** – **TH:P73** – **TH:P79** – **TH:P81** – **TH:P93** – NTH:P93b – NTH:P97 – **TH:P98** – NTH:P129 – NTH:P130 – NTH:P132 – **TH:P150** – NTH:P156 – **TH:P164** – **TH:P167** – **TH:P193** – NTH:P193b – NTH:P223 – **TH:P229**

As previously done, the examples of *thematic humor* have been highlighted for the sake of convenience. I should note that I've included within this group all the texts that refer to the Waltz family, especially those examples that illustrate Otto's warped sense of reality. While these do not specifically refer to guns or other weapons, together they make up the environment which in turn makes it possible for young Rudy Waltz to consider it harmless to fire the rifle. In addition, while Otto Waltz as a character is certainly outlandish, he is at the same time a hyperbolic representation of the kind of ignorant gun enthusiast that Vonnegut is trying to prevent his reader from becoming. It is therefore all the more pertinent that his persona and everything connected to Otto Waltz be included within the paradigm of the novel's main theme.

A count of the examples of *thematic* and *non-thematic humor* show that the first group is significantly larger than the second, with 36 examples of TH and only 19 examples of NTH. This further suggests a strong determination on the part of the author to keep the reader focused, one way or the other, on the issue presented in the novel, which Kurt Vonnegut must have felt was of an urgent matter at the time. However, one should be cautious of how much importance should be given to the use of humor in *Deadeye Dick*. In *Fates Worse than Death* Vonnegut points out that the older an author gets, the less humorous he becomes, that he still knows how to make jokes but it entails a rather automatic process. During the period when this novel came out, Vonnegut certainly wasn't feeling particularly humorous. His previous work, the one that came out after *Slaughterhouse Five* had not been well received, and both his trip to Africa and the political administration of the time had a distinctly negative impact upon the author's disposition. When *Deadeye Dick* came out it was just two years before his attempted suicide. The novel itself does certainly contain humor and it is especially prolific when creating the portrait of Otto Waltz. It is not however centered around the protagonist since the section that describes Rudy's life as a neutered servant to his parents, as a living victim of his family's and his country's gun culture, is distinctly non-humorous. This suggests that the author no longer felt it necessary to use humor as a central ingredient, as had been the case in his previous novels, but rather as an element that has now become as typical to his style as is the insertion of autobiographical elements or the simplicity of his language.

The examples of *non-thematic humor*, despite being significantly less in number, appear spread out in the text, which contains a near symmetry of two examples of NTH at the beginning and at the end. Like in *Cat's Cradle*, the text also contains clusters – in this case two of them – of *non-thematic humor*. This first (NTH:P35 – NTH:P37 – NTH:P37b) refers to the pun on how a conversation in Creole would look, considering the fact that it only has one verb tense, the dumb luck of Otto having invested in one of the only companies that was not affected by the Great Depression and Otto's joke that someone might flunk from Pharmacy School because he couldn't make a sandwich. The second cluster (NTH:P129 – NTH:P130 – NTH:P132) is made up of the disaster of Rudy's play, the fact that he knows less than anyone else about his own play and his advice that the actor make up his own lines. And although this second cluster is centered on the same topic – Rudy's play – all in all, like in *Cat's Cradle*, there really isn't any thematic correlation between the two clusters and the first one doesn't even have a prevailing theme

across the three cases of NTH. This further diminishes the value of these humorous fragments of text and once again calls into question whether the novel might not have simply done away with this category all together and to focus all the humor onto thematic issues.

4.4. A comparison of humor in all three novels

When looking at *Cat's Cradle*, *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Deadeye Dick* as a Tralfamadorian would, all at once, an image may begin to emerge of Kurt Vonnegut's life's work. It is as much the image of the lessons that the author endeavored to teach his readers, as it is that of the evolution of how he proceeded to do so. In many ways, from *Player Piano* to *Timequake*, and the short stories and essays that came before and in between, Kurt Vonnegut acted very much like a missionary, like someone who devoted his entire adult existence to something that he truly cared about. To put it in his own words, "when a man becomes a writer, I think he takes on a sacred obligation to produce beauty and enlightenment and comfort at top speed" (Vonnegut 2011[1963]:166). While his style and approach suffered multiple changes from one segment of his literary career to the next, the messages he gave out remained largely the same, repeated over and over, in the hopes that someone who didn't understand them in one novel will have a greater comprehension in the next, or someone who missed one novel will learn the lesson on another. What Vonnegut told his reader was that humanity should always come before technology, just as community and society need should come before individual desire. The consequences of ignoring this advice can be dire, apocalyptic even, because indoctrinating oneself and others into thinking that some things – be it ideas or inventions – or simply the quest for unraveling scientific truth may be deemed more important than the human life will inevitably lead to mankind delving too soon into matters we do not yet fully comprehend. And before this disaster, which in old age Vonnegut became more and more convinced is inevitable, as we continue to look forever to the future and to live in one way or another, on the principle that those who fall behind should be left behind, what mankind creates as a legacy is a trail of death and destruction that we refuse to take responsibility for or to even acknowledge its existence. Even after we unlocked the power of the sun, the power to obliterate all life on Earth, and proceeded to unleash a taste of that power upon civilians in Japan in 1945, there was hardly an individual to be found in the US that did not agree with the callous justification that it was all for the greater good or

that such things just happen in war and even that it was justified vengeance for Pearl Harbor. In all three of the novels analyzed in this paper Vonnegut proceeded to show the end result of this mentality, be it the uncontrollable worldwide impact of a devastating invention, the annihilation of whole cities by a country's own government all for the sake of experimentation, or quite simply the coming to the conclusion, born by false logic, that life and death are meaningless and so the end might be passively accepted. Kurt Vonnegut's hope, of course, was that in reading of these doomsday predictions, people would take steps so as to prevent them, and I think that to the day he died Vonnegut never lost his hope entirely, always believing that at the last minute mankind's eyes would be open, since, after all, there are no such things as real villains (he certainly never created one). The problem with any idea is how to transmit it, and from an early age Kurt Vonnegut learned that humor represented a wonderful medium and his endeavor to refine the craft of telling jokes and of using joke-like text to communicate with others rivals or even surpasses his humanitarian quest. It certainly precedes it. And from the analysis of the humor in the three novels picked out in this paper, some interesting incites can be observed.

The first observation, and perhaps the most obvious one, is that all three of Kurt Vonnegut's novels contains a clown. Not in the literal sense of course, meaning a man with make-up and colorful attire, but in the sense that the most memorable and most evidently ridiculous fragments of humorous text are in each novel centered on one specific character. In the case of *Cat's Cradle* we have Dr. Felix Hoenikker, the absentminded scientist that childishly plays with death. In *Slaughterhouse Five* there is Billy Pilgrim, the odd looking weakling that is always out of place. In *Deadeye Dick* there is Otto Waltz, the delusional failed artist with little concept of the real world. All three of these characters act as allegorical representations of the absurd nature of the very issue Vonnegut means to criticize in one book or another. Dr. Hoenikker thus represents scientific research left unchecked by moral considerations. Billy Pilgrim is the embodiment of the kind of passive tolerance that makes it possible for governments to do unspeakable acts of horror without being checked. Lastly, Otto Waltz represents America's sense of delusion in regards to its own invincibility and the gun culture found here which permits the piling on of more and more senseless death, until the difference between accidentally killing one woman and the accidental act of wiping out a city becomes nothing more than a mute consideration. These three images, when taken at face value, appear as being so hideous that it might be difficult for someone to stomach reading a text that puts them

so clearly on display. This is precisely what Vonnegut undoubtedly wished to avoid, since transmitting a message that no one is capable of receiving is obviously futile. And so the author turns to humor as a balancing ingredient, a sort of catalyst that might make it all far easier to swallow. Certainly Dr. Hoenikker is a mad scientist, irresponsible beyond all measurable means of moral comprehension. Why else would he not only invent something like *ice-nine* but experiment with the substance in so unsecure a place as his own kitchen? Yet at the same time, Felix is also the man whom everyone who knew him was aware that he could never intentionally hurt a fly, a man who tips his wife for breakfast and plays with cheap toys, an innocent child in a man's body. Billy Pilgrim is a latter day Messiah who convinces his followers that life and death are without meaning or purpose, that the existence of the Universe in its entirety has already been laid out and that nothing we do can change a thing because free will is an illusion. Such a philosophical doctrine, which reads very much like the dogma of some strange religion, undoubtedly has its attractions. It effectively absolves anyone of any guilt that they might suffer from regarding anything they might do, regardless of the level of their atrocities since, if all history has already been written, through any act of horror that an individual may commit he is simply following his inevitable path of existence and, what's more, Tralfamadorian teaching would have Billy's followers respond to any and all such atrocities by simply ignoring them and focusing on the pleasant moments in life. Fortunately, it is rather difficult to seriously take into consideration the teachings of an oddly-shaped weakling that has no important social connections beyond the limits of his tiny town and is otherwise constantly out of place and annoying to everyone around him. His looks, his attitude, every fiber of his very being makes him an easy target for ridicule and the implied premise in Vonnegut's novel is that one is expected to laugh at him, no matter how enticing his words may be. Lastly, Otto Waltz is an idiot and a fraud whose actions do harm to everyone around him and who does as much to ruin Rudy's life as does the accidental shooting of Mrs. Metzger. He teaches his children to fire guns and gives his eldest boy free access to a room full of weapons while the latter is still a teenager. He then hands that same key to his younger son without the slightest inkling of the boy's actual age. He is at least as much to blame for the shooting accident as is Rudy and the fact that he is the one to go to prison for it is only fair. And when he doesn't spend his years setting the scene for disaster, Otto rescues the life of Adolf Hitler and then proceeds to advocate for the Nazi view on humanity. On the other hand, there is not a moment in his existence when Otto Waltz shows

so much as an inkling of malice. When the Maritimo brothers come to him starving and homeless, Otto treats them like respectable guests, showing them nothing but courtesy because it is what a gentleman would do. Gentlemanly behavior is what he was taught and, regardless of how humorously improper these lessons may have taken root in his mind, it is understood that Otto only ever acts according to how he honestly perceives things and how he thinks an artist should perceive them since, according to his mother, he is apparently an artist. Looking at things from his perspective, it would of course seem odd that the destruction of the guns and the act of bringing down then cupola would somehow be payment enough for accidental murder, especially in a world where such shootings seem to happen all the time. And so we have it that in all three cases – the mad science of Felix Hoenikker, the passive tolerance of Billy Pilgrim, the destructive ignorance of Otto Waltz – utterly disturbing ideas are intended to be transmitted and, by having the medium of these transmissions be some foolhardy clowns, Vonnegut assures that the reader stays amused long enough for his ideas to really sink in.

What's interesting to note is that, of the three novels, only in one of them does the clown coincide with the protagonist of the story, namely in *Slaughterhouse Five*. This is also the only text in which the main character is not also the narrator. This shows that, despite his efforts at humanizing himself and at showing that he does not impose himself as a grand moralist but, on the contrary, might be situated at the same level as his readers, Vonnegut nonetheless takes a kind of moral high ground. He does so by not really including himself or his fictional avatars among the list of humorous characters. A slight exception to this can be found in *Deadeye Dick*, in which Rudy the narrator does undermine himself by mocking his own altruistic choice of serving his parents and by joking about his failure as a writer. However, the influence of this self-mockery on the rest of the novel is minor, reason for which it would be a mistake to say that the narrator of *Deadeye Dick* on the whole endeavors to make himself an important target for ridicule. In addition, and returning to the central observation here whereby the author refrains from any significant act of self-mocking, there is the fact that many times when a fragment of the text in any one novel can be identified as distinctly Vonnegut addressing his readers directly, those bits are told in a thoroughly sober manner. Mr. Metzger's plea in *Deadeye Dick* for disarmament is one example, Vonnegut's comment in *Slaughterhouse Five* that he is not overjoyed by Billy's notions is another, but examples can be found spread out across any of the three texts. And, although it is only speculative, one might consider the possibility that the reason

that people engaged in the very activities we are warned about – scientists, generals, politicians – were evidently less inclined to heed Vonnegut’s words is because while reading one of his novels such individuals would have undoubtedly felt attacked by an author who is willing to relate to just about anyone, but not to them.

Looking at the analysis of the humor in each novel in terms of *thematic* and *non-thematic* humor, another observation that stands out is the steady decline in both number and value of the latter type. Initially, in *Cat’s Cradle*, we can see a steady balance between either type, intermingled in such a way that the reader could hardly read a chapter of the novel without being reminded at least once that he is reading something meant to be funny. The clusters of both *thematic* and *non-thematic* humorous fragments of text are nearly of equal number and of equal strength, while the only relevant indication that one might be worth remembering more than the other is the fact that the former focuses on specific notions while the latter is completely unfocused. Here is then a novel that is meant to entertain while providing the reader with some useful wisdom and it is little wonder that people found *Cat’s Cradle* such a pleasant read. Yet, from here, through *Slaughterhouse Five* and on to *Deadeye Dick*, the number of humorous fragments of text that center on the given novel’s themes begins to thoroughly outnumber their counterparts, while the impact of *non-thematic* humor steadily declines. To give a minor example, readers of *Cat’s Cradle* would probably recall the fact that Newt Hoenikker had his only real relationship with a Russian spy that was twice his age at least, but when going through *Deadeye Dick* one would surely soon forget the fact that Otto bought shares in Coca-Cola during the Great Depression or that Rudy, upon arriving home from the Police Department, wanted only to go to bed. It is obvious that, as he got older Kurt Vonnegut’s will to entertain began to wane, and even the novel *Breakfast of Champions*, which is full of silly notions, could not conceal the author’s steady loss of humor.

From a linguistic point of view, this shift of humor towards a solely thematic focus also appears in tandem with a simplification of sorts of the text. No one can deny the literary complexity of *Slaughterhouse Five*, however, in terms of Narratives Levels of the kind that aid in forming a linguistic analysis of humor in a novel, it is *Cat’s Cradle* that offers the most interesting structure, as it contains three narratives, two of which are subservient to the main. In *Slaughterhouse Five* the reader encounters only two Narrative Levels and, with the exception of

some sparse comments and reminders when Vonnegut pops up in Chapters Two to Ten, they appears to be neatly delineated between the author's comments at the beginning and end and the story of Billy Pilgrim per se. lastly, the structure of *Deadeye Dick* is the simplest of the three, with only one Narrative Level, that of Rudy Waltz telling his tale. Last but not least, as the linguistic narrative structure of the novels becomes simpler and the humorous fragments of text shift more towards a focus on theme, one can also notice a systematic reduction in diversity of the Narrative Strategy Knowledge Resources adopted. Certainly the 'expository text' type NS is predominant in all three novels, which is only natural given the nature of the text as a work of prose. However, *Cat's Cradle* also contains a significant amount of humorous fragments with other types of Narrative Strategies, including 'conversation', 'poem' and 'question/answer'. This last category, typically used in jokes and stand-up comedy, is a testimony to Kurt Vonnegut's early interest in such forms of verbal expression. Yet this type of strategy disappears in the later novels and, while 'conversation' and 'poem' remain, their numbers decline to the point where they become insignificant. The conclusion is thus that the humor used by Vonnegut in his novels becomes simpler and, I dare say, somewhat lazier the more his literary career progresses and the more interested he becomes in addressing, rather than entertaining his readers.

Curiously enough, the actual number of humorous fragments of text used in the three novels does not conform to this steady decline. A count of the jab lines and punch lines in *Cat's Cradle* shows 51 cases of the former and 25 examples of the latter, for a total of 76 fragments. *Slaughterhouse Five* on the other hand contains 47 jab lines and 34 punch lines, totaling 81 fragments, while in the case of *Deadeye Dick* we can see a steep decline with 36 jab lines and 19 punch lines, totaling just 55 humorous fragments of text. As far as the first two novels are concerned the difference between the number of fragments from one text to the other may not seem great, however, we should keep in mind that the count in the case of the second novel does not take into consideration the jab line fragments and, as shown in the section of the paper that deals exclusively with *Slaughterhouse Five*, when we do factor it in the resulting formal representation of the text is far more formidable. What is curious is that the number of punch lines in this novel nearly equals that of jab lines, whereas in the case of *Cat's Cradle* they number less than half as many. This propensity to use joke-like texts more often in the later novel than in the earlier one runs once again counter to the elements presented above that would suggest a simplification of the humor in Vonnegut's works. Perhaps the fact that *Slaughterhouse*

Five hits closer to home for the author prompted him to try and distance himself more by providing more jokes, like tiny pricks of a needle that can be taken individually. *Deadeye Dick* at least runs in tandem with the previously-mentioned decline. In this case the number of humorous fragments of text is so small, when compared to the other two novels that one has to wonder whether Vonnegut should have bothered to make it humorous at all, since making his readers laugh can hardly be thought as a clear objective in this case. It is more likely that Vonnegut, being well aware of the mechanic usefulness of humor in writing postmodern literature, simply decided to make use of it in the same way that anyone would make use of a tool that he has become well accustomed to after decades of practice in his profession.

In terms of the Logical Mechanisms used to create humor in Kurt Vonnegut's novels, once again one can speak of similarities across the board, in the sense that all three novels contain a very wide variety of LMs. This goes to show that Vonnegut possessed an extensive repertoire of ways in which he might create verbal humor and it is thus a further testimony to how much knowledge he had in this respect. In addition, while the numbers for each type of LM varies greatly in each novel, four categories seem to appear most often, namely 'Implicit Parallelism', 'Ignoring the Obvious', 'Reasoning from False Premises' and 'Missing Link'. As has previously been hinted at in passing, the propensity to use these over other LMs has very much to do with the author's choice of strategy. In all of his novels Kurt Vonnegut proceeds to take a given subject and by taking it to the extreme, reveal its absurd and ridiculous nature to the reader, who unconsciously compares the fiction presented with the reality around him. Within this context using 'Implicit Parallelism' makes sense. The manner in which Vonnegut ridicules the themes he tackles is by associating them with characters that are prone to silly and even absurd acts because they have a skewed view of the world around them, and so the next two Logical Mechanisms best come into play. Finally, of all the LMs, perhaps none of the four engages us as active readers of the text as does 'Missing Link' since, by its very definition, it provides the reader with the context in which the two semantic scripts are found but leaves it up to him to figure out what connects them. This is without a doubt essential in a postmodern novel, in which the reader is perceived as an active participant in the literary process, rather than a mere passive consumer as he was considered before.

As far as the Target KR is concerned, and in terms of character focus, the personas that are most often mocked in all three of Vonnegut's novels are the aforementioned clowns Felix, Billy and Otto. However, beyond this similarity, the focus of humor shifts considerably from one text to the other. In *Cat's Cradle* there certainly is a noteworthy number of humorous fragments of text that specifically target the novel's main theme, overall the vast majority of the instances of humor in the novel center on various characters and, if nothing else, this is a reflection of the time and effort that Vonnegut put into the development of each individual character throughout the making of *Cat's Cradle*. In *Slaughterhouse Five* we are dealing with a very different situation. The narrator of this novel states towards the end of the text that there are no real characters to be found here because everyone is too sick (Vonnegut 1969:164), and this fact is reflected in the focus of the humor. Between the process of mocking the Tralfamadorian philosophy together with the elements and representatives of war, there is little else left that might serve as the target of humor in *Slaughterhouse Five*. This would seem to indicate that in between his fourth novel and his sixth, despite there being only six years of separate, Kurt Vonnegut became steadily less interested in proper character development and more focused on getting his message across to the reader. Ten years later, the author makes a comeback of sorts, at least to a degree. Thus, in the case of *Deadeye Dick*, like in *Slaughterhouse Five*, the main focus of the humor is undoubtedly the gun culture which Vonnegut means to subvert. However, it is also true that a great deal of effort was made in the case of this novel to create several well-rounded characters such as Otto, Celia and Rudy and the last has been included as the target for quite a few of the humorous fragments of text. In addition, not only do some of these fragments aim at the narrator but they are also self-undermining, something that isn't present in either of the previous novels. In conclusion, as far as the targeting mechanism of the humor in Kurt Vonnegut's writings is concerned, there is a two way evolution. On the one hand the humor goes from being character based to ideological to a combination of the two. On the other hand it shifts from containing no elements of self-mockery to the existence of a self-criticizing narrator, although it remains true to all three novels that whenever the direct voice or presence of the author is detected, it is almost always humorless or else the humor is targeted towards something else.

Among the general characteristics of Kurt Vonnegut's writing is the fact that he provides the reader with as much useful information as he can as quickly as it is possible. This is not just

because of his propensity to eliminate any and all potential climax, as a testimony to the fact that he is a postmodern writer. This desire to provide, like his choice of using simple language, is an established aspect of his pragmatic desire to make himself understood clearly by his reader. As far as the three novels studied is concerned, this habit also has an important impact upon the positioning of the humorous fragments of text. Quite simply, there is a far higher concentration in the first half of each novel than in the second, the latter of which often contains spans of text without any humor whatsoever. In the case of *Cat's Cradle* for example, nearly every page of the edition used in this paper contains at least one humorous fragment of text and whenever one of the secondary Narrative Levels is introduced this is done with the aid of a stream of funny bits. Afterwards, the rate of humorous fragments declines and by Chapter 70 of 127 we only have one fragment emerging on average every two to four pages. In the case of *Slaughterhouse Five* the introductory chapter isn't abundant in the way of humor, though it still contains on average one fragment per page. Once Billy Pilgrim comes in this rate increases exponentially, especially if we consider the jab line fragments that build up the humor contained in the novel's tag line. Yet by the end of Chapter Five and throughout the remainder of the novel, large gaps emerge where these jab line fragments are the only instances of humor to be found, especially as the actual firebombing of Dresden draws ever closer. Lastly, in *Deadeye Dick*, the most numerous and certainly the most memorable instances of humor surround the segment up until and including the moment Otto and Rudy are arrested. Other than that the average rate of occurrence of a humorous fragment of text is five to ten pages and the latter half of the novel contains segments where as much as twenty five pages go without any humor at all. It should be made clear however, that this occurrence of a declining rate of humor in each novel does not necessarily mean that the author had the habit of becoming more and more disinterested in whatever project he was working on at the time, although an entry in *Palm Sunday* might be construed as an admission of such, especially when he elaborates upon the principle whereby "Two Thirds of a Masterpiece Is More than Enough" (Vonnegut 1991:39). Still, the quality of any of the three texts, which remains undoubtedly the same to the very last word is proof that, despite this principle, which is humorous onto itself, Vonnegut struggled to work on the novels until they were right. Therefore, the far more likely explanation has to do once again with pragmatics; the author proceeds to ridicule as soon as possible that which the reader should perceive as

ridiculous, afterwards only periodic reminders are necessary in order to keep the reader's perspective in line with the author's point of view.

5. Conclusion

What has been shown in the present paper first of all is that the evolution of humor in Kurt Vonnegut's novels is as complicated as the evolution of his literary career itself. It began as one that is character-based, during the first two decades of his life as a writer when Vonnegut was still adjusting to the nature of his calling. This was the period when the amount of time and energy that he could allocate towards his craft was limited by the circumstances of caring for a large family, which often had him doing odd jobs for some extra money. Fortunately literary magazines paid well at the time, which allowed him room to write his first three novels, however the restrictions that these magazines imposed on his short stories (they had to be slick, to appeal to a wide audience, among other things) and the other above-mentioned obstacles slowed down the development of the unique style which would later become Vonnegut's signature mark. As the analysis of humor in *Cat's Cradle* shows, the humor in this novel is not only character-based but extremely diverse, with numerous accounts of humorous fragments of text which have varied structures and targets. All this is an indicator of how important the entertainment value of the novel was, meaning that this text, like Vonnegut's short stories written before, was intended to appeal to a large variety of readers. It might even be said that the humor of the novel is commercial in nature, however, one should be cautious when saying so, since even this novel, like *Player Piano*, *The Sirens of Titan*, *Mother Night* and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, already contains those elements of postmodern deconstruction that would become so apparent later on, as for example the notion that human reality is a construct.

The humor in *Cat's Cradle* does not focus primarily on the novel's themes, however this does not mean that the ideas which Kurt Vonnegut wished to transmit do not appear center stage. On the contrary, Vonnegut's pragmatic sense of duty as a writer is already clearly felt in this text, as evidenced by the fact that the narration never strays very far away from the dire implications of morally unchecked scientific advancement or the consequences of the individual's choice to skew or ignore his sense of responsibility towards his fellow man. And while the humor in *Cat's Cradle* may focus on the various characters that play their significant role in the development of the plot, the reader cannot deny the fact that one of these characters, Felix Hoenikker is not only the representation of the scientist and of science in general, but is also by far the funniest individual in the novel. Thus the traits of the most memorable character

forces the humor associated with him to circle back to the theme that he embodies, which in turn only adds to the reassurance that what Vonnegut meant to express in his novel might stick in the minds of his readers.

Just six years later, *Slaughterhouse Five* hails a milieu of changes to Vonnegut's style and approach, which would propel the unsuspecting author from anonymity to global fame. Among a disjointed chronology, a fictionalization of reality and the premise of a text that is, among other things, about the writing of this text, all of these distinctively postmodern traits run alongside some changes in the functionality of humor. Where the previous novel presented an assortment of varying memorable and fully formed characters, in this case the premise of the text is that there are hardly any authentic characters to speak of, because everybody in the tale is too sick and weary, or dead. This is not to say that there are no characters per se, but that the persons that do appear are meant to function less as fictional individuals and more as representations of various aspects pertaining to the novel's themes. Even the protagonist Billy Pilgrim is just an avatar of the nihilistic passivism that Vonnegut warns his readers against and the fact that everything about Billy – from his appearance and demeanor to his opinions and decisions – comes off as ridiculous is only meant to humorously demean this passivism. Thus, beginning with 1969, we find Kurt Vonnegut as an author who, thanks also to his experience in essay writing and public speaking, has come to terms with the fact that he has something valuable to say and as such, while never ignoring the entertainment value of his work, proceeds to shift towards a focus on his own concerns, confident that his readers will make the effort of mulling over his considerations. As a result, the humor in *Slaughterhouse Five* becomes distinctly ideological in nature, as the present paper has proven by showing that the *thematic humor* of the text greatly outmatches its *non-thematic* counterpart and that the targets of the humorous fragments of text in *Slaughterhouse Five* are most often connected with the novel's central themes.

Readers and critics probably didn't quite expect the direction in which Kurt Vonnegut's artistic career would take. Perhaps, after the innovative impact of his anti-war book, many may have thought that he would begin to take his writing more seriously, seeking to push it towards ever more abstract manifestations of literature, as had been the case for other authors at the time. Nothing could be further from the truth however. If anything, the novel that immediately follows

Slaughterhouse Five, namely *Breakfast of Champions*, is far sillier and includes various odd drawings, including one that is apparently the author's anus. As has been suggested by Jerome Klinkowitz, among others, this direction may have been the result of Vonnegut's difficulties in coming to terms with the speed with which he had risen to fame and wealth, with the fact that, all of a sudden, the world was paying attention to what he says and how he says it. Fortunately, by the beginning of the 1980's he had grown accustomed to his social status and with *Deadeye Dick* we can see a half-way return to the formulas that had so worked for him in the past, especially since his literary career during the 1970's had not gone as well as he might have hoped. In this sense, and as far as the humor of the novel is concerned, the analysis performed in this paper has revealed that it is as much ideological as it is character-based. At the same time it also shows that the actual importance that the author places on humor has diminished significantly, as has the complexity of its nature. In this manner, the Narrative Strategy of the humorous fragments of text is almost completely the same, while the elements of the novel that they target have either to do with the elements of Vonnegut's own past, as an indication of his growing interest in inserting autobiographical facts into his fiction, or with the issue of gun control that the author wishes to warn his readers about.

As has been said, the present paper has first of all shown the evolution of humor in Kurt Vonnegut's novels. The second thing that it proves is how the General Theory of Verbal Humor can be adapted to identify the elements of humor in a text as complex as a novel, even when this complexity is heightened by its postmodern nature. By singling out first of all the script oppositions contained in each of the three novels, an identification of the humorous fragments of text could be done, leading to a set of formal representations which in turn illustrate the varying complexity of the humor found in each novel in turn. In addition, by identifying the six Knowledge Resources for each humorous fragment of text, definitive observations could be made, especially in terms of the Logical Mechanisms employed (wherein, despite there being a wide verity of them, some seem to be favored over others, and possible theories have been provided for this phenomenon), the Narrative Strategies utilized and the Targets of these instances of humor. These elements not only result in a thorough formal linguistic analysis of the humor in each individual text but, taken together, they make it possible to draw conclusions about how verbal humor manifests itself across Kurt Vonnegut's entire career. Last, but not least, the analysis performed in this paper has shown no indications that what has been done here

cannot be performed for any other text by any other novel, which is further proof of the universal nature of the linguistic theory postulated by Attardo and Raskin.

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Attachment 1: Humorous fragments of text in *Cat's Cradle*

Like most (if not all) humorous narratives, *Cat's Cradle* begins with the narrator's almost non-humorous (though witty) quick presentation of who he is and what his initial plan as a writer was (that is, to write a book about the day the A-bomb dropped entitled *The Day the World Ended*). This part of the novel is for the most part rhetorical and the only comic element to be found is a poem taken from the so-called *Book of Bokonon* about widespread interpersonal connections. The verses are supposed to be of religious importance, but lines such as "Nice, nice, very nice – / So many people / In the same device" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 3) make it wholly ridiculous.

↪ - J →

Shortly after that, the novel glides into the events which begin roughly one year earlier, with the narrator gathering material for his book. To that end he contacts one Newt Hoenikker, the youngest son of Dr. Felix Hoenikker, who in turn played a major role in the making of the bomb. Interestingly enough, it is only when, through Newt's telling of what he remembers of the day the bomb dropped, we enter NL_{1a} that we encounter a humorous fragment of text, namely Newt's comically grotesque description of his father who scared the poor boy when coming to play with him. The premise is that Dr. Hoenikker never plays with his children. Yet this time he decides to act as a father, but comes out looking like "the ugliest thing I had ever seen" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 9).

↪ - J →

As he continues to tell the narrator in writing about the history of his family, Newt serves the reader with other anecdotes, such as the time his father tipped his own wife for serving him breakfast (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 10).

↪ - P →

or two cases where Felix simply had unusual reactions to given circumstances. In the first it is winter and the eldest sibling, Angela, who after the death of her mother became the de facto woman of the house, tries to start the car and keeps pushing the start button until the battery finally dies. While everyone is thus stuck in a cold car, Felix suddenly mutters "I wonder about turtles [...] When they pull in their heads, do their spines buckle or contract?" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 11).

↪ - J →

The second unusual reaction is when, at a testing of the atomic bomb, one of his colleagues states that “science has now known sin”, to which Felix asks in return “What is sin?” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 13).

↳ - P →

With the end of Newt’s letter, the narrator brings us back to NL₀ and quickly provides the reader with a humorous anecdote about Newt’s former lover having lied about her real age. She was thought to be Newt’s age but was in fact “old enough to be Newt’s mother” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 14).

↳ - P →

The narrator then explains how he set his novel aside for a year, until his freelance journalistic writing brings him to Ilium NY, the hometown of Dr. Hoenikker. Here, John (the narrator) gets in contact with Dr. Breed, Felix’s supervisor, who makes a point of commenting that if he had actually supervised Dr. Hoenikker, he’d now be ready “to take charge of volcanoes, the tides and migrations of birds” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 15).

↳ - J →

John sets up a meeting with Dr. Breed, but before that he goes to a bar, where he has a deep and extensive conversation with a prostitute, “about truth, about gangsters, about nice poor people who went to the electric chair [...] We got drunk” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 16).

↳ - P →

Also, together with the bartender they discuss how scientists have discovered “the basic secret of life” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 18), which, apparently, is protein.

↳ - J →

The next day, the narrator remarks how his soul “seemed as foul as smoke from burning cat fur” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 20).

↳ - J →

Nonetheless, he meets with Dr. Breed, who quickly points out that the Research Laboratory is placed where “they held the public hangings for the whole country” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 21).

↳ - J →

During his presentation of the General Forge and Foundry Company Research Facility, Dr. Breed introduces John to a secretary named Mss. Pefko, who, although she works closely with scientists, confesses to not understanding anything they say. When Dr. Breed tells her to ask for clarification, since “any scientist who can’t explain to an eight-year-old what he’s doing is a charlatan” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 25), Mss. Pefko confesses that she doesn’t even know what a charlatan is.

↳ - J →

Moving on, John and Dr. Breed head on up to the latter’s office. Being that it’s Christmas, a group of female employees nicknamed “the Girl Pool” come caroling and Dr. Breed gives them chocolate. It is explained that they work in the typing bureau, taking down what scientists dictate to them. Dr Breed’s remark that “they serve science too, even though they may not understand a word of it” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 27), makes it seem however that the girls do more than just type for the scientists.

↳ - J →

In continuing the tour and interview, Dr. Breed explains to John the purpose of their work and of science in general, which is to uncover truth, because “the more truth we have to work with, the richer we become” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 29). If we look at the novel *Cat’s Cradle* as a whole, this statement comes off as ridiculous.

↳ - J →

Dr. Breed then begins to tell John about the last days of Dr. Hoenikker’s life and about one particular project he was given. Thus, the reader is transported once again to NL_{-1a}. The project in question was brought to Felix’s attention by a US Marine General, and the task was for Dr.

Hoemaker to create something that would take care of mud, since “the Marines, after almost two hundred years of wallowing in mud, were sick of it” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 30).

↪ - J →

With this in mind Dr. Breed presents the narrator with the theory of *ice-nine*, Felix’s invention, which would turn anything that contains water into ice at room temperature, thus allowing the marines “to rise from the swamp and march on!” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 34).

↪ - J →

After this scene, we return to NL₀ and John points out that, while he was talking to Dr. Breed, the Hoemaker children already had “seeds grown from their father’s seed” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 37), this being a double entendre.

↪ - P →

After leaving Dr. Breed’s office, the narrator is taken by his secretary Mss. Faust to Felix’s laboratory, where it is pointed out that Dr. Hoemaker preferred cheap children’s toys to expensive lab equipment, and that indeed “there were numerous pieces of conventional laboratory equipment, too, but they seemed drab accessories to the cheap toys” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 40).

↪ - J →

Mss. Faust also remarks how strange Felix was, and that, like his children, he was “as different as a man from Mars” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 41).

↪ - J →

John and Mss. Faust then move on and encounter the elevator conductor Knowles, who points out that scientific research is redundant, because scientists conduct research and “re-search means look again, don’t it? Means they’re looking for something they found once and it got away somehow, and now they got to re-search for it!” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 42).

↪ - P →

After leaving the research facility, John goes to the cemetery where Dr. Hoenikker is buried. He sees a massive headstone and considers the monument worthy of such a great man, only to find that “there on the shaft in letters six inches high was the word MOTHER” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 43).

↳ - P →

He leaves the gravesites, but his taxi driver asks if they could stop at the tombstone salesroom, which happens to be owned by Dr. Breed’s brother. The coincidence here implies that they both deal with death.

↳ - J →

Surprised by the coincidence, John points out what a small world this is, to which the undertaker answers that “when you put it in a cemetery, it is” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 46): ↳ - P →

Their conversation continues and soon focuses on a beautiful Angel bust that was ordered long ago by a German immigrant who never came to pay. Again, by some coincidence, the name of the German is the narrator’s name.

↳ - P →

John’s last visit in Ilium is to Jack’s Hobby shop, where Frank Hoenikker, the eldest son, had worked years before as a boy, and where the owner Jack has nothing but praise for Frank and describes him as a genius. After this, the narrator returns home to New York. He finds his apartment ruined by a nihilist named Mr Krebbs. Although the destruction is great, John’s only conclusion was that his friend helped steer him away from nihilism, remarking “well done Mr. Krebbs, well done” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 56).

↳ - J →

Sometime later, the narrator is assigned to do a piece about Julian Castle, a millionaire who created a clinic on the island of San Lorenzo. Thus NL_{1b} is introduced, and a first comment about the island’s history, which the narrator reads in a book, is that “sports fishermen recognize San Lorenzo as the unchallenged barracuda capital of the world” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 58), an observation that is as much a praise as it is a criticism.

↳ - J →

John's research on the history of the island also leads him to an essay written by Frank Hoenikker, who turns out to be Major General there. In his essay, he describes how he nearly drowned in shark-filled waters when he saw the peak of San Lorenzo's one mountain and wondered whether it was in fact Fata Morgana. Looking up Fata Morgana, the narrator finds out that it is "a mirage named after Morgan le Fey, a fairy who lived at the bottom of a lake" and concludes that it "was poetic crap, in short" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 59).

↳ - P →

On the plane to San Lorenzo John meets Newt Hoenikker and his sister Angela Hoenikker, the eldest child, together with the US ambassador to San Lorenzo Horlick Minton with his wife and H. Lowe Crosby and his wife. The last couple are moving their bicycle factory to San Lorenzo because "the people down there are poor enough and scared enough and ignorant enough to have some common sense" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 64).

↳ - J →

John and the Crosby's talk about all sorts of things, including the couple's trip to a wax museum, where children looked at horrible scenes of torture and then "just moved on to see what the next thing was" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 68).

↳ - J →

The narrator then returns to his seat and talks to the Mintons again, who explain that the ambassador was fired from his last position because his wife published a letter criticizing American views on the rest of the world and because "the highest possible form of treason is to say that Americans aren't loved wherever they go, whatever they do" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 70).

↳ - J →

The Mintons give John a sort of history book written by Philip Castle (Julian Castle's son) about San Lorenzo, through which the narrator glides back into NL_{1b}. His eyes fall on a quote written by the famous local prophet Bokonon who mocks Jesus' statement regarding giving Caesar what

is due him, by advising people to not “pay attention to Caesar. Caesar doesn’t have the slightest idea what’s *really* going on” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 72).

↳ - P →

John continues to read Philip’s book, focusing on the life of Bokonon and his remark that he went from scoundrel to saint, like St. Augustine (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 74).

↳ - J →

The prophet became a saint by crash landing on San Lorenzo, together with one Corporal McCabe, an event which he describes by comparing himself to a fish evolving into a mammal: “A fish pitched up / By the angry sea / I gasped on land / And became me” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 76).

↳ - J →

The narrator’s reading of Bokonon’s life is interrupted by Hazel Crosby, who tells him that she’s met Angela Hoenikker and Newt Hoenikker, the latter of which is a midget, but “he’s a nice midget though, a smart little thing” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 72).

↳ - J →

John goes to talk to the Hoenikker children. In their conversation, Angela reveals that she is married to a man who had come to her house to ask about her father and who had taken her as his wife just two weeks later. Considering the fact that Angela is described as being a “horse-faced platinum blonde” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 79), while her husband Harrison as “a strikingly handsome man” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 83), it is fairly obvious (and later stated) that the latter married Angela so as to obtain her fragment of *ice-nine*, since, initially, each of the three Hoenikker children had one. Thus, Angela’s great love in fact used her.

↳ - J →

Upon returning to his seat, the narrator takes up Philip Castle’s book again and looks in the index to find information on Mona Aamons Monzano, a beautiful San Lorenzo native that John has instantly fallen in love with, but who is promised to Frank. The index, however, is a mess, which

starts a conversation between him and Mrs. Minton, who apparently is a professional indexer. Since Philip indexed his own book, she claims that she can create a character profile of the man just by looking at the index he created. Thus, upon inspection of the text, Mrs. Minton concludes that Philip Castle is a homosexual.

↳ - J →

Shortly after, the narrator continues his presentation of the history of San Lorenzo. He tells us that the sugar company that had originally made Julian Castle a millionaire before he started up his hospital, was set up by his grandfather and that at the time Castle Sugar owned every piece of arable land on the island. In the area dominated by the Castle's, a feudalistic system existed where "the nobility consisted of Castle Sugar's plantation bosses, and [...] the knighthood was composed of big natives who, for small gifts and silly privileges, would kill or would torture on command" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 89). Though called a feudal system, the analogy between nobility and bosses, between knights and hired thugs makes it all seem like a mafia ring.

↳ - J →

Everything that was not part of the Castle plantations was severely underdeveloped, which is why, when Bokonon and his partner Corporal McCabe arrived on San Lorenzo, they found an island which "God, in His Infinite Wisdom, had made worthless" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 89).

↳ - P →

John's reading is interrupted again by Newt Hoenikker, who invites him to the bar for some drinks. At the bar, Crosby talks to them about what he calls *pissants*, which he describes as someone who "does his best to make you feel like a boob all the time" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 93). Given the way Crosby is portrayed as a character, it is clear that he is in fact portraying himself.

↳ - J →

Their conversation is cut short as the plane prepares to land. On the ground, all the passengers are greeted by a silent band and a destitute San Lorenzo population. The reality of their condition falls in stark contrast to the utopian image created by news papers which portrayed the island as a place where everyone was happy and full of life.

↳ - J →

This contrast is enforced by the anthem that everyone begins to sing upon the arrival of their leader ‘Papa’ Monzano, an anthem which speaks of a land “where the living is grand” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 93).

↳ - J →

During the procedures, Mr. Minton, as the new US ambassador to San Lorenzo, gives a speech in which he “told a whopping lie, that there is not an American schoolchild who does not know the story of San Lorenzo’s noble sacrifice in World War Two” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 102), referring to the so-called Hundred Martyrs to Democracy, whose “ship was sunk by a German submarine right outside of Bolivar harbor” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 106), which is the island’s port.

↳ - J →

↳ - P →

During his speech, ‘Papa’ Monzano feints and is taken away by an ambulance. Despite all the commotion that is befitting the sudden collapse of the country’s leader, the narrator notices how Mona is preoccupied with having a sexual-like encounter with a pilot, where Mona was “obscenely kneading the instep of the flyer’s boot” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 104).

↳ - J →

The narrator and the Crosby’s go to their hotel and find out that they are the establishment’s first guests. Shortly after though, the Crosby’s are insulted by Philip Castle who is making a mosaic portrait. The narrator walks up to Philip and tells him how he envies the man, to which the latter answers that he “always knew that if [he] waited long enough someone would come and envy [him]” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 107).

↳ - P →

The two strike up a conversation in which John admires the mosaic and claims that he could never forget the image. To that Philip tells him that “you’ll forget it when you’re dead. When

I'm dead I'll forget everything – and I'll advise you to do the same” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 108), as though remembering or forgetting something in death were a voluntary act.

↳ - J →

Philip asks John if he's a drug salesman and the latter says that, no, he's a writer, to which the former tells him that they are one and the same thing.

↳ - P →

Mr. Crosby comes over and tries to start up an argument with Philip, but only becomes angrier. Storming off, he goes to the hotel counter and demands that Philip be thrown out, to which the desk clerk informs him that the latter owns the establishment. As a result the Crosby's leave.

↳ - P →

John goes to his room and is later joined by Phillip, who has come to do some maintenance work. They strike up another conversation in which Philip recalls the time when he was growing up in his father's hospital and Julian was dealing with an outbreak of the plague. One day, while standing before the piles of dead bodies that had been gathered up using bulldozers, his father laughed, turned to Phillip and said “son, someday this will all be yours” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 116).

↳ - P →

The phone rings. At the other end is Frank Hoenikker, who invites John to his estate. Upon arrival, the narrator meets there with Newt, Angela and the famous Julian Castle. They talk and Julian declares that Jesus Christ is his hero, but then he also agrees with the message portrayed in Newt's painting, which is that everything in life is meaningless. When Angela confronts Julian with the discrepancy between his two claims, the latter shrugs and says that “people have to talk about something just to keep their voice boxes in working order” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 120).

↳ - J →

With that said, and without any other warning, Julian takes Newt's painting and throws it off the terrace and into the ravine below. After a moment of silence, Angela turns to her brother and

tells him that “you’ve got paint all over your face, honey. Go wash it off.” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 121).

↳ - J →

After this, the narrator resumes conversing with Julian and their talks lead back to the history of San Lorenzo and the deal that Bokonon and McCabe made in order to create their perfect society. The arrangement was that the former would become a religious icon, while the latter became the dictator who outlawed Bokononism. The result is that periodically the citizens pretend to hunt Bokonon (even though everyone on the island is a Bokononist), only to realize that the man “had done the impossible. He had escaped, had evaporated, had lived to preach another day. Miracle!” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 124).

↳ - J →

The narrator then asks Julian what he thinks has become of Newt’s painting, to which he replies that at the bottom of the ravine is a waterfall and then a bowl where the villagers have a net placed. And since “this is a poor country, nothing stays in the net very long. Newt’s painting is being dried in the sun by now, along with the butt of my cigar” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 127).

↳ - J →

Although he doesn’t show up for dinner, Frank calls to say that everyone must remain at his estate and that ‘Papa’ Monzano is dying. Julian tells them that it’s cancer, which begins a conversation on the disease. When Angela sarcastically comments that the discussion is “cheerful”, Julian answers that “everybody would agree that these are cheerful times” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 132).

↳ - P →

As he is not ‘Papa’ Monzano’s physician, Julian mentions that the man is being taken care of by Dr. Schlichter von Koenigswald, a former Nazi doctor who practiced at Auschwitz and is now helping people. At the rate he’s going, “working day and night, the number of people he’s saved will equal the number of people he let die – in the year 3010” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 133).

↳ - P →

A few hours go by, night falls and a convoy appears at the mansion with orders to protect the next president of San Lorenzo. A moment later “there was a power failure. Every electric light in San Lorenzo went out” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 134), as if the news of a new president heralds the coming of the end.

↳ - J →

Once oil lanterns are set up throughout the house, the narrator excuses himself and goes to the majordomo to ask for a copy of *The Book of Bokonon*, which would be this religion’s version of a Bible. The latter becomes upset and tells John that “anyone who read it should die on the hook. And then he brought him a copy from Frank’s bedside table” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 136).

↳ - J →

While reading, John falls asleep, only to be awakened by loud noises. Frank Hoenikker has returned and, after taking him into a secret den dug into the rock underneath his mansion, he asks the narrator if he doesn’t want to be the next President of San Lorenzo. After refusing the position several times, John begins to laugh and Frank asks him if the former is laughing at him. The narrator assures him otherwise, to which Frank explains that many kids teased him when he was a little boy. They probably wouldn’t have done so had they known that he was “screwing Jack’s wife every day” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 143).

↳ - J →

Returning to the subject of John’s being made President, the narrator confesses his doubts as to whether the citizens of San Lorenzo would elect him. Frank responds by saying that “nobody objects to anything. They aren’t interested. They don’t care” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 144). This statement is understood to be as much about the San Lorenzians as about people in general, even Americans.

↳ - J →

The only catch is that, in order to become the new ruler of San Lorenzo, John would have to marry Mona. Once he’s given the narrator this condition, Frank brings Mona in and then leaves. The latter confirms the fact that she comes with the presidential package, which leaves John

nearly speechless. In order to calm him down, she proposes that they engage in *boko-maru*, the pseudo-sexual toe-mingling activity that the narrator had seen her do with the pilot before. He agrees and, shortly after, describes himself as being in complete ecstasy.

↳ - J →

After their encounter, John demands that, once married to him, Mona only performs *book-maru* with him, but this is against her Bokononist faith. After an argument in which Mona almost calls the marriage off, the narrator finally gives in and even asks if he can become a Bokononist. This immediately reconciles the pair. The precise wording of this reconciliation is important, since the overly superficial style of the exchange effectively creates a jab-line. The important lines begin as Mona is about to leave:

“ ‘Good-bye, man-with-no-religion.’ She went to the stone staircase.
‘Mona...’
She stopped. ‘Yes?’
‘Could I have your religion, if I wanted it?’
‘Of course.’
‘I want it.’
‘Good. I love you.’
‘And I love you,’ I sighed.”

(Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 150).

The simplicity behind the switch between ‘good-bye’ and ‘I love you’ due merely to the narrator’s verbal acknowledgement of his desire to become a Bokononist makes the affection as authentic within the lies of the faith as it is false in reality.

↳ - J →

The narrator thus accepts to become the next president of San Lorenzo. Together with the Hoenikker brothers and Mona, he goes to ‘Papa’ Monzano’s castle. It is described as a monumental structure whose building would be something for the island to be proud of if it weren’t for the fact that the castle was built through “dumb terror” and “according to the wish of Tum-bumwa, Emperor of San Lorenzo, a demented man, an escaped slave” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 152).

↳ - J →

Frank and John enter the castle and go to ‘Papa’ Monzano’s deathbed. There, the dying leader gives the narrator his blessing and urges him to finally kill Bokonon, because the religious man teaches people only lies, whereas what people should be taught is scientific truth, since “science is magic that *works*” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 156). The problem with this last statement is that science in itself can either be seen as *working*, in which case it is entrancingly not magic, or it is *magic*, in which case it doesn’t really work.

↳ - J →

Since ‘Papa’ Monzano is a Bokononist, he is given the last rites that are appropriate to his religion. The sermon, however, comes off as a mock version of Christian doctrine, in which “God made mud” and then “got lonesome”, so he told the mud to sit up and ‘Papa’ “was some of the mud that got up. [...] Lucky me, lucky mud” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 158).

↳ - J →

Leaving the dying dictator’s bedside, John prepares a speech to be read by him at his inauguration. He puts the speech in his pocket and embraces the thought of his future power. Thus he “mounted the spiral staircase in [his] tower. [He] arrived at the uppermost battlement of my castle, and I looked out at my guests, my servants, my cliff, and my lukewarm sea” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 162). The guests have no idea that ‘Papa’ is dying and it is clear that they are there for him, not for John’s sake. This delusional thinking on behalf of the narrator is rendered absurd by his belief that the sea, or even the cliff, somehow belong to him now.

↳ - J →

John goes down to mingle with the guests and stops at Mr. Crosby. The latter enthusiastically points to a set of cardboard cut-outs placed out at sea, which are to be blown up by fighter jets, as part of a military demonstration. The cut-outs are made to look like various international leaders which are known enemies of America, and Mr. Crosby exclaims how they’re “gonna get it”, that they’re “gonna get the surprise of their lives” (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 162), as if the figures were real people.

↳ - J →

Leaving Crosby's side, John walks up to the Castles, and Philip proposes that all writers go on strike until society comes to its senses. Unsure, the narrator turns to Julian and asks him what the effects of such a strike would be, to which the latter tells him that everyone would suffer from putrescence of the heart and atrophy of the nervous system" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 166) and begs them to never stop writing. The implication is that, somehow, writers are as much artists as they are saviors.

↳ - J →

Philip Castle and the narrator begin to talk about the potential industrialization of San Lorenzo. The former explains that "there's only one aspect of progress that really excites [the people]" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 168), and that is the electric guitar. Such an interest is, of course, absurd, considering the status of the average citizen.

↳ - P →

John suddenly feels ill from the food and reenters the castle, eventually reaching an area close to 'Papa' Monzano's bedroom. There, he encounters Dr. von Koenigwald, the standing physician. The latter is scared to death and asks John to come in. Thus it happens that the narrator sees 'Papa' petrified, turned to ice, and still holding the cylinder that previously contained Frank's piece of *ice-nine*. Koenigwald tells the narrator what happened moments before the dictator's death and, while doing so, he puts his hands inside a water bowl. The water freezes and then he does so as well, shattering to pieces when he collapses. Terrified, John yells out and guards, servants and eventually the Hoenikker brothers come. After much debate, it is finally decided to clean everything up and pretend that nothing interesting has happened. As a comment to this decision, the narrator recalls one of the Calypso's in *The Book of Boknon* entitled 'What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?' and which "consists of one word and a period. This is it: Nothing" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 175).

↳ - P →

During the clean-up, the Hoenikker brothers recall how they got their hands on *ice-nine*. They explain that, on the night that their father died, he had the substance on him. There were also

several puddles on the floor of the kitchen, where Felix had had fun experimenting with his deadly invention. Although it looked just like water, Newt realized easily enough that it was something else after his dog licked the substance and died. The three children are described to have cleaned up the mess created by their father's experiment with the same ease with which they now describe the event and to this the narrator points out to the reader another one of Bokonon's remarks: "History! Read it and weep" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 180), in stark contradiction to the common notion that one should know history so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

↳ - J →

As the ceremonies commence, the Heonikkers and the narrator agree to leave the body of 'Papa' where it is and then return to finish cleaning later on. As it so happens, however, while everybody is outside enjoying the spectacle, one of the fighter jets crashes into the castle and 'Papa' Monzano's body is thrown into the sea. Thus, the water freezes, violent weather phenomena start to occur, signaling the beginning of the end. Before violent tornadoes ripping through the island, "only H. Lowe Crosby and his Hazel cried out 'American! American!'" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 187) as if such a citizenship would matter to the elements.

↳ - J →

In the meantime, John grabs a hold of Mona and takes her down into a bomb shelter. The facility is a safe place and has everything they need to survive. In a calm tone, as if it were perfectly natural for them to be there, the narrator turns to Mona, spreads his hands and says "Here we are" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 188).

↳ - P →

While in the shelter, having not much else to say, John tells Mona the simple scientific fact that man inhales oxygen and exhales carbon dioxide. Mona, who had been completely oblivious to this information, accepts the narrator's scientific truth as something unimportant, which, under the circumstances, it is.

↳ - J →

The two emerge days later from their home to find that the world has turned to ice. After scouting around, they eventually stumble across a mass grave and a message which explains how the people there followed the advice of their spiritual leader Bokonon and committed suicide. The message is, however, written and signed by the holy man, which implies that, while giving the others the advice to place the deadly blue substance on their lips, he himself did not do so.

↳ - P →

Upon seeing the bodies and the message, Mona decides to join her people and kills herself. Shortly after, a taxi shows up and inside are Frank, Newt and the Crosby's. The narrator describes how the group of survivors have begun to live their lives and how the Castle's died while heading back to Julian's hospital on foot. John tells Newt how much he admires the two for braving the trek, to which the latter replies that "maybe you can find a neat way to die, too" (Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 204).

↳ - P →

The two continue to talk, until Newt spots Bokonon himself. The two head over to him and find that the holy man is busy writing what is to be the final sentences in *The Book of Bokonon*, which, up until now, was a continuous work in progress. The words he has written are:

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

(Vonnegut 1963[2011], p 206)

↳ - P →

Thus the novel ends in a punch line that belongs as much to Bokonon's text as, perhaps, to *Cat's Cradle* as a whole.

Attachment 2: Knowledge resource elaboration of humorous fragments of text in *Cat's Cradle*

P3: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO authentic sermon/mock sermon

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA Bokomonism, religion

NS poem

LA irr

P9: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO father/monster

LM exaggeration

SI Felix playing with his son Newt

TA Felix

NS expository text

LA irr

P10: [\mapsto - P \rightarrow]

SO thanking wife/tipping waitress

LM reasoning from faulty premises

SI serving

TA Felix, wife (?)

NS Q/A

LA irr

P11: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal reaction/distant reaction

LM ignoring the obvious

SI cotext

TA Felix

NS expository text

LA irr

P13: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO rational reaction/absurd reaction

LM ignoring the obvious

SI cotext

TA Felix

NS question

LA irr

P14: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO expected age/real age

LM missing link

SI discovery after relationship

TA Newt, Zinka (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P15: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO possible assignment/impossible assignment

LM exaggeration

SI supervision

TA Dr. Breed, Felix (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P16: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO serious conversation/drunken conversation

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA narrator, Sandra

NS expository text

LA irr

P18: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO significant find/irrelevant find

LM reasoning from faulty premises

SI cotext

TA humanity, society

NS conversation

LA irr

P20: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO plausible/implausible status of a soul

LM analogy

SI cotext

TA narrator

NS expository text

LA irr

P21: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO life improving research/hangings

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA research (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P25: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO science as explainable/science as mystery, intelligence/stupidity

LM self-undermining

SI cotext

TA science, common man

NS conversation

LA irr

P27: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO scientific work/prostitution

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA Girl pool

NS expository text

LA irr

P29: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO truth is wealth/truth is worthless

LM reasoning from faulty premises

SI cotext

TA science

NS expository text

LA irr

P30: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO valuable research/petty research

LM missing link

SI science project

TA science

NS expository text

LA irr

P34: ↔ - J →

SO valid national pride/outrageous national pride

LM exaggeration

SI marching

TA nationalism

NS Q/A

LA irr

P37: ↔ - P →

SO ice-nine seed/semen

LM analogy

SI cotext

TA research (?), the Hoenikker children

NS expository text

LA irr

P40: ↔ - J →

SO advanced tools/ cheap toys

LM parallelism

SI Felix's lab

TA Felix

NS expository text

LA irr

P41: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal/alien

LM analogy

SI cotext

TA Felix, the Hoenikker children

NS conversation

LA irr

P42: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO discovery/rediscovery or linear progress/circular redundancy

LM reasoning from false premises

SI cotext

TA scientific research

NS Q/A

LA irr

P43: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO monument to great man/monument to great man's wife

LM role exchanges

SI Felix's gravesite

TA Felix

NS expository text

LA irr

P45: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO scientific progress/death

LM coincidence

SI funeral parlor

TA science (?)

NS Q/A

LA irr

P46: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO world of the living/world of the death

LM parallelism

SI funeral parlor

TA life

NS conversation

LA irr

P52: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO plausible/implausible circumstances

LM coincidence

Si cotext

TA narrator

NS expository text

LA irr

P56: ↔ - J →

SO harm/help

LM parallelism

SI narrator's apartment

TA narrator

NS expository text

LA irr

P58: ↔ - J →

SO barracuda as fish/barracuda as dictator

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA San Lorenzo

NS expository text

LA irr

P59: ↔ - P →

SO fabled mirage/poetic crap

LM vacuous reversal

SI cotext

TA Fata Morgana (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P64: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO common sense/ignorance

LM reasoning from false premises

SI San Lorenzo population

TA poverty (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P68: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO innocent reaction/apathetic reaction

LM ignoring the obvious

SI wax museum

TA humanity

NS expository text

LA irr

P70: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO patriotism/fanaticism

LM reasoning from false premises

SI cotext

TA American belief system

NS expository text

LA irr

P72: ↔ - P →

SO divinity/false profit

LM vacuous reversal

SI sermon

TA religion, Jesus (?)

NS expository text

LA quotation

P74: ↔ - J →

SO sainthood/depravity

LM parallelism

SI Bokonon's education

TA saints

NS poem

LA irr

P76: ↔ - J →

SO survival/evolution

LM analogy

SI washing up on island

TA Bokonon

NS poem

LA irr

P79: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO appreciation/mistrust

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA Hazel

NS expository text

LA irr

P84: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO love/use

LM missing link

SI Angela's marriage

TA Angela

NS expository text

LA irr

P87: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO sensible reasoning/outrageous reasoning

LM reasoning from false premises

SI Mrs. Minton's reading of Castle's index

TA Mrs. Minton

NS Q/A

LA irr

P89: ↔ - J →

SO kingdom/mafia

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA Castle Inc, San Lorenzo

NS expository text

LA irr

P89: ↔ - P →

SO divine plan/divine stupidity

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA San Lorenzo, God

NS expository text

LA irr

P93: ↔ - J →

SO critic/self-criticism

LM ignoring the obvious

SI cotext

TA Crosby

NS conversation

LA irr

P97: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO utopia/dystopia

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA San Lorenzo population

NS first half of adjacency pair

LA irr

P99: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO utopia/dystopia

LM ignoring the obvious

SI cotext

TA San Lorenzo population

NS second half of adjacency pair, poem

LA irr

P102: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO heroes/fools

LM exaggeration

SI cotext

TA Hundred Martyrs for Democracy

NS first half of adjacency pair

LA irr

P104: ↔ - J →

SO appropriate reaction/inappropriate reaction

LM vacuous reversal

SI stroke

TA Mona

NS expository text

LA irr

P106: ↔ - P →

SO heroes/fools

LM exaggeration

SI cotext

TA Hundred Martyrs for Democracy

NS second half of adjacency pair

LA irr

P107: ↔ - P →

SO real expectation/false expectation

LM vacuous reversal

SI cotext

TA Philip Castle, people (?)

NS conversation

LA irr

P108: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO voluntary/involuntary obliviousness in death

LM reasoning from false premises

SI eventual death

TA person dead (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P109: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO writer/drug dealer or art/drugs

LM analogy

SI cotext

TA art

NS conversation

LA irr

P110: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO vagrant/proprietor

LM vacuous reversal

SI cotext

TA Crosby, Philip

NS conversation

LA irr

P116: \leftrightarrow - P \rightarrow

SO wealth inheritance/horrid inheritance

LM reasoning from false premises

SI plague

TA Philip Castle

NS expository text

LA irr

P120: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO meaningful talk/pointless talk

LM vacuous reversal

SI cotext

TA humanity, society

NS expository text

LA irr

P121: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal reaction

LM ignoring the obvious

SI cotext

TA Angela

NS expository text

LA irr

P124: ↔ - J →

SO authentic chase/mock chase

LM missing link

SI manhunt

TA Bokonon (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P127: ↔ - J →

SO value/worthless or art/junk

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA San Lorenzo, Newt (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P132: ↔ - P →

SO cheerful/sorrowful

LM referential ambiguity

SI cotext

TA society

NS conversation

LA irr

P133: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO realistic/impossible repent

LM exaggeration

SI medicine (?)

TA Dr. Schlichter von Koenigswald

NS expository text

LA irr

P134: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO power outage/apocalypse

LM exaggeration

SI cotext

TA San Lorenzo

NS expository text

LA irr

P136: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO indignation/false indignation

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA Stanley, San Lorenzians (?)

NS Q/A

LA irr

P143: ↔ - J →

SO faithful apprentice/cheater

LM inferring consequences

SI cotext

TA Frank, Jack (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P144: ↔ - J →

SO active citizens/ignorant citizens

LM ignoring the obvious

SI elections

TA San Lorenzians, Americans (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P146: ↔ - J →

SO realistic/unrealistic sexual encounter

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA narrator, boko-maru (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P150: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO real love/false love (?)

LM reasoning from false premises

SI relationship (?)

TA narrator, Mona

NS conversation

LA irr

P152: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO historical achievement/tyrannical endeavor

LM reasoning from false premises

SI building of castle

TA San Lorenzo, great monuments

NS Q/A

LA irr

P156: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO truth/illusion

LM reasoning from false premises

SI cotext

TA science (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P158: ↔ - J →

SO sermon/mock sermon

LM implicit parallelism

SI deathbed

TA religion

NS sermon

LA irr

P162: ↔ - J →

SO possible/absurd leadership

LM exaggeration

SI cotext

TA narrator

NS expository text

LA irr

P164: ↔ - J →

SO vengeance on America's enemies/vengeance on fake targets

LM ignoring the obvious

SI ceremony

TA American nationalism (?)

NS expository text

LA irr

P166: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO writer/savior

LM reasoning from false premises

SI cotext

TA writers, society (?)

NS Q/A

LA irr

P175: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO hope/despair

LM ignoring the obvious

SI cotext

TA history, humanity

NS Q/A

LA irr

P180: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO history as educational/history as horror

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA humanity, society

NS expository text

LA irr

P187: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO American invincibility/foolish frailty

LM reasoning from false premises

SI tornado attack

TA Crosby and wife

NS expository text

LA irr

P188: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO pleasant environment/horrid environment

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA narrator, world (?)

NS conversation

LA irr

P192: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO importance/irrelevancy of scientific knowledge

LM vacuous reversal

SI post-apocalypse

TA science

NS conversation

LA irr

P195: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO preaching/doing

LM implicit parallelism

SI mass suicide

TA man, religion

NS expository text

LA irr

P204: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO good way to die/no good way to die

LM implicit parallelism

SI Angela's death

TA narrator (?)

NS conversation

LA irr

P206: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO modest affirmation/bold affirmation

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA Bokonon, humanity

NS expository text

LA irr

Attachment 3: Humorous fragments of text in *Slaughterhouse Five*

The first narrative then begins (as most of Kurt Vonnegut's works do) with the mock-author addressing the reader. The very first line – “All this happened, more or less” (Vonnegut 1969:1) is in fact a pun on the mixture of fact and fiction that is one of the characteristics of *Slaughterhouse Five* as a whole.

↳ - J →

The author then continues by presenting how he and his friend Bernard V. O'Hare took a trip back to Dresden after the war. There they met a cab driver named Gerhard Muller, who, by some coincidence, had been a prisoner of war for the Americans.

↳ - J →

The mock-author continues by commenting briefly on his experience as a prisoner of war, noting “how useless the Dresden part of my memory has been” (Vonnegut 1969:2), even though, in the novel he writes, it in fact occupies the central setting, where the slaughterhouse that gives the novel its title is located.

↳ - J →

What follows is a quick overview of the mock-author's difficulties when writing his book about Dresden. These are rendered through a song, which both characterizes the apparent circular nature of his struggles and the circular nature of the second narrative.

“My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin,
I work in a lumbermill there.
The people I meet when I walk down the street,
They say, "What's your name?
And I say,
'My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin . . .’ “

(Vonnegut 1969:3)

↳ - J →

The mock-author then moves to more concrete details of some events that took place while he was working on his novel. He explains that he would sometimes get drunk and “drive [his] wife

away with a breath of mustard gas and roses” (Vonnegut 1969:4), which is an absurd combination.

↳ - P →

In such a state he calls up his war buddy O’Hare. He had been his friend in the war and compares the two of them to the comic duo Mutt and Jeff.

↳ - P →

On the phone, he tells Bernard that the climax of the story he is working on will center on how “a whole city gets burned down, and thousands and thousands of people are killed. And then this one American foot soldier is arrested in the ruins for stealing a teapot. He’s given a regular trial, and then he’s shot by a firing squad” (Vonnegut 1969:5). The script opposition here has to do with the circumstances in which the thief is shot.

↳ - P →

The mock-author continues to comment on his process of artistic creation by comparing himself as a writer to “a trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue” (ibid), as if he were a drug dealer.

↳ - J →

He tells the reader that “the best outline [he] ever made [...] was on the back of a roll of wallpaper” (ibid), an outline that consists of various differently-colored lines that intersect. Given the futility of rendering an outline to a work of fiction in such an abstract form and the fact that *Slaughterhouse Five* looks nothing like what the outline supposedly presents, this is obviously a pun on the usefulness of making outlines in general.

↳ - J →

The mock-author then begins to talk a bit about his experiences, more precisely about the aftermath, when the freed prisoners were being transported out of the camps. He explains how he was standing next to a stupid Englishman with no teeth, who had taken as a souvenir a plaster

model of the Eiffel Tower. The Englishman describes it as “a smashin’ thing” (Vonnegut 1969:6). Given the ordeals that they supposedly went through, such a souvenir is preposterous.

↳ - J →

After getting home, he took a job as a reporter. One of his jobs was to phone in reports to writers and he notes that “the very toughest reporters and writers were women who had taken over the jobs of men who’d gone to war” (Vonnegut 1969:8). Contrary to the common perception of the time, the women employees are then tougher than the members of what was then still considered the stronger sex.

↳ - J →

A few weeks after phoning Bernard V. O’Hare, the mock-author goes to visit him. He takes his daughter and her best friend with him and explains how “when we saw a river, we had to stop so they could stand by it and think about it for a while” (Vonnegut 1969:11), as if one’s normal reaction when standing before a river was to *think about it*, not admire the scenery.

↳ - P →

When they arrive at Bernard’s house, the mock-author imagines “two leather chairs near a fire in a paneled room” (Vonnegut 1969:13), a setting that captures romantic notions of veterans of war reminiscing about what they went through as brothers in arms. Instead, Mary, Bernard’s wife, takes the two in the kitchen, where they sit on “two straight-backed chairs at a kitchen table with a white porcelain top” (ibid).

↳ - J →

Their discussion is hampered by Mary’s obvious irritation. Finally, when the mock-writer insists on finding out why she is so upset, she tells him that they were babies then but that she’s sure he’ll portray himself and Bernard as having been men, men who will be played in movies by “Frank Sinatra and John Wayne or some of those other glamorous, war-loving, dirty old men” (Vonnegut 1969:14). The pun here involves both the discrepancy between the crude reality of war and the fantastic way in which Hollywood portrays it, as well as the discrepancy between the

glamorous nature of the actor's fame and image and Mary's choice to characterize them as *dirty old men*.

↳ - J →

The mock-author assures Mary that his novel will be nothing like that and the two go on talking. After the visit, he and the girls go to the New York World's Fair and see "what the past had been like according to the Ford Motor Car Company and Walt Disney, saw what the future would be like, according to General Motors" (Vonnegut 1969:18), as if companies decided what the past and the future looked like and would look like, not historians and human society as a whole.

↳ - P →

The novel returns to his post-war trip to Dresden with Bernard, the mock-author explains how, on his way back to the US, he was forced to land in Boston instead of Philadelphia, and so had a night to wait in a hotel. He describes the seconds and minutes that night as having passed too slowly, but that "as an Earthling [he] had to believe whatever clocks said – and calendars" (Vonnegut 1969:20). The pun is that clocks and calendars are said to be based on a scientific, factual representation of time, but in fact they are simply a human invention, as is *time* in general.

↳ - J →

His last words involve once again the process of writing his novel. The mock-author remembers reading the section of the Bible on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, focusing on Lot's wife, who was told not to look back "but she did look back, and [he] loves her for that, because it was so human. So she was turned into a pillar of salt" (Vonnegut 1969:22). The woman's act, considered religiously as condemnable, is here then seen as praiseworthy.

↳ - J →

He continues by pointing out that he's finished his book and that "the next one will be fun" (Vonnegut 1969:22). The implication here that the novel is not fun runs in contradiction with the fact that *Slaughterhouse Five* is a humorous text.

↳ - P →

He also explains that the novel is a failure. Again, this is in contradiction with the fact that *Slaughterhouse Five* is Vonnegut's most successful work, although he certainly could not have known this would be the case. Still, it is also atypical for a writer to proclaim his text a failure from the get go.

↳ - J →

With Chapter Two the story of Billy Pilgrim begins. The first paragraph describes how “Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time. Billy has gone to sleep a senile old widower and awakened on his wedding day [...] He has seen his birth and death many times, and pays random visits to all the events in between” (Vonnegut 1969:23). Contrary to typical approaches in literature where the narrator suggests or gives hints regarding what is happening to the protagonist, like clues, here the events are plainly provided.

↳ - J →

What follows is a description of the protagonist and his past. Billy is thus described as “a funny-looking child who became a funny-looking youth – tall and weak, and shaped like a Coca-Cola bottle” (ibid). The description is odd and unnatural.

↳ - P →

Billy became an optometrist and then was enlisted in the army during World War Two. During his experience in Europe, “his father died in a hunting accident during the war” (Vonnegut 1969:24). Given all the death that occurs in the war, it is ironic that his father should die in such a manner.

↳ - J →

After getting home from the war, Billy got married and had children. His son Robert is described as having been a trouble child in school, but then he joined the Green Berets, “straightened out, became a fine young man, and he fought in Vietnam” (Vonnegut 1969:25). The positive image created by the military's ability to straighten someone out falls in stark contradiction to the horrors of war portrayed later in the novel.

↳ - J →

At one point in time Billy is kidnapped by a race of aliens called Tralfamadorians, who are described as being “two feet high and green, and shaped like plumber’s friends” (Vonnegut 1969:26), the description being wholly ridiculous.

↳ - P →

Later on in his life, after his wife is dead and his children have moved out, Billy tells people over the radio about his abduction experience and about his time travelling. Everyone thinks he’s crazy or has been affected by the plane crash. One day the narrator presents him sitting in his bath robe in the cellar writing again about Tralfamadorians. His daughter and son-in-law come over and find him. The former tries to talk some sense into Billy, but can’t seem to get anywhere. The text explains how “she celebrated frustration by clapping her hands” (Vonnegut 1969:30). The word *celebrated* is used here ironically, as it can mean both that she acts out and that she enjoys it.

↳ - J →

After this the novel shifts to when Billy Pilgrim is in the military during World War II. He is a Chaplain’s Assistant, which is “customarily a figure of fun in the American Army” (ibid). A Chaplain’s Assistant is thus both a pious young man and a fool, at least as far as the US Army is concerned.

↳ - J →

Further ridicule to Billy’s position in the military is provided by the fact that his organ player and the altar that he had to carry with him “were made by a vacuum-cleaner company in Camden, New-Jersey” (Vonnegut 1969:31). Thus, far from having any holy significance, these Christian objects come off as being cheap replicas of what they signify.

↳ - J →

One day, as he is playing a religious melody, news comes that they are all theoretically dead. To this news “the theoretical corpses laughed and ate a healthy noontime meal” (ibid). The joke here could either address the notion of false intelligence reports that circulated during the war or the idea of happy corpses eating well.

↳ - P →

Billy is later given shore leave to attend his father's funeral. Upon returning, he ironically finds himself in a group that "was in the process of being destroyed by the Germans in the famous Battle of the Bulge" (Vonnegut 1969:32).

↳ - J →

Thus it happens that the protagonist ends up behind enemy lines, together with two well-trained scouts and an anti-tank gunner. During their march through the snow, Billy, far from looking as a real soldier, is described as "preposterous, [with] no helmet, no overcoat, no weapons and no boots" (Vonnegut 1969:33). On his feet he has a pair of shoes and he "had lost a heel, which made him bob up-and-down, up-and-down" (ibid).

↳ - J →

After three days of walking, a sniper starts firing at them. The gunner and scouts take cover, but Billy "stood there politely, giving the marksman another change. It was his addled understanding of the rules of warfare that the marksman *should* be given a second chance" (ibid).

↳ - J →

The gunner Roland Weary finally pulls Billy down, thus saving his life. The former is said to have "been saving Billy's life for days, cursing him, kicking him, slapping him, making him move" (Vonnegut 1969:34), actions which are indeed meant to save Billy, while at the same time being ones of abuse.

↳ - P →

Despite acting as if he were a professional, Roland, as the narrator explains, is just as new to war as Billy is. During the battle that destroyed his company, he fired an anti-tank gun at an enemy tank. The weapon "made a ripping sound like the opening of the zipper on the fly of god Almighty" (ibid), as if it were typical to envision God wearing pants.

↳ - P →

Unfortunately he misses and the flame that resulted from the shot “left a black arrow on the ground, showing the Germans exactly where the gun was hidden” (ibid)

↳ - J →

While behind enemy lines, Weary begins explaining to Billy all about various elements of torture. To this the narrator adds that the protagonist already knows a bit about torture from the grotesque crucifix that he had in his room as a child and that Billy’s Christ “died horribly. He was pitiful” (Vonnegut 1969:38). The discrepancy here lies between the referential connotations associated with Jesus Christ which make him out to be a holy savior and the implication that his death was a pitiful one rather than a sacrifice.

↳ - P →

Further description of Roland Weary is given, where the narrator tells us that “he had every piece of equipment he had ever been issued” (Vonnegut 1969:39), to the point where his entire image is a ridiculous one.

↳ - J →

Despite his obvious ineptitudes, Weary believes himself at the same level of military proficiency as the two trained scouts and has a very vivid fantasy of how they formed a team called “The Three Musketeers”, which is of course very far from the truth, since the two scouts were getting ready to abandon him and Billy.

↳ - J →

Billy falls behind and becomes unstuck in time. One of the places he travels to is a party in 1961 where he gets very drunk. Upon leaving the party he gets in his car but can’t find the steering wheel and finally falls asleep there. The narrator explains that “he was in the back seat of his car, which is why he couldn’t find the steering wheel” (Vonnegut 1969:47)

↳ - P →

The next moment, Billy still feels drunk out of his mind, but is in fact back in World War II behind enemy lines, dying. One of the scouts “hung his head, let spit fall from his lips. The other

did the same. They studied the infinitesimal effects of spit on snow and history” (Vonnegut 1969:49). The joke here stems from the association between snow and history (the former something plain and ordinary, the other very complex, at least in human understanding) as well as from the notion that one can spit on history and affect it.

↳ - P →

Feeling abandoned after the scouts leave, Weary begins to beat Billy, whom he considers to blame for their predicament. During the assault the latter starts making convulsive sounds that sound like laughter. Also during the fight German soldiers appear and watch them for a while “filled with a bleary civilian curiosity as to why one American would try to murder another one so far from home, and why the victim should laugh” (Vonnegut 1969:51). This discrepancy between how soldiers behind enemy lines should behave and how these two do is also what makes this fragment humorous.

↳ - J →

At the beginning of Chapter Three the narrator tells the reader that the Germans were in the middle of “the divinely listless loveplay that follows the orgasm of victory. It is called “mopping up” (Vonnegut 1969:52). The humor here lies in the absurd association between war and sex.

↳ - P →

The soldiers are accompanied by a German Sheppard dog which, though it sounds ferocious, “had been shivering. Her tail was between her legs. She had been borrowed that morning from a farmer. She had never been to war before. She had no idea what game was being played. Her name was Princess” (ibid).

↳ - J →

The soldiers themselves are not much better off. A far-cry from any standard image of a soldier, the group consists of “two boys in their early teens” and “two ramshackle old men – droolers as toothless as carp” (ibid).

↳ - J →

One of the soldiers is wearing a pair of golden boots. It is explained that once, when he was polishing his boots, the soldier told another one that if he looks deeply enough into them, he could see Adam and Eve. Coincidentally, and absurdly, when Billy looks at the boots he “saw Adam and Eve in the golden depths. They were naked. They were so innocent, so vulnerable, so eager to behave decently” (Vonnegut 1969:53).

↳ - J →

Next to the man with the golden boots is a young man who, in order to further widen the discrepancy between men at war and the soldiers at hand, is described to be “as beautiful as Eve” (ibid).

↳ - J →

While the prisoners are being rounded up “three inoffensive bangs came from far away. They came from German rifles. The two scouts who had ditched Billy and Weary had just been shot” (Vonnegut 1969:54). The discrepancy here can either be from idea of calling gun shots “inoffensive” or from the irony of the two trained soldiers getting killed while Billy and Weary survive.

↳ - J →

The two captured young men are marched off and eventually meet up with other prisoners of war. During their long trudge “nobody talked. Nobody had any good war stories to tell” (Vonnegut 1969:55) as if this were a cozy situation.

↳ - J →

Billy travels again through time and finds himself in 1967. Although the linear progression of time has become rather irrelevant to him, Billy still asks himself “Where have all the years gone?” (Vonnegut 1969:57)

↳ - P →

More details are then given about Billy’s post-war life. He is an optometrist and in his office he has on the wall a framed prayer which writes:

“GOD GRANT ME
THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT
THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE,
COURAGE
TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN,
AND WISDOM ALWAYS
TO TELL THE
DIFFERENCE”
(Vonnegut 1969:60)

To which the narrator adds in reference to his situation that “among the things Billy Pilgrim could not change were the past, the present and the future” (ibid), which is to say he cannot change a thing.

⇒ - P ⇒

Returning to the war, Billy is presented still on the march. Despite his predicament, Billy appears as a bungling fool who, when face to face with the citizens of a city they were passing through, “had smiles for them all” (Vonnegut 1969:64).

⇒ - J ⇒

Even more absurdly, Billy “beams lovingly at a bright lavender farmhouse that had been spattered with machine-gun bullets” (Vonnegut 1969:65).

⇒ - J ⇒

The prisoners are taken to a train station and kept in boxcars. From time to time another train would pass by which whistled and “the locomotive of Billy Pilgrim’s train whistled back. They were saying, ‘Hello’” (Vonnegut 1969:70). This anthropomorphizing of the locomotives falls in stark contrast to the horrible nature of the trains’ functions.

⇒ - J ⇒

The prisoners themselves receive little food, but when it comes “the humans were quiet and trusting and beautiful. They shared” (ibid). The humorous implication here is found in the idea that their horrible condition actually makes these people into wonderful human beings.

⇒ - J ⇒

Chapter Four begins years later, at Billy's daughter's wedding night. It contains two fragments of text which are humorous do to their referential coincidences to other parts of the text that have to do with the war. First, there is the fact that the boxcars on the train in which Billy is kept as a prisoner of war is black and has an orange stripe on it to distinguish the train from other trains that could be potential targets by Allied airplanes. Coincidentally, Barbara's wedding "had taken place in a gaily striped tent in Billy's backyard. The stripes were black and yellow" (Vonnegut 1969:72).

↳ - J →

The second coincidence is that the bodies of the prisoners who died while waiting for the train to move are described as having the color of ivory and blue on their skin and, on the night of Barbara's wedding Billy steps outside barefoot and "he looked down at his feet. They were ivory and blue" (ibid).

↳ - J →

At this point, the text indirectly reintroduces the mock-author which was present in the beginning of *Slaughterhouse Five*. More precisely, when Billy reenters his house the phone rings. Billy answers and "there was a drunk on the other end. Billy could almost smell his breath – mustard gas and roses" (Vonnegut 1969:73).

↳ - P →

Hanging up, Billy heads into the kitchen and finds a bottle of champagne that had been opened and then stoppered again. Upon opening it, Billy discovers that "it didn't make a pop. The champagne was dead" (ibid), as if the drink had been alive before

↳ - P →

Billy drinks and then goes to watch TV. He watches a war movie apparently in reverse, though a simple play-back could not account for the absurd description where "the American fliers turned in their uniforms. Hitler turned into a baby [...] Everybody turned into a baby and all humanity, without exception, conspired biologically to create two perfect people named Adam and Eve" (Vonnegut 1969:75).

↳ - J →

Eventually the novel returns to the boxcar where Billy is a prisoner. One of the other men inside is a hobo. As a man who lives on the streets, he is expected to have the highest chance of surviving the present harsh conditions and even repeats lines “this ain’t bad. I can be comfortable anywhere” (Vonnegut 1969:79). Yet, “on the ninth day the hobo died” (ibid).

↳ - P →

As the narrator explains, the train eventually leaves and on the tenth day the doors open. Billy has a rather disgusting reaction of soiling himself upon breathing the fresh air. In order to render this scene humorous, the narrator explains how the falling of Billy’s waste is “in accordance with the Third Law of Motion according to Sir Isaac Newton” (Vonnegut 1969:80).

↳ - P →

He is taken to a POW camp where he is made to pick a coat to wear, for the German guards had “the firmly expressed wish that every American without a coat should have one” (Vonnegut 1969:81), as if they were somehow being kind.

↳ - J →

The prisoners are taken to delousing showers, where they are described as being shriveled and weak. Here the narrator makes the exaggeratingly obvious observation that “reproduction was not the main business of the evening” (Vonnegut 1969:84).

↳ - J →

After the shower, Billy is given a coat that is too small for him and which makes him look ridiculous. As such, “the Germans found him to be one of the most screamingly funny things they have seen in World War Two” (Vonnegut 1969:90). The humor here is found not in the way Billy looks but rather in the idea that one would find anything particularly funny in a war such as this one.

↳ - J →

The American prisoners are taken to a part of the camp where a group of British officers have been kept since the beginning of the war. By some fluke the Red Cross ended up shipping “five hundred parcels of food per month instead of fifty” (Vonnegut 1969:93), which is why the Englishmen are described as being “clean and enthusiastic and decent and strong” (ibid). The notion of these officers being most likely better off as prisoners than as fighting soldiers boards upon the absurd.

↳ - J →

The Englishmen welcome the Americans and “called them *Yank*, told them *Good show*, promised them that Jerry was on the run and so on. Billy wondered who Jerry was” (Vonnegut 1969:95). The joke here is rendered by the double meaning of the word *Jerry*, which is at once a proper name and a nickname for the Germans.

↳ - P →

A banquet is thrown for the new arrivals. During the proceedings “Billy wondered if there was a telephone somewhere. He wanted to call his mother, to let her know he was still alive” (Vonnegut 1969:97). The idea of having a phone in a Nazi POW camp is ridiculous.

↳ - J →

Billy collapses and is taken to the infirmary. Some moments later he finds himself in a mental hospital years later, when in his final year at optometry school. While in bed he notices a still life painting in which “the water was dead. So it goes. Air was trying to get out of that dead water. Bubbles were clinging to the wall of the glass too weak to climb out” (Vonnegut 1969:101). The joke here lies in the notion of anthropomorphizing not just water and a group of air bubbles, but the water and air that are found in a painting.

↳ - P →

Back in the infirmary in the POW camp, one of the English officers comes to check up on Billy. He is reported to be “Dead to the world [...] but not actually dead” (Vonnegut 1969:105), to which the officer comments on “how nice – to feel nothing, and still get full credit for being

alive” (ibid). The joke here relies on the idea that being alive and not feeling pain is somehow a state of existence in which one cheats on the natural order of things.

↳ - P →

Back in the mental hospital once again, Billy is visited by his wife Valencia. The patient who is sitting next to Billy’s bed is Eliot Rosewater and he and Valencia strike up a short conversation. The former admires the woman’s engagement ring and the latter points out that Billy got the diamond during the war. To this Rosewater jokingly remarks that “that’s the attractive thing about war, everybody gets a little something” (Vonnegut 1969:111). The pun here relies on the implied double meaning of the phrase *to get something*, which is *to receive something valuable* and *to suffer*.

↳ - P →

Shortly after, Billy finds himself on the home planet of the Tralfamadorians, in a zoo. He has no chance of escape since the air outside is toxic and “Earth was 446,120,000,000,000 miles away” (Vonnegut 1969:112). Given the enormous space between the planets, providing the distance in miles is ridiculous.

↳ - J →

In his conversations with the aliens, Billy discovers that the latter “had identified no fewer than *seven sexes* on Earth, each essential to reproduction” (Vonnegut 1969:114), a notion which is meant to be taken as absurd, given the significant discrepancy between the number of sexes that we know of and the number that is simply provided by the text and then left unexplained.

↳ - J →

The Tralfamadorians continue to tell Billy how they see the world in four dimensions. Since they can look at all moments in time simultaneously, they also know how the universe ends – they “blow it up, experimenting with new fuels for our flying saucers. A Tralfamadorian test pilot presses a starter button and the whole Universe disappears” (Vonnegut 1969:117). The notion that a single pilot on a single flying saucer could end the universe in a blink of an eye is meant to be a joke.

↳ - P →

Billy travels again back to 1968, in his home, in the moments first presented in Chapter Two. His daughter Barbara is scolding her father for staying in the basement while the furnace is out and it's cold. Concerning his reaction, the narrator jokingly comments that "it was very exciting for her, taking his dignity away in the name of love" (Vonnegut 132).

↳ - P →

Chapter Six returns to the POW camp. The English officers had just finished putting on a theatre production of *Cinderella* and one of the American soldiers named Lazzaro is having an argument with the Englishman who plays the role of the Fairy Godmother. When Lazzaro tells him to go f**k himself, the latter jokingly replies "Don't think I haven't tried" (Vonnegut 1969:138).

↳ - P →

Later on, a discussion on death ensues. Billy, being a time-traveler, already knows when he is going to die and how. The narrator explains that his demise takes place in Chicago in 1976. He also explains that, at the time, Chicago is a separate state and that "the United States of America has been Balkanized, has been divided into twenty petty nation so that it will never again be a threat to world peace" (Vonnegut 1969:142). The notion of America being a threat to world peace is an obvious criticism of the notion, which already existed in 1969, of the US operation as an international guardian of peace.

↳ - P →

As a prisoner, Billy and the rest of the Americans are finally sent to Dresden. While marching, "Billy again led the parade. He had silver boots now, and a muff, and a piece of azure curtain which he wore like a toga" (Vonnegut 1969:147). The entire scene does read like a parade march and not the proceedings of prisoners under harsh conditions.

↳ - J →

Upon reaching Dresden, they are taken by the soldiers stationed there. This group is even worse off than the group that first captured Billy, since one of them "actually had an artificial leg, and

carried not only a loaded rifle but a cane” (Vonnegut 1969:149), an image that further ridicules the German army at the time.

↳ - P →

What follows is a significantly large piece of text that contains no humorous fragments. Indeed, as the novel focuses more and more on the Dresden part of Billy’s experience, the frequency of humorous fragments of text diminishes significantly. When one is next introduced, Billy is back in his house and arguing with Barbara. The latter expresses her distain for the fiction writer Kilgore Trout, whom Billy admires very much and who she thinks is partially behind her father’s fantastic ideas of aliens and time-travel. A bit of background information is then given about Trout who at one time “had written a story about a money-tree. [...] It attracted human beings who killed each other around the roots and made very good fertilizer” (Vonnegut 1969:167). Given the fact that no one actually gets to pick from the tree and that, in trying to do so, humans actually end up dead and providing the tree with fertilizer, this appear as a pun on humanity’s dangerous and frivolous lust for wealth.

↳ - P →

On his eighteenth wedding anniversary Billy invited Trout as well. There the writer enters into a conversation with the wife of one of Billy’s fellow optometrists. Her name is Maggie White, who is described as “a sensational invitation to make babies. Men looked at her and wanted to fill her up with babies right away. She hadn’t even one baby yet. She used birth control” (Vonnegut 1969:171). It is thus ironic that a woman who is presented as being biologically perfect for bearing children should use birth control.

↳ - P →

Another section of text follows with no distinct humorous fragments. Here the aftermath of the destruction of Dresden is presented, after which in Chapter 9 we are told of the way in which Billy’s wife Valencia dies while trying to get to the hospital where her husband has been admitted after the plane crash in which he was the sole survivor. Humor finally reenters the novel when, in the hospital, Billy is described as being engaged in “an adventure very common among people without power in time of war: he was trying to prove to a willfully deaf and blind

enemy that he was interesting to hear and see” (Vonnegut 1969:193). This is a very amusing way of describing the magnanimity of soldiers during wartime who are not interested in killing their enemies but in getting along with them.

↳ - P →

After a few more hops through time, Billy finds himself at the end of the novel back in Dresden. The prisoners are made to gather up the charred corpses of the civilians that were killed after the firestorm. Jokingly, the narrator describes this enterprise as “the first corpse mine in Dresden” (Vonnegut 1969:214).

↳ - P →

Attachment 4: Knowledge resource elaboration of humorous fragments of text in *Slaughterhouse Five*

P1: ↔ - J →

SO fact/fiction

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA reader/fiction

NS expository text

LA irr

P1: ↔ - J →

SO allied prisoner/enemy prisoner

LM coincidence

SI German cab

TA war

NS expository text

LA irr

P2: ↔ - J →

SO usefulness/uselessness

LM vacuous reversal

SI cotext

TA war experience/novel

NS expository text

LA irr

P3: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO relevant action/circular futility

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA mock-author/novel

NS poem

LA irr

P4: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO possible/impossible odor combination

LM juxtaposition

SI getting drunk

TA mock author/wife

NS expository text

LA irr

P4: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO flattering/insulting comparison

LM parallelism

SI cotext

TA mock author/Bernard

NS expository text

LA irr

P5: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO reasonable/unreasonable reason

LM reasoning from false premises

SI trial

TA German soldiers/war

NS expository text

LA irr

P5: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO writer/drug dealer

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA mock-author

NS expository text

LA irr

P5: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO usefulness/uselessness of outlines

LM reasoning from false premises

SI outlining novel

TA mock-author

NS expository text

LA irr

P6: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO appropriate/preposterous souvenir

LM ignoring the obvious

SI cotext

TA English prisoner

NS expository text

LA irr

P8: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO weaker/stronger sex

LM parallelism

SI cotext

TA women workers

NS expository text

LA irr

P11: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO usual/unusual reaction

LM ignoring the obvious

SI watching a river

TA the two girls

NS expository text

LA irr

P13: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO imagined/actual setup

LM parallelism

SI cotext

TA veterans

NS expository text

LA irr

P14: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO horror/glamour of war

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA war/society

NS conversation

LA irr

P18: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO reasonable/unreasonable perspective

LM reasoning from false premises

SI cotext

TA society

NS expository text

LA irr

P20: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO existence/nonexistence of time

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA perception of mock-author/society

NS expository text

LA irr

P22: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO condemnable/praiseworthy act

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA Lot's Wife/society

NS expository text

LA irr

P22: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO humorous/non-humorous text

LM missing link

SI cotext

TA mock-author

NS expository text

LA irr

P22: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO reasonable/unreasonable position

LM reasoning from false premises

SI cotext

TA mock-author

NS expository text

LA irr

P23: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO typical/atypical narrative approach

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA writing/reader

NS expository text

LA irr

P23: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO normal/absurd description

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA irr

P24: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO expected/ironic death

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA Billy's father

NS expository text

LA irr

P25: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO positive/negative image of the military

LM implicit parallelism

SI cotext

TA Robert

NS expository text

LA

P26: ↔ - P →

SO typical/ridiculous description of Tralfamadorians

LM exaggeration

SI

TA Tralfamadorians

NS expository text

LA

P30: ↔ - J →

SO acting out/enjoying frustration

LM missing link

SI

TA Barbara

NS expository text

LA

P30: ↔ - J →

SO pious man/fool

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P31: ↔ - J →

SO holy item / cheap replica

LM missing link

SI

TA organ/religion

NS expository text

LA

P31: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO valid/erroneous intelligence reports or soldiers eating / corpses eating

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA the military

NS conversation

LA

P32: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO proper/pointless time to return

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA Billy/war

NS expository text

LA

P33: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO proper/ridiculous image of a soldier

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P33: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal reaction

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P34: \leftrightarrow - P \rightarrow

SO salvation/abuse

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA Billy/Weary

NS expository text

LA

P34: \leftrightarrow - P \rightarrow

SO typical/atypical image of God

LM missing link

SI

TA God

NS expository text

LA

P34: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO expected/unexpected result

LM inferring consequences

SI

TA Weary

NS expository text

LA

P38: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO holy/pathetic man

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA Jesus

NS expository text

LA

P39: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO regular/ridiculous image

LM exaggeration

SI

TA Weary

NS expository text

LA

P42: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO valid/ridiculous perception

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Weary

NS expository text

LA

P47: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO proper/improper place in car for driver

LM missing link

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P49: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO valid/invalid comparison

LM false analogy

SI

TA scouts

NS expository text

LA

P51: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal behavior of soldiers

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA Billy/Weary

NS expository text

LA

P52: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO war/sex, pleasure/pain

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA war/Germans

NS expository text

LA

P52: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO ruthless/pitiful German military hound

LM vacuous reversal

SI

TA Princess/German army/war

NS expository text

LA

P52: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO authentic/decrepit soldiers

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA German army/war

NS expository text

LA

P53: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO mocking/authentic imagery

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P53: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal/absurd image of a soldier

LM parallelism

SI

TA young soldier

NS expository text

LA

P54: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO innocent/lethal gunshot

LM vacuous reversal

SI

TA war/scouts

NS expository text

LA

P55: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO proper/improper time and place

LM missing link

SI

TA prisoners/war

NS expository text

LA

P57: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO pertinent/absurd question

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P60: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO useful/useless prayer

LM exaggeration

SI

TA religion

NS poem

LA

P64: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal behavior

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P65: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal behavior

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P70: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO friendly train/train of death

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA train/war

NS conversation

LA

P70: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO expected/unexpected behavior

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA soldiers/war

NS expository text

LA

P72: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO expected/unexpected colors

LM coincidence

SI

TA war/Billy

NS expository text

LA

P72: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO expected/unexpected colors

LM coincidence

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P73: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO expected/unexpected person

LM missing link

SI

TA Billy/mock-author

NS expository text

LA

P73: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO living/dead champagne

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA champagne

NS expository text

LA

P75: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal time flow

LM exaggeration

SI

TA time/Billy

NS expository text

LA

P79: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO expected/unexpected death

LM missing link

SI

TA hobo

NS expository text

LA

P80: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO useful/redundant information

LM ignoring the obvious/exaggeration

SI

TA narration/Billy

NS expository text

LA

P81: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO kind/cruel Germans

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Germans/Americans

NS expository text

LA

P84: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO implied/exaggeratingly obvious fact

LM exaggeration

SI

TA narration

NS expository text

LA

P90: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO humor/horror in wartime

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Germans/war

NS expository text

LA

P93: ↔ - J →

SO misfortune/fortune of being a POW

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA British officers/war

NS expository text

LA

P95: ↔ - P →

SO nickname/proper name

LM field restriction

SI

TA language/Billy

NS conversation

LA

P97: ↔ - J →

SO normal/abnormal expectation

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P101: ↔ - P →

SO proper/improper anthropomorphizing

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA painting/Billy

NS expository text

LA

P105: \leftrightarrow - P \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal state of being

LM false analogy

SI

TA Billy

NS conversation

LA

P111: \leftrightarrow - P \rightarrow

SO reward/punishment in war

LM exaggeration

SI

TA war

NS conversation

LA

P112: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO useful/useless information

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA narrative

NS expository text

LA

P114: $\leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow$

SO believable/absurd information

LM exaggeration

SI

TA Tralfamadorians

NS expository text

LA

P117: $\leftrightarrow - P \rightarrow$

SO possible/impossible ending

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Tralfamadorians

NS conversation

LA

P132: $\leftrightarrow - P \rightarrow$

SO love/abuse

LM false analogy

SI

TA Barbara

NS expository text

LA

P138: ↔ - P →

SO possible/impossible sexual act

LM missing link

SI

TA British Officer/Lazzaro

NS conversation

LA

P142: ↔ - P →

SO the US as a friendly/threatening country

LM exaggeration

SI

TA USA

NS expository text

LA

P147: ↔ - J →

SO proper/ridiculous march

LM exaggeration

SI

TA Billy

NS expository text

LA

P149: ↔ - P →

SO proper/ridiculous image of soldiers

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA German soldiers/war

NS expository text

LA

P167: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO worthy ambition / frivolous endeavor

LM missing link

SI

TA humanity

NS expository text

LA

P171: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO biologically perfect for reproduction / uses birth control

LM missing link

SI

TA Maggie White

NS expository text

LA

P193: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO possibility/impossibility of magnanimity during war

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA war

NS expository text

LA

P214: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO proper/improper mine

LM exaggeration

SI

TA war

NS expository text

LA

Attachment 5: Humorous fragments of text in *Deadeye Dick*

If we ignore the Preface, which is just Kurt Vonnegut (the actual author) saying some things about his book, the actual story of *Deadeye Dick* begins with the narrator Rudy Waltz addressing the yet-unborn, warning them about life. He points out that he “has come down with life” (Vonnegut 1982:1), as if it were a disease.

↳ - P →

He then moves on to talk about his family history. The Waltz’s became rich in the 19th century by selling “a quack medicine known as ‘Saint Elmo’s Remedy’, which [...] was absolutely harmless unless discontinued” (Vonnegut 1982:2). Thus the joke here revolves around the notion of a medicine, which by definition is supposed to help, which does no good and which is harmful if you stop taking it.

↳ - P →

Otto Waltz, the narrator’s father, is born near the turn of the century and is soon thought by his mother to be a potentially great artist. She hires a man named Arthur Gunther to be Otto’s arts teacher and mentor. Arthur is presented as having become a teacher not because he believes in educating the young, but because “teaching paid as well as cabinetmaking, and, unlike cabinetmaking, allowed him to be as drunk as he pleased” (ibid).

↳ - J →

As a result, while he and Otto pretend to be working on the latter becoming an artist, “the two of them managed to get drunk, and to become darlings of the fanciest whorehouses in the Middle West” (ibid).

↳ - J →

Eventually, Otto’s mother discovers the truth about the things that Arthur Gunther gets her son involved in. She fires the teacher and sends Otto off to Vienna. As the capital city of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, “Vienna was a place of exotic dresses, wine and music, which made it look to Otto like the city was a giant ball. As such he decided to come to the party as a starving

artist. What fun!” (Vonnegut 1982:5). Since Otto is in fact very wealthy and thus views his attire as a practical joke, this is obviously meant as a pun on the romantic notion of the starving artist.

↳ - P →

The Academy of Arts from Vienna rejects him however. When Otto goes to pick up his portfolio from the professor who turned it down, he meets there with another failed artist and in a fit of rage Otto buys the man’s works, providing him with sufficient money to survive the winter. The man’s name is Adolf Hitler. As the narrator points out, “there is a chance that, if it weren’t for his father, Hitler might have died of pneumonia or malnutrition in 1910” (ibid). The discrepancy here lies between the good that Otto did (saving a man’s life) and the involuntary bad (saving a monster).

↳ - P →

Otto stays in Vienna for four years. When World War Two breaks out – one of the bloodiest wars in history – Otto “imagined that the fancy dress ball was to become a fancy dress picnic” (Vonnegut 1982:7).

↳ - J →

He is absolutely adamant about staying and enlisting in the Austrian army, only to be able to dress in a uniform that has a panther costume. His parents, however, threaten to cut him off financially, so he returns to America. Once home, Otto transforms his parents’ carriage house into a studio. His mother sees him as “the reincarnation of Leonardo da Vinci” (Vonnegut 1982:9), however, the narrator is then quick to comment that his “father’s mother was as crazy as a bedbug” (ibid).

↳ - P →

When describing the resulting studio, the narrator asks the overtly random question “was it big enough for a basketball game?” (ibid.) and then answers “no – it lacked fourteen feet” (ibid). The joke here is found between the simplicity of having just said that the space is fifteen feet short of a basketball court and the elaborate tactic of asking and answering a rhetorical question.

↳ - J →

Otto would later make the second floor of the carriage house into an apartment and fills the attic with a gun collection. Rudy's first comment about these weapons is that "they were murder" (Vonnegut 1982:11), which is ironic, since he later manages to kill a pregnant woman with one of the rifles.

↳ - J →

As a young man freshly returned from Austria, Otto once again befriends Arthur Gunther. One day, a pair of Italian brothers named Gino and Marco Maritimo show up while Otto and his former mentor are having a picnic. The two Italians appear as starving and miserable. They had been robbed shortly after arrival, yet they came across the ocean because "the streets of America were paved with gold" (Vonnegut 1982:15)

↳ - J →

The Waltz family, as the narrator goes on to explain, further became wealthy by setting up a pharmacy company. When his parents die, Otto becomes the CEO and attends meetings, but has no interest in it because he sees himself an artist. In relation to his father's rejection of the family enterprise, Rudy points out that, ironically, at the time of the telling of his tale, he is a registered pharmacist.

↳ - P →

In continuing his brief history of the Waltz family, Rudy explains that his father always regretted not going into military service. Otto dreamed of being a war hero like his neighbor John Fortune, but the only commemoration he would ever receive would be "a citation from the governor of Ohio for his leadership of scrap metal drives in Midland County during World War Two" (Vonnegut 1982:20). In regards to the certificate which he received, Otto sarcastically comments that he has now "joined the company of the immortals" (ibid).

↳ - P →

In the autumn of 1916, as Rudy explains, Arthur Gunther gets shot in the head. His body is initially nowhere to be found but turns up a month later floating down a river very far off, on its way to the Gold of Mexico. In regards to the distance that the body traveled, Rudy characterizes

it as quite a “vacation from Midland City” (Vonnegut 1982:21), as if a corpse floating away could be construed as a nice trip somewhere.

↳ - P →

In 1922 Otto and Emma get married. During their honeymoon they acquire their great gun collection. As a child, the narrator explains, Rudy was taught all about how to clean, load and fire these weapons. His father taught him and for this Rudy makes the comment “God bless him” (Vonnegut 1982:24), which would seem like a legitimate praise, yet, in light of the later events where Rudy ends up committing murder, this statement actually comes off as ironic.

↳ - J →

One of the most impressive parts of their house is a weathervane on top, which commemorates the lifting of the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1983. Regarding the siege itself, Rudy’s elder brother Felix jokingly mocks his younger brother, while they are both still little, saying that if it hadn’t been for Austria’s victory “mother would be in a harem now and father would be passing out towels in a steam bath” (Vonnegut 1982:25)

↳ - P →

In 1933 Rudy’s family, with the exception of Rudy himself, go to Germany as guests of the now Chancellor Adolf Hitler. During their visit, though too young to join the Hitler Youth, Felix receives from his father a tailor-made outfit identical to that of the Nazi order. Again, the narrator makes an ironic remark, this time the rhetorical question “Why not?” (Vonnegut 1982:27), as if dressing up in a Nazi youth outfit were nothing special.

↳ - J →

Upon returning to the US, Otto begins to give lectures that promoted the German ideology. In one of his talks he explains that “A pure Jew is this. A pure German is that” (Vonnegut 1982:29), and that if you “cross a Pole with a Negro, you are certain to get an amusing laborer” (ibid). Compared to the previous two statements, which allude clearly to the Nazi idea of German superiority, the last statement simply comes off as ridiculous, as a joke.

↳ - P →

After completing the history of the Waltz family and the description of their lives as children, the narrator jumps, beginning with Chapter 6, to the present, where their hometown of Midland City

“has been depopulated by a neutron bomb. It was a big story for about ten days or so. It might have been a bigger story, a signal for the start of World War Three, if the Government hadn’t acknowledged at once that the bomb was made in America. One newscast [...] called it ‘a friendly bomb’” (Vonnegut 1982:33)

This entire fragment is a joke on both journalism and human compassion, or lack thereof. The discrepancy lies between the magnitude of the obliteration of the population of an entire city and the overall relaxed civilian reaction to this event, a reaction calmed simply because of the fact that the bomb was American and not foreign.

↳ - P →

Rudy and Felix survive because they are in Haiti. As the former explains Haitians speak a form of Creole that only has a present tense. The humorous, nonsensical implications of this linguistic fact are rendered through a conversation about Rudy’s father:

“‘He is dead?’
‘He is dead.’
‘What does he do?’
‘He paints’”
(Vonnegut 1982:35)

Since the past cannot be expressed in this form of Creole, the implication here is that Otto is both dead and alive, or at least that he is dead, yet still paints.

↳ - J →

The narrator then jumps back to his family’s history. Despite having absolutely no interest in business and finances, the Waltz’s pass through the Great Depression with ease. This is because Otto previously bought stock in Coca-Cola, for no particular reason, and Rudy’s mother still had a lot of land received as an inheritance. The narrator, rather than praising his parents’ good fortunes, calls the whole thing “dumb luck” (Vonnegut 1982:37)

↳ - J →

The Waltz Brothers pharmaceutical company had by now left Midland City. It was moved by Otto’s cousins, who wanted to conduct serious business. Yet, they invest a lot in soda fountains

and, during the depression, they go out of business. A joke that Otto sometimes says in regards to this is about “a boy who flunked out of pharmacy school. He didn’t know how to make a club sandwich” (Vonnegut 1982:37)

↳ - P →

As children, Rudy and Felix have problems when bringing friends home because of their father, who constantly makes the guests uncomfortable with remarks that are meant to be funny. Later, on his deathbed, Otto says that, despite all his failures in life, “at least he had been wonderful with children” (Vonnegut 1982:38)

↳ - P →

On the evening of his prom, Felix agrees to bring his date home before going to the party. The girl he is taking is Celia, said to be the most beautiful girl in Midland City. Intrigued by this, Otto waits for his son to leave with the car after Celia and then arranges the front of the house to look grandiose. When Felix returns with Celia, his father greets them wearing his panther-skin uniform, holding an apple in his hand and shouting “let Helen of Troy come forward – to claim this apple if she dare!” (Vonnegut 1982:47). His entire approach is as far from usual as could be expected of a man living in a small city in central US.

↳ - J →

When he becomes of age, Felix is drafted into the military and sent off to war. As a last family even, he, Rudy and their father go on the shooting range. In regards to his skill with a weapon, the narrator points out that he “shot better than anybody” (Vonnegut 1982:53), a comment that, in light of the fact that he accidentally shoots a pregnant woman in-between the eyes later that evening, has humorous overtones.

↳ - J →

He is capable of committing accidental murder because Otto gives him the key to the gun room, to which so far only he and Felix had had access to. Rudy is given the key despite the fact that he is only twelve years old. This gift is explained though by the fact that his “father had only the

vaguest idea how old [he] was” (ibid) and that, when the police show up to investigate the murder, Otto says that his youngest son is sixteen.

↳ - J →

Rudy commits murder by firing a single shot off the roof of his house. All the while, his parents are downstairs entertaining their distinguished guest Eleanor Roosevelt. Looking back at that day, and at other occasions when people visited their parents’ home, Rudy points out his hypothesis that everyone either knew or was tipped off that the great painter Otto Waltz was a phony because “not one of them even asked to see examples of his work” (Vonnegut 1982:57). The only thing resembling art that Otto ever made was a sketch, which he created as a young man. It was one moment when, as the narrator imagines, he must have said “My God! I’m a painter after all!” (Vonnegut 1982:58), as if that possibility were a surprise even to him.

↳ - J →

During her visit, Eleanor Roosevelt makes a comment regarding Rudy’s extensive knowledge of firearms, to which Otto replies proudly that his boys “will never have a shooting accident because their respect for weapons has become a part of their nervous system” (Vonnegut 1982:60). Once again, due to the events that follow, this statement has humorous overtones.

↳ - J →

Even Felix has, as it turns out, little regard for the power of firearms, since he used them for years to destroy other people’s property and even “loosed a couple of rounds at a herd of sheep” (ibid).

↳ - J →

The day of Rudy’s act of murder is Mother’s Day to most people, but to him it is the day he “had been initiated into manhood” (Vonnegut 1982:61). This initiation is both a simple statement relating to the fact that he was given the key to the gun room and an allusion to the traditional notion that a boy becomes a man only after battle, only after killing another man.

↳ - J →

In the presentation of the moment when Rudy fires the rifle, whose bullet would kill a pregnant woman, he explicates the ideas that “firing a Springfield over the city was now part of [his] treasure-house of memories” (Vonnegut 1982:64), and that “the bullet was a symbol, and nobody was ever hurt by a symbol” (ibid.), or that “all those guns weren’t for just anybody to handle. Some people were fools where guns were concerned” (ibid). All three statements have the same discrepancy between the innocent and wise nature of their words and the radically different real consequences of Rudy’s actions.

↳ - J →

↳ - J →

↳ - J →

When the police come, initially Rudy doesn’t understand what the problem may be, but eventually he realizes what he he’s done. To this realization, the narrator states “I died” (Vonnegut 1982:66), and then is quick to add “but I didn’t die” (ibid). Since the first comment is meant figuratively, that he felt weak from shock, the second comment is humorous due to its complete redundancy.

↳ - J →

The chief of police Morissey, is actually there to try and help the Waltz’s get away with it, since, as it is later revealed, he is responsible for Arthur Gunther’s death. Otto makes such an escape impossible because “he felt that, given who he was, he had no option other than to behave nobly” (Vonnegut 1982:68), and so declares that his son is the killer but that he is to blame. Such a confession would indeed be grand from someone who is noble, but, since Otto is in reality a fraud in everything, the gesture simply falls short and is ridiculous.

↳ - J →

Rudy explains his father’s behavior by pointing out that this “was the first truly consequential adventure life had offered him” (Vonnegut 1982:69) and that “he was going to make the most of it” (ibid). Thus, Otto sees what is undoubtedly the ruining factor of his life as being an adventure.

↳ - J →

In a fit of dramatic play, Otto proceeds to destroy all the guns and even to “cut away the base of the cupola” (Vonnegut 1982:70), a feat that in his mind is a gesture through which he pays for his son’s transgression, which, of course, is very far from reality.

↳ - J →

So detached from reality, Otto first expects that his grand gesture would be enough to appease both the law and the husband of the victim, Mr. Metzger, and then, after he and Rudy are arrested, he is “surprised, again, that [they] weren’t allowed to go home after that” (Vonnegut 1982:73).

↳ - J →

While at the police station, young Rudy is placed in a cage like an animal. People come to see him and yell at him. They not only accuse him of the crime he’s committed, but is also “told about friends or relatives who had been hurt or killed during the war” (Vonnegut 1982:79), as if he is suddenly to blame for all the death in the world.

↳ - J →

The reason why it was so important to put Rudy in there, as the narrator ironically explains, is so that “everyone could feel safe for a while. Bad luck was caged” (Vonnegut 1982:81), as though Rudy was misfortune incarnate.

↳ - J →

Eventually, Rudy is released, being a minor, and sent home. He arrives at his house in the dead of night. When his mother finally opens the door, she neither hugs him, nor does she initially let him inside. She doesn’t scold him either. Far from being either a loving or an oppressive mother, as mothers usually are, she is characterized as being “purely ornamental” (Vonnegut 1982:93)

↳ - J →

When he finally enters the house, Rudy goes straight to his room, his plan being to go to bed. The narrator adds jokingly that “that is still pretty much [his] plan” (ibid.) in life in general.

↳ - P →

Mr. Metzger sues the Waltz family for the death of his wife. His lawyer is one Mr. Ketchum, who wins the jury's favor through many tactics, including that of constantly pointing out the unborn baby's little fingers and toes. The narrator then points out that years later, he would hire the same lawyer to sue the people responsible for manufacturing and installing a radioactive mantelpiece in their home, which ended up killing his mother. During that trial, Rudy tells the lawyer to not "forget to tell the jury about Mother's perfectly formed little fingers and toes" (Vonnegut 1982:97).

↳ - P →

After Otto's trial, the Waltz family loses everything they have, save for the carriage house. Without any more servants, Rudy begins cooking and cleaning for his parents, while still doing rather well in school. To this the narrator remarks "what a good boy was [he]" (Vonnegut 1982:98), as if house chores and school performance would make up for the fact that he ruined his family's livelihood.

↳ - P →

What follows is a non-humorous description of Rudy's life while growing up. Eventually, as a grown-up, Rudy becomes a pharmacist and writes a play entitled *Katmandu* which is put on stage in New York. When he sees his name on the theatre, the narrator points out that his father had Vienna, where he found out that he couldn't paint and Rudy had New York where he "found out [he] couldn't write" (Vonnegut 1982:129).

↳ - J →

Despite the fact that he is the author of the play, Rudy seems "to know less about the play than anybody" (Vonnegut 1982:130) and is "not worth talking to" (ibid).

↳ - J →

When an actor points out that a particular line is said too often and that it should be replaced periodically with something else, Rudy asks the actor what he wants to say (Vonnegut 1982:132), as if actors made lines up.

↳ - J →

After the night in which *Katmandu* is staged, Rudy and his brother Felix, who'd been living in New York, return to Midland City, which has been struck by a severe snow storm which has covered the city. The narrator jumps for a moment to the present, where he and Felix are in Haiti and their hometown has been recently depopulated by a neutron bomb. Their lawyer Mr. Ketchum makes a joking remark that the Haitians should start colonizing America, since "you can claim a piece of land which has been inhabited for tens of thousands of years if only you will repeat this mantra endlessly: we discovered it, we discovered it, we discovered it" (Vonnegut 1982:150), this being a reference to how the colonists justified occupying the American continent and killing off the natives.

↳ - P →

Returning to their trip back to their snow-covered hometown, Rudy and Felix are helped by a wealthy local named Fred T. Berry. The latter gives the brothers the use of his pilot and helicopter, a contraption which the narrator describes as resembling "some mythological creature – half eagle, half cow" (Vonnegut 1982:156), a notion that is wholly ridiculous.

↳ - P →

Reaching the county hospital, the brothers ask about their parents and find out that their mother is fine and sleeping in a bed in the basement. To this the narrator remarks that "there was a member of our distinguished family down in a basement again" (Vonnegut 1982:164), making a reference to the time when he, as a child, had been caged up in the basement of the police station after killing Mrs. Metzger.

↳ - J →

Otto is in far worse condition and is in fact dying. One of his last words is *guns*. The weapons that he had destroyed had been sold to scrap metal, to which the narrator ironically remarks that "they might have killed a lot more people when they were melted up and made into shells and bombs" (Vonnegut 1982:167).

↳ - J →

After Otto dies, the state confiscates the carriage house due to back taxes and Rudy and his mother end up living in a small apartment. Felix ends up the President of the NBC network, but is then fired. He returns home drugged out of his mind on pills, reason for which he “parked his car on the front lawn” (Vonnegut 1982:193).

↳ - J →

When Felix arrives, Rudy and their mother are just getting ready to go and attend the funeral of Celia Hoover, the woman who had been Felix’s prom date. The narrator explains that, looking back on that prom night, when Celia ran screaming from Otto and the rest of them, leaving her dress shoes behind, now Felix would have to die in order to return her shoes to her. In continuation of that thought, Rudy jokingly describes Felix in Heaven yelling “Celia! Celia! Where are you? I have your dancing shoes.” (ibid).

↳ - P →

Years later, after his mother died and he had sued the people responsible and had become rich, Rudy is mistakenly suspected of having kidnapped and murdered a little girl. When they inspect his car, forensics detectives are surprised to find that every fiber in the car belonged to Rudy, indicating that no one else had ever gotten into the vehicle. Regarding Rudy’s apparent complete lack of social skills and needs, one of the officers asks him why he bothered to buy a car with four doors (Vonnegut 1982:223).

↳ - J →

In the epilogue of *Deadeye Dick*, the narrator presents his trip back to Midland City, together with Felix and one of their Haitian employees, after the neutron bomb has depopulated the town. The National Guard is surveying the site and during their visit Rudy and the others are forbidden to touch anything. This is so that a film crew can come in and “document, without the least bit of fakery, the fundamental harmlessness of a neutron bomb” (Vonnegut 1982:229). Once again, the idea that the bomb is *harmless* falls in stark contrast to the fact that it killed all the inhabitants of the city.

↳ - J →

Attachment 6: Knowledge resource elaboration of humorous fragments of text in *Deadeye Dick*

P1: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO life as gift/disease

LM missing link

SI

TA narrator

NS expository text

LA

P2: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO helpful/harmful medicine

LM inferring consequences

SI

TA Waltz family

NS expository text

LA

P2: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO teaching as a worthy calling/a frivolous job

LM parallelism

SI

TA Gunther

NS expository text

LA

P2: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO helpful medicine/narcotic

LM inferring consequences

SI

TA Otto, Gunther

NS expository text

LA

P5: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO starving artist/rich pretender

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P5: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO good deed/bad deed

LM implied consequences

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P7: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO war/picnic

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P9: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO intuitive person/crazy woman

LM vacuous reversal

SI

TA Otto's mother

NS expository text

LA

P9: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO useful/useless information or clear/overly elaborate explanation

LM ignoring the obvious/exaggeration

SI

TA carriage house

NS Q/A

LA

P11: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO simple/overly accurate statement

LM inferring consequences

SI

TA guns

NS expository text

LA

P15: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO blissful image/horrible reality of America

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Maritimo bothers/America

NS expository text

LA

P19: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO expected/unexpected career result

LM missing link

SI

TA Rudy

NS expository text

LA

P20: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO worthy/worthless medal

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto

NS conversation

LA

P21: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO dead body moving/going on vacation

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA guns/Gunther

NS expository text

LA

P24: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO genuine/sarcastic praise

LM missing link

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P25: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO plausible/implausible statement

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Rudy

NS expository text

LA

P27: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal/outrageous way of dressing

LM missing link

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P29: \leftrightarrow - P \rightarrow

SO plausible/implausible situation

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P33: \leftrightarrow - P \rightarrow

SO friendly/destructive bomb

LM missing link

SI

TA society/arms race

NS expository text

LA

P35: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO being alive/being dead

LM referential ambiguity

SI

TA Rudy

NS conversation

LA

P37: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO good fortune/dumb luck

LM missing link

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P37: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO pharmacist/sandwich maker

LM missing link

SI

TA pharmacy industry

NS expository text

LA

P38: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO realistic/overly unrealistic statement

LM ignoring the obvious/exaggeration

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P47: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal behavior

LM exaggeration

SI

TA Otto

NS conversation

LA

P53: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO great marksman/killer

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA Rudy/guns

NS expository text

LA

P53: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO real/imaginary perception of age

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P58: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO painter/fraud

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P60: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO realistic/ridiculous statement

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Otto/guns

NS expository text

LA

P60: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO logical/ignorant perspective

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto/Felix

NS expository text

LA

P61: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO initiation into manhood/becoming a murderer

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA Rudy/guns

NS expository text

LA

P64: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO wise words / foolish outcome

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Rudy/guns

NS expository text

LA

P64: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO wise words / foolish outcome

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Rudy/guns

NS expository text

LA

P64: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO wise words / foolish outcome

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA Rudy/guns

NS expository text

LA

P66: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO pertinent/redundant statement

LM vacuous reversal

SI

TA Rudy

NS expository text

LA

P68: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO grand/ridiculous gesture

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P69: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO adventure/tragedy

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P70: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO empty/significant gesture

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P73: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal reaction

LM reasoning from false premises

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P79: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO pertinent/irrelevant target of aggression

LM exaggeration

SI

TA society

NS expository text

LA

P81: \leftrightarrow - J \rightarrow

SO frightening entity/inoffensive child caged

LM field restriction

SI

TA Rudy/society

NS expository text

LA

P93: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO typical/abnormal mother

LM parallelism

SI

TA Emma

NS expository text

LA

P93: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO particular/general plan

LM missing link

SI

TA Rudy

NS expository text

LA

P97: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO useful/ironic request

LM missing link

SI

TA Ketchum

NS conversation

LA

P98: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO authentic/mock praise

LM missing link/self-undermining

SI

TA Rudy

NS expository text

LA

P129: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO grand launch of career / grand flop

LM parallelism/self-undermining

SI

TA Otto/Rudy

NS expository text

LA

P130: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO author/idiot

LM self-undermining

SI

TA Rudy

NS expository text

LA

P132: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO realistic/delusional expectations

LM implicit parallelism/self-undermining

SI

TA Rudy

NS conversation

LA

P150: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO authentic occupation of land / brutal conquering

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA America

NS expository text

LA

P156: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO plausible/ridiculous description

LM analogy

SI

TA helicopter

NS expository text

LA

P164: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO basement as shelter/torture chamber

LM implicit parallelism

SI

TA Police brutality (?)

NS expository text

LA

P167: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO well-intentioned gesture / horrible outcome

LM vacuous reversal

SI

TA Otto

NS expository text

LA

P193: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO normal/abnormal parking

LM missing link

SI

TA Felix

NS expository text

LA

P193: \mapsto - P \rightarrow

SO plausible/ridiculous scenario

LM juxtaposition

SI

TA Felix

NS expository text

LA

P223: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO appropriate/redundant car choice

LM implicit parallelism/self-undermining

SI

TA Rudy

NS expository text

LA

P229: \mapsto - J \rightarrow

SO harmless/destructive bomb

LM ignoring the obvious

SI

TA arms race

NS expository text

LA