

**PATTERNS OF CONTROL:  
A STUDY OF FREE WILL IN THE  
NOVELS OF KURT VONNEGUT, JR.**

**ESSAYS IN LITERATURE**

**CHARLES THOMAS HINTON, JR.**

PATTERNS OF CONTROL:  
A STUDY OF FREE WILL  
IN THE NOVELS OF KURT VONNEGUT, JR.

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An Abstract  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Charles Thomas Hinton, Jr.

August, 1976

## ABSTRACT

The novels of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., when read in chronological order, express Vonnegut's increasing pessimism over man's lack of free will in modern society. Through his characters, Vonnegut portrays man as the victim of forces beyond his control. The universe as Vonnegut depicts it has no order or pattern except time, and time itself is not subject to chronological progression. Even the forces which control man do not fit a rigid pattern. Yet within the body of the novels, beginning with Vonnegut's second novel, The Sirens of Titan, there is a repetition of these controlling forces that does form a pattern.

Basically the pattern is an alternating one. In every other novel, Vonnegut shows man as the puppet of the same forces. The Sirens of Titan, Cat's Cradle, Slaughterhouse-Five and Breakfast of Champions portray man as the victim of cosmic forces beyond his control. In Mother Night, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, and, to a lesser extent, Breakfast of Champions, man is shown to be restricted in his actions by external aspects of society such as Government and money and bad ideas. In Breakfast of Champions, his last novel, Vonnegut unites all of the determining restrictions to which man is subjugated.

Given that there is no free will, Vonnegut allows us only two possibilities for finding meaning and purpose in life. One is to create illusions of reality for ourselves; the other is to love each other uncritically. Vonnegut places the most emphasis on our capacity to love.

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by  
Charles Thomas Hinton, Jr.

August, 1976

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Charles Thomas Hinton, Jr. entitled "Patterns of Control: A Study of Free Will in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

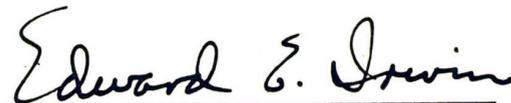


Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:

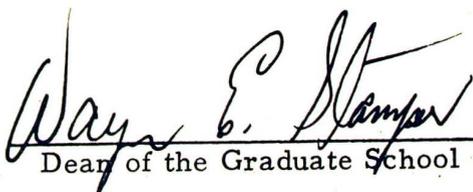


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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Kurt Vonnegut's first novel, Player Piano, was published in 1952. It was followed by The Sirens of Titan, 1959; Mother Night, 1961; Cat's Cradle, 1963; God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, 1965; Slaughterhouse-Five, 1969; and Breakfast of Champions, 1973. With the exception of one article by a friend of Vonnegut's, no scholarly articles on him appeared in American academic journals until 1971.<sup>1</sup> His novels are now being taught in college literature courses and his short stories are included even in literary magazines designed especially for high school students. Colleges and universities are accepting masters and doctoral theses dealing with Vonnegut and his works. With the publication of Breakfast of Champions, critics rushed to jump on the Vonnegut band wagon with favorable reviews.

Vonnegut's popular following is still larger than his critical acclaim. While numerous articles and reviews have appeared in general periodicals, only a small number of articles, in comparison, have been published in scholarly journals. The unfavorable critics of Vonnegut dismiss him as a science-fiction writer who employs comic

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<sup>1</sup>Jerome Klinkowitz, "Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: The Canary in a Cathouse," The Vonnegut Statement, ed. Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer. (New York: Delacorte Press, 1973), p. 12.

book techniques of writing and who appeals only to adolescents.

Charles Thomas Samuels, writing in the New Republic, concludes that Vonnegut's own spiritual age is late adolescence.<sup>2</sup> There are other critics who are more kind to Vonnegut. Some of these will be quoted in the body of this paper to support some of my own points.

It is not my purpose here to discuss or explain Vonnegut's sudden popular and critical success nor to defend his writing against critical attacks. My intention here is to introduce one aspect of Vonnegut's writing that has intrigued me since I first read Mother Night in 1972. That aspect is Vonnegut's view of free will as demonstrated in his novels.

Within the body of his work, Vonnegut seems to present conflicting attitudes toward the question of whether or not man does have free will. In Slaughterhouse-Five, the Tralfamadorians tell Billy Pilgrim that they know how the universe will end:

"If you know this," said Billy, "isn't there some way you can prevent it? Can't you keep the pilot from pressing the button?"

[ The Tralfamadorians tell him ]:

"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."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Charles Thomas Samuels, "The Age of Vonnegut," The New Republic 164 12 June, 1971, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse-Five (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968), p. 117.

In other works, however, there is evidence that Vonnegut's attitude toward free will is not quite as decided as the quote from Slaughterhouse-Five implies. In The Sirens of Titan, Vonnegut creates a character who establishes "the church of God the Utterly Indifferent." This idea leaves the reader with a feeling much different from the idea of living in a structured universe (although in the context of the novel this feeling turns out to be a deception).

Another example, from Cat's Cradle, shows that Vonnegut has not quite solved the problem of free will in his universe:

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

And God said, "Let Us make living creatures out of mud, so the mud can see what We have done." And God created every living creature that now moveth, and one was man. Mud as man alone could speak. God leaned close as mud as man sat up, looked around, and spoke. Man blinked. "What is the purpose of all this?" he asked politely.

"Everything must have a purpose?" asked God.

"Certainly," said man.

"Then I leave it to you to think of one for all this," said God.  
And He went away.<sup>4</sup>

The above comments serve to show that Vonnegut's treatment of the problem of free will appears to be inconclusive and somewhat ambiguous. The purpose of this study is to examine the idea of free

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<sup>4</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Cat's Cradle (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), p. 177.

will in Vonnegut's novels by discussing primarily the major characters in terms of the degree of free will Vonnegut allows them in relationship to the forces that restrict man's free will. Throughout his work, Vonnegut depicts man as the victim of forces beyond his control. These forces vary from manipulation by cosmic forces to the more subtle workings of guilt grounded in external circumstances. Within the scope of the novels a pattern emerges which defines Vonnegut's view of free will. The pattern is an alternation between cosmic restrictions of free will and the limitations of free will man imposes upon himself and other men. The overall design results in an apparent lack of free will in Vonnegut's universe. A more detailed discussion of the individual novels will show more clearly the development of the pattern of control that denies man free will. For the purpose of this study, I am omitting a discussion of Player Piano for several reasons, but chiefly because the ideas presented are not as fully developed as in the later novels, and because the first novel is not representative of the style and techniques for which Vonnegut has become known.

## Chapter II

### The Sirens of Titan: The Beginning of the Pattern

The narrator of Kurt Vonnegut's The Sirens of Titan speaks from the future when "Everyone now knows how to find the meaning of life within himself" (p. 7).<sup>1</sup> The story related by the narrator is the story of how everyone came to find the meaning of life. The man most responsible for this contribution to the human race is Winston Niles Rumfoord who "between the Second World War and the Third Great Depression" (p. 8) ran his space ship into a chrono-synclastic infundibulum and became the only man in history to exist in a universal time spiral. As a result of this phenomenon, Rumfoord acquired the ability to see both the past and the future: "When I ran my space ship into the chrono-synclastic infundibulum, it came to me in a flash that everything that ever has been always will be, and everything that ever will be always has been" (pp. 25-26). Because he has this advantage over the other characters, Rumfoord appears to them as a cosmic manipulator, and he seems to the reader to be the only character in

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, The Sirens of Titan (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959). Page numbers for all citations will be included parenthetically in the text.

the novel who has free will. But as we shall see, the latter is not the case. In The Sirens of Titan Vonnegut does not clearly state his view of free will, but he does develop an idea that will become one of his major themes: the manipulation of man by forces he cannot control. Rumfoord's role within the novel and his relationship to the other characters are central to the development of this theme in The Sirens of Titan, yet Rumfoord also represents the ambiguities of Vonnegut's attitude toward free will in the novel.

The first time Rumfoord appears in the novel, he literally materializes inside his mansion, which is in "New Port, Rhode Island, U.S.A., Earth, Solar System, Milky Way" (p. 9). Vonnegut echoes Thornton Wilder in setting the cosmic scene early in the narrative so that we see a relationship between the general and the specific in the pattern of the universe. Rumfoord himself conforms to the pattern of the spiral in which he is caught. He and Kazak, his mastiff caught with him in the infundibulum, materialize on Earth every fifty-nine days, on Mercury every fourteen days, and on Mars every one hundred and eleven days. Rumfoord and Kazak are materialized permanently on Titan, the largest of the nine moons of Saturn, because their spirals coincide exactly with the spiral of Titan. Rumfoord has no control over where and when he materializes. In terms of the properties of space and time, he is a puppet of the universe.

It is the knowledge of the future granted to Rumfoord by his unique vantage point that makes him able to manipulate other characters. David Goldsmith has indicated that Rumfoord bears a resemblance to the Yahweh of the Old Testament who intervened in the history of Israel.<sup>2</sup> He certainly represents this archetype in his relationship to his wife, Beatrice, and to Malachi Constant. Beatrice and Malachi are told by Rumfoord that they will be bred to Martians and produce a son, Chrono, and that they will all be united on Titan. His prophecy is met with skepticism and both Beatrice and Malachi take active measures to prevent its coming true. Their efforts prove futile; Rumfoord's knowledge proves to be a fact of the universe.

To Rumfoord, the universe in The Sirens of Titan is a structured but meaningless one. It is structured because Rumfoord sees how things will be and even intervenes to assure that "the way things are" turns out to be just that. Vonnegut supplies numerous images of spiral patterns, all related to the idea of the movement of the universe:

Saturn describes a circle around the Sun.  
 It does it once every twenty-nine and a half  
 Earthling years.  
 Titan describes a circle around Saturn.  
 Titan describes, as a consequence, a spiral  
 around the Sun (p. 266).

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<sup>2</sup>David Goldsmith, Kurt Vonnegut: Fantasist of Fire and Ice (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), p. 3.

Rumfoord and Kazak are materialized permanently on Titan. The fact that they exist as spiral wave which coincides exactly with that of Titan makes them, as a consequence, describe a spiral around the Sun. They are part of the clockwork movement of the universe. Symbolically, Saturn with its nine moons may represent our solar system. There are a great many more spiral images in the novel such as spiral staircases and Chrono's good luck piece that is "a spiral of steel strapping" (p. 143). All of these images suggest the structured movement of the universe of which Rumfoord is a part.<sup>3</sup>

Rumfoord also perceives the universe as being meaningless. I have already mentioned that Rumfoord is the one character in The Sirens of Titan who seems to be most free. His prophecy to Malachi and Beatrice comes true; he is no false prophet crying in the wilderness of Absurdity. He knows the pattern of the universe and man's role in that pattern. His knowledge, however, does not help him to discover any meaning for the way things are. In fact, what Rumfoord discovers is that the universe is indifferent to the acts of man. It is Malachi and Beatrice who search for and find meaning and purpose for their lives in the novel. The contrast between the indifference of the universe and man's search for meaning and purpose results in the

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<sup>3</sup>For a more complete discussion of the spiral images see David Ketterer, New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), pp. 309-314.

essential questions of Vonnegut's works: How does man find meaning and purpose in an Absurd universe? And how free is man to pursue meaning and purpose? The answers to these questions are not clearly stated in The Sirens of Titan. It is Vonnegut's portrayal of Rumfoord that produces the ambiguities.

In connection with his prophecy, Rumfoord actively intervenes to control the destiny of man. The first intervention is his control of the army of Mars. Rumfoord sees to it that the army, according to plan, attacks Earth so that the countries of Earth will unite against a common enemy. He and his agents (Yahweh and his angels?) kidnap and brainwash the "recruits" from Earth, take away their free will and program them for this purpose. As it turns out, Malachi and Beatrice have a role to play which is part of the prophecy. Each assumes a new identity necessary for the pattern of control Rumfoord exerts over them. This role is only a stepping stone to their ultimate destiny.

The second deliberate intervention is Rumfoord's establishment of "The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent" (p. 180) which occurs after the predetermined failure of the Martian invasion. The major tenet of the new religion is "Take Care of the People, and God Almighty Will Take Care of Himself." "The two chief teachings of this religion are these. . . 'Puny man can do nothing at all to help or please God Almighty, and Luck is not the hand of God'" (p. 180). The

creed of Rumfoord's new church emphasizes the indifference of the universe, suggesting that whoever is in control leaves man to find his own meaning and purpose in life. It also indicates that man is free to pursue the quest for this purpose. The fact that Rumfoord is in control of man's destiny seems to negate this freedom, however.

Malachi Constant has an important role to play in the novel as well as in Rumfoord's religion. As Vonnegut tells us, Malachi's name means "faithful messenger" (p. 17). Because of his name Malachi had a sense of destiny. "What Constant had in mind, presumably, was a first-class message from God to someone equally distinguished" (p. 17). Rumfoord's use of Constant gives Malachi an opportunity to deliver a message to the human race, which is at least as "equally distinguished" as God in the pattern of the novel's universe.

The message is delivered by Malachi in the role of the Space Wanderer who, as Rumford predicted, appears on Earth in West Barnstable, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, at the Barnstable First Church of God the Utterly Indifferent, which has the subtitle, "The Church of the Weary Space Wanderer" (p. 218). Malachi does show up here after spending two years on Mercury (also according to Rumfoord's plan). His message, foretold, of course, by Rumfoord, is "I was a victim of a series of accidents, as are we all" (p. 229). The message is received enthusiastically by the people of Earth because it fits the plan. Man is free from the burden of responsibility for his acts

because he is a victim of a universe in which the only effects are the results of accidental causes. If God is indeed utterly indifferent, then accidents could be the only cosmic causes for the effects we see, according to Rumfoord's perception of the universe.

But from his cosmic control board, Rumfoord can see the pattern of the universe and the direction toward which it and he and mankind are moving. The idea of accidental causality is incongruent with the overall structure of the universe as described earlier. There is one possible explanation suggested by Ketterer for this incongruity: "Presumably, then, Rumfoord concocted his religion of accidental causality as a form of compensation or consolation protecting mankind from the sad knowledge that there has, indeed, been a purposeful design directing human affairs, but one that does little to advantage man's sense of dignity."<sup>4</sup> If this is true, the question of who the director of human affairs really is comes to mind. The only answer at this stage in the novel is Rumfoord.

Rumfoord's final intervention in the destiny of Malachi Constant comes shortly after the arrival of the Space Wanderer on Earth. Rumfoord materializes long enough to tell everyone that the Space Wanderer was once called Malachi Constant, a man now hated by the members of The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent because of his

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<sup>4</sup>Ketterer, p. 306.

belief in luck and his assumption that ". . . somebody up there likes me" (p. 20). Rumfoord informs Malachi/Space Wanderer that "The most significant accident that happened to you was your being born" (p. 254).

Malachi becomes a martyr for the religion of God the Utterly Indifferent when he is exiled to Titan along with Bee and Chrono. Thus the original prophecy made by Rumfoord is fulfilled. The pattern of control imposed by Rumfoord has been completed. As a martyr, Malachi will be remembered for making himself "the most memorable, magnificent, and meaningful human being of modern times" (p. 256). Malachi has no free will to resist; his martyrdom is planned to happen as it does.

Once they arrive on Titan, the destinies of Malachi, Bee and Chrono are complete. However it is on Titan that complexities arise as to the real role of Rumfoord. Up to this point in the novel, Rumfoord has been the agent of the universe; he has made the events in the lives of the three characters lead them to Titan. As Bee describes:

"He snatched us out of our lives. . . He put us to sleep. He cleaned out our minds the way you clean the seeds out of a jack-o-lantern. He wired us like robots, trained us, aimed us--burned us out in a good cause" (p. 242).

On Titan, Rumfoord's free will, we discover, may not be as free as it appears to be.

On Titan there is a stranded Tralfamadorian, Salo, who is on a mission to deliver a message from "One rim of the Universe to the Other" (p. 269). Salo himself does not know what the message is. By the time Malachi, Beatrice, Chrono, and Rumfoord all appear on Titan, Salo had been stranded since the Earthling year 203, 117 B.C. Salo's space ship, interestingly, is powered by a force that seems human, the "Universal Will to Become" (p. 270).

Salo is a machine, as are all Tralfamadorians. Tralfamadore was at one time inhabited by non-machine-like creatures, according to Salo. These creatures

" . . . were obsessed by the idea that everything that existed had to have a purpose, and that some purposes were higher than others.

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

And rather than serve such a low purpose, the creatures would make a machine to serve it" (p. 274).

Eventually the creatures began to kill each other off because of their contempt for purposelessness. They turned even the killing over to the machines, and the machines quickly finished the job. The structure of society on Tralfamadore extends the idea discussed earlier of an indifferent, purposeless universe.

Salo is different from the other machines on Tralfamadore as a result of his long stay on Titan. In order to pass the time while

waiting for his replacement part, Salo observes the people of Earth. The result of his observations is that Salo acquires human emotions. By watching Earthlings, Salo is inspired to build statues from Titanic peat.

"It wasn't so much what the Earthlings did as the way they did it that inspired Salo.

The Earthlings behaved at all times as though there were a big eye in the sky--as though that big eye were ravenous for entertainment" (p. 276).

If Salo's conclusion is true, the people on Earth do not seem convinced by the tenets of Rumfoord's Church of God the Utterly Indifferent.

I have digressed from my discussion of Rumfoord's free will because Tralfamadore is important to his final realization. In the final chapter of The Sirens of Titan, we discover that Rumfoord has been a victim of the patterns of control in the universe just as Malachi, Beatrice, and Chrono. Tralfamadorians have been directing human affairs since the time of Salo's being marooned on Titan. Some of the architectural accomplishments made by man turn out to be no more than Tralfamadorian messages to Salo:

"The meaning of Stonehenge in Tralfamadorian, when viewed from above, is: 'Replacement part being rushed with all possible speed.'"

"The Great Wall of China means in Tralfamadorian, when viewed from above: 'Be patient. We haven't forgotten about you.'"

"The Golden House of the Roman Emperor Nero meant: 'We are doing the best we can.'"

"The meaning of the Moscow Kremlin when it was first walled was: 'You will be on your way before you know it.'"

"The meaning of the Palace of the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, is: 'Pack up your things and be ready to leave on short notice'" (pp. 271-72).

Rumfoord discovers, much to his disgust, that he, too, is part of the pattern to deliver the replacement part to Salo. The agent/victim becomes very bitter and angrily says that Tralfamadore "reached into the Solar System, picked me up, and used me like a handy-dandy potato peeler!" (p. 285). Later, just before Rumfoord and Kazak are blown out of the Solar System by conditions on the Sun's surface, Rumfoord compares himself and Kazak to "buggywhips in the hands of a lunatic" (p. 287).

Before he goes crackling off into space, Rumfoord tells Malachi, Beatrice, and Chrono what he has discovered. They do not seem impressed or alarmed in any way; Malachi and Beatrice know they have been used all along. As Rumfoord disintegrates, he tells Chrono, "You have it in your pocket. In your pocket is the culmination of all Earthling history. In your pocket is the mysterious something that every Earthling was trying so desperately, so earnestly, so gropingly, so exhaustingly to produce and deliver" (p. 297). Rumfoord's final words in the novel express the hope that man will be able to exercise free will in the future:

"Perhaps, now that the part has been delivered to the Tralfamadorean messenger, Tralfamadore will leave the Solar System alone. Perhaps Earthlings will now be free to develop and follow their own

inclinations, as they have not been free to do for thousands of years. . . . The wonder is that Earthlings have been able to make as much sense as they have" (p. 298).

The pattern is now complete. Salo's replacement part is delivered and Salo, after self-destructing himself in an all too human effort to gain Rumfoord's love, is put back together by Malachi whom Salo takes to Earth to die after Beatrice's death on Titan. One of the major themes of The Sirens of Titan is expressed by Beatrice in her book, "The True Purpose of Life in the Solar System," and is a refutation of the conclusion stated in Rumfoord's last words. Beatrice concludes, "The worst thing that could possibly happen to anybody. . . would be to not be used for anything by anybody" (p. 310). This sentence states the situation that governs the existence of every character in the novel, including Salo. Vonnegut here implies that the purpose of life is found in relationship with other people. Malachi completes the theme by stating what this relationship involves. Vonnegut has him say that "a purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved" (p. 313).

What then can be concluded about free will in The Sirens of Titan? Peter Reed proposes that "For one thing, the novel suggests that free will implies the presence of meaning, even of some universal power that can observe the actions and respond to the wishes of man,

and which can adjust the course of the future."<sup>5</sup> This implies no free will at all. David Ketterer sees the question of free will presented through Rumfoord, who "seems to be, in turn, controller and controlled, but he does not exist in linear time. What we have here is the central religious mystery of fate or determinism and free will, given God's omniscience, in science fiction garb. Depending upon the circumstances, as a source of consolation one may choose to emphasize either the knowledge that man has freedom of choice, or that an unhappy event is God's will. This is the contradiction, or rather paradox, at the heart of Vonnegut's fiction. . ."<sup>6</sup>

My own reading of The Sirens of Titan leads me to infer that Vonnegut was not decided at that time on whether or not man has free will. He does show us that man is the victim of forces beyond his control, but he also allows for the hope that man does have some freedom, at least, to act. Rumfoord's last words express this hope. There is also the hint that Tralfamadore, the dictating force in this novel, did not have complete control over the human race. Beatrice says in her book that although the forces of Tralfamadore did play a part in the affairs of Earth ". . . those persons who have served the

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<sup>5</sup>Peter J. Reed, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1972), p. 75.

<sup>6</sup>Ketterer, op. cit., p. 326.

interests of Tralfamadore have served them in such highly personalized ways that Tralfamadore can be said to have had practically nothing to do with the case" (p. 309).

The force in The Sirens of Titan that allows freedom for the characters is love. Malachi and Beatrice discover this for themselves in their advice "to love whoever is around to be loved." Even Salo, programmed not to reveal the contents of his message to anyone until he reaches his destination on the other side of the universe, becomes less machine-like and even exercises free will by revealing the message to his memory of Rumfoord. Salo realizes "The machine is no longer a machine. . . . His mind buzzes and pops like the mind of an Earthling--fizzes and overheats with thoughts of love, honor, dignity, rights, accomplishments, integrity, independence--" (p. 300). Salo self-destructs because he loves Rumfoord who is not sensitive to the machine's emotional side. In fact, Salo, out of his love for Rumfoord, denies his machine nature to tell Rumfoord the message.

The meaning of life as discovered by Beatrice and Malachi and the meaning to which the narrator refers in the opening sentence of the novel is love. If one believes the Christian equation God Is Love, then the force that determines the pattern of all things is God. But we are told that the meaning of life in The Sirens of Titan is found in "the truths that lie within every human being" (p. 7). Vonnegut's attitude toward free will is not clear in this novel, but his message implies

that there is at least some freedom in loving whoever is around to be loved.

### Chapter III

#### Mother Night: Roles to Play Before I Sleep

In his introduction to Mother Night, Vonnegut tells us that this novel is the only story of his whose moral he knows. The moral is "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (p. v).<sup>1</sup> As in The Sirens of Titan the idea of playing or fulfilling roles relates to man's lack of free will. We see in Mother Night a more sharply defined attitude toward free will than Vonnegut expressed in The Sirens of Titan. This attitude (or theme) is developed in Mother Night through the roles the protagonist, Howard W. Campbell, Jr., is forced to play in relationship to the other characters.

Campbell introduces himself to us from his jail cell in Jerusalem where he is awaiting trial for his war crimes. He tells us that he is "an American by birth, a Nazi by reputation, and a nationless person by inclination" (p. 17). Campbell's particular crime is writing and broadcasting Nazi propaganda during World War II. Campbell's situation is different from other Nazi war criminals

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Mother Night (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1961). Page numbers for all citations will be included parenthetically in the text.

because we learn that he was an American agent whose broadcasts carried coded information out of Germany throughout the war. As a result of this, he is not hanged immediately after the war but is freed to pursue his career as playwright.

The roles of American agent and Nazi propagandist are complex and are important to Vonnegut's theme. As we shall see, it is Campbell's playing of these roles that in the end restricts his freedom to act.

Campbell is recruited as an American agent by Major Frank Wirtanen (code name Blue Fairy Godmother) as he sits in the Tiergarten in Berlin in 1938. When Wirtanen asks him to be an agent, Campbell refuses:

"Oh Christ," I said. I said it with anger and fatalism (italics mine). I slumped down. When I straightened up again, I said, "Ridiculous. No--hell, no" (p. 40).

Campbell accepts reluctantly under the conditions that

"The most that will be done for you . . . is that your neck will be saved. But there will be no magic time when you will be cleared, when America will call you out of hiding with a cheerful: Olly-olly-ox-in-free" (p. 45).

It is through Campbell's schizophrenic role of propagandist/agent that Vonnegut forces us to look at the theme of the novel, for it is his acceptance of this dual role that causes Campbell's problems and leads to his destruction. The problems occur after the war when Campbell is living in Greenwich Village. Until this time, the most

serious event of his life is the death of his actress wife, Helga, during the war. It is in America that Campbell becomes the victim of fate, or luck, as he sees it, and of three other characters.

The first of these characters is George Kraft, a Russian agent whose real name is Colonel Iona Potapov. Campbell admits:

"It was dumb luck that brought us together. No conspiracy was involved at first. It was I who knocked on his door, invaded his privacy. If I hadn't carved that chess set, we never would have met . . .

I induced him to unlock [his door] by asking him if he played chess. There was dumb luck again. Nothing else would have made him open up" (p. 48).

Despite the friendship that develops between them, Kraft "eventually [thinks] of a way to use me cruelly in advancing the Russian cause" (p. 51. Italics mine).

Kraft's plan involves two other characters who come to influence and use Campbell: The Reverend Doctor Lionel Jason David Jones, D.D.S., D.D., who is the publisher of The White Christian Minuteman, a publication dedicated to the principles of Naziism; and Resi North, the sister of Campbell's dead wife, Helga. Resi pretends to be Helga and affords Campbell the only moment of real joy he experiences in the novel, in spite of his intuition which warns him not to trust Resi/Helga. His doubt proves well grounded.

The conspiracy among the three, Kraft, Jones, and Resi, involves kidnapping Campbell and sending him to Moscow. Wirtanen

warns Campbell of the plot. The reason for the kidnaping is so that Campbell can be exhibited "to the world as a prime example of the sort of Fascist war criminal this country (America) shelters . . . . They also hope that you will confess to all sorts of collusion between Americans and Nazis at the start of the Nazi regime" (pp. 144-45), as Wirtanen explains to Campbell. This magnificent plot is foiled by an F.B.I. raid on the meeting of the White Christian Minutemen where the abduction is to take place. Campbell is then free again, after discovering from Wirtanen that Jones alone held Campbell's best interest at heart.

Campbell, like Malachi and Beatrice and even Rumfoord, is the victim of a scheme of things he would prefer to take no part in. Like Rumfoord's role in the pattern of the Tralfamadorians, Campbell's role in aiding the Americans during the war is unknown to him. He did not have any idea of what or even when he was broadcasting a message. For example, he was completely unaware of broadcasting the news of his wife's death. After the war, as we have seen, he becomes the object of Kraft's plot to use him. These two facts indicate a belief by Vonnegut that Government is one aspect of man's life that has gained control over him. Campbell is a pawn in the international game of political chess.

Campbell is used in another way in Mother Night. Resi brings him a copy of Memoirs of a Monogamous Casanova which relates

details of his love affair with his wife. Campbell learns that this book, and all of his writing, is translated by a corporal in the Russian army who found a trunk belonging to Campbell when the Russian army entered Berlin. The corporal publishes all of the material as his own in Russia and becomes a success. Memoirs is published in Russia as pornography and is even illustrated. Campbell reacts in despair:

"That's how I feel right now-- . . . like a pig that's been taken apart, who's had experts find a use for every part. By God--I think they even found a use for my squeal! The part of me that wanted to tell the truth got turned into an expert liar! The lover in me got turned into a pornographer! The artist in me got turned into ugliness such as the world has rarely seen before" (p. 150).

Campbell also plays a part in the destiny of Bernard B. O'Hare, the American soldier who arrested him in Germany at the end of the war. O'Hare is waiting in Campbell's ransacked apartment after the failed kidnapping. O'Hare feels it is his personal destiny to kill Campbell because Campbell represents "pure evil." O'Hare tells him that their meeting again is "in the stars." "Just when you think there isn't any point to life-- . . . then, all of a sudden, you realize you are being aimed right straight at something" (p. 178). Campbell understands what he means. Then he breaks O'Hare's arm, sends him away, and turns himself in to the Israelis to be punished for his war crimes.

The act of turning himself in is the desperate act of a man who has no free will attempting to find some meaning in his life. Through-

out the novel, we are aware of the dangers of role playing. Vonnegut shows us Campbell, the Nazi propangandist/American agent; Kraft, the friend/Russian spy with plans for Campbell; and Resi/Helga, who pretends to be what she is not. All of the characters pretend to be what they are not, and in the end, have no free will.

Shortly before he turns himself in, Campbell finds himself frozen:

"It was not guilt that froze me. I had taught myself never to feel guilt.

It was not a ghastly sense of loss that froze me. I had taught myself to covet nothing.

It was not a loathing of death that froze me. I had taught myself to think of death as a friend.

It was not the heartbroken rage against injustice that froze me. I had taught myself that a human being might as well look for diamond tiaras in the gutter as for rewards that were fair.

It was not the thought that I was so unloved that froze me. I had taught myself to do without love.

It was not the thought that God was cruel that froze me. I had taught myself never to expect anything from Him.

What froze me was the fact that I had no reason to move in any direction" (p. 167).

Campbell, like Rumfoord, despairs when he realizes to what extent he is manipulated by other people. He has no free will because he is the puppet of forces beyond his control. Campbell's crime against himself is the same crime he committed against the Jews. It is the crime of dehumanization. Campbell becomes what he pretended to be. His pretending to be a Nazi, which contributed to the dehumanization of millions of Jews, results in his own dehumanization.

Even though he tells us he is "in Israel, of my own free will" (p. 188), it is his lack of ability to cope with what he is that leads him to turn himself in. Even Campbell's final act of hanging himself is not an act of free will, but is the culmination of his despair over what he is as a consequence of his being controlled so long by others.

In Mother Night Vonnegut develops a corollary to his moral of the danger of pretending. The corollary is "Make love when you can. It's good for you" (p. vii). As in The Sirens of Titan, love is the redeeming factor of man's condition in a universe that does not always make sense. Campbell fails to find and keep love and in the end fails even to love himself. Campbell betrays himself to the despair of a world without love, and in losing himself, he loses whatever chance for free will man is allowed in an absurd universe. He becomes what he pretends to be, and so might we all.

## Chapter IV

### Cat's Cradle: It's All in the Game

While in Mother Night Vonnegut shows us close up how people restrict the free will of others, he backs away again in Cat's Cradle to the familiar cosmic view he presented in The Sirens of Titan. Even though the setting of Cat's Cradle is terrestrial, we are more aware of the forces of the universe at play with man's place in the scheme of things in this novel than in Mother Night. But we do not see the active control of forces outside man like the Tralfamadorians. The controls are not all produced by man in Cat's Cradle, but there is the indication that man is at the center of things.

In the novel, Vonnegut develops a religion which is based on foma, or harmless lies. The religion is Bokononism. It is named by a black, whose real name is Lionel Boyd Johnson, who during a very eventful life is washed ashore with a Marine deserter named Earl McCabe onto San Lorenzo, a Caribbean island which is unknown to the United States. The two attempt to create a Utopia and fail. As an alternative, they decide to entertain the people of the island. Johnson becomes Bokonon, a religious leader; McCabe becomes the island's political leader. They agree that Bokonon will become an outlaw in order to give the new religion some zest, and to occupy

the natives by having them hunt Bokonon so he can be executed on the Hook. Although Bokononism is against the law, everybody on the island is a Bokononist. It is through Bokononism that Vonnegut, in this novel, makes a statement of the condition of man in the universe.

It is a tenet of Bokononism (Rumfoordism?) that everything happens as it is "supposed to happen." Yet Bokonon himself says in The Books of Bokonon that "Nothing in this book is true."<sup>1</sup> The Bokononist view of the universe, however, is that of circles (patterns?) of relationship among people that are demonstrated to be true. Every circle intersects every other circle in the pattern. Perhaps a look at the glossary of Bokononist terms will make this metaphor more clear.

The first term is karass. A karass is a team that performs the Will of God without realizing what they are doing. Bokonon writes, "Man created the checkerboard; God created the karass. By that he means that a karass ignores national, institutional, occupational, familial, and class boundaries" (p. 12). In some religious sects, these terms would be the "chosen" or "elect" of God. In Bokononism, these teams perform in ignorance of the fact that they are performing God's Will or even that there is any logic at all to their actions. They act

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Cat's Cradle (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), copyright page. Page numbers for all citations will be included parenthetically in the text.

simply because they are supposed to act in the way they do.

A vin-dit is "a sudden, very personal shove in the direction of Bokononism, in the direction of believing that God Almighty knew all about me, after all, that God Almighty had some pretty elaborate plans for me" (p. 53). Christians might recognize this as a "calling." The narrator of Cat's Cradle says that at the moment he has his first vin-dit, he has a vision "of the unity in every second of all time and all wandering mankind, all wandering womankind, all wandering children" (pp. 55-56). A vindit, then, seems to be another link in the chain binding humankind to God's Will.

A third Bokononist word expressing a relationship that may exist among people is granfalloon. On board a plane flying to San Lorenzo, Jonah, the narrator, meets a woman who is obsessed with meeting Hoosiers everywhere she goes. Her obsession is an example of a false karass, "a textbook example of what Bokonon calls a gran-falloon. Other examples of granfalloons are the Communist party, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the General Electric Company, the International Order of Odd Fellows--and any nation, anytime, anywhere" (p. 67). Such a team is meaningless in terms of the way God operates, according to Bokonon.

Another word, wampeter, describes a relationship among a karass. A wampeter is the pivot of a karass; it is an object around which the lives of otherwise unrelated people revolve. "Anything can

be a wampeter: a tree, a rock, an animal, an idea, a book, a melody, the Holy Grail. Whatever it is, the members of its karass revolve about it in the majestic chaos of a spiral nebula" (p. 42. Italics mine). The phrase "chaos of the spiral nebula" echoes the structure of the universe in The Sirens of Titan. The particular wampeter of the characters in Cat's Cradle is an invention called ice-nine, which is ice with a melting point of one-hundred-and-thirty degrees Fahrenheit. It is capable of turning all the water on Earth to ice. The role of ice-nine will come in later in this discussion.

There are words in Bokononism that imply a lack of free will for man in the universe. One of these is wrang-wrang which is "a person who steers people away from a line of speculation by reducing that line, with the example of the wrang-wrang's own life, to an absurdity" (p. 59). Jonah interprets his own wrang-wrang as preventing him from being a nihilist. (This fact may be a key in understanding Vonnegut's position on free will.) Even the wrang-wrang has a mission, whether he knows it or not.

Another Bokononist influence is the idea of zah-mah-ki-bo which means "Fate-inevitable destiny." Related to zah-mah-ki-bo is the word duffle, which "is the destiny of thousands upon thousands of persons when placed in the hands of a . . . fogbound child" (p. 135). The inclusion of these words in the Bokononist vocabulary shows a further emphasis on a structured universe in the religion of Bokonon.

One last expression of Bokonon contributes to the idea of structure. Jonah tells us, "Busy, busy, busy, is what we Bokononists whisper whenever we think of how complicated and unpredictable the machinery of life really is" (p. 51). We have seen the imagery of machinery in The Sirens of Titan, and we shall see it again in Slaughterhouse-Five and Breakfast of Champions. It is an imagery that suggests the structure of the universe and leads us to infer a lack of free will within the structure.

A paradox arises, however, from the works of Bokonon. As we have seen above, there are key words in the religion that indicate a structure and a purpose, (zah-mah-ki-bo) whatever that purpose might be. The paradox comes from a passage in The Books of Bokonon that implies free will for man and an indifferent universe much like the one in The Sirens of Titan.

Listen:

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

And God said, "Let Us make living creatures  
out of mud, so the mud can see what We have done."  
And God created every living creature that now  
moveth, and one was man. Mud as man alone could  
speak. God leaned close as mud as man sat up,  
looked around, and spoke. Man blinked. "What  
is the purpose of all this?" he asked politely.

"Everything must have a purpose?" asked God.

"Certainly," said man.

"Then I leave it to you to think of one for all  
this," said God.

And He went away (p. 177).

The question we must now ask is, How does Vonnegut resolve this paradox of seeming free will in a structured universe within the scope of Cat's Cradle. The answer lies in the function of Bokononism which although begun as entertainment, a game in which the people of San Lorenzo could forget about their poverty, has taken on serious implications. Bokononism gives the people of San Lorenzo a sense of purpose which they did not have before. It is this sense of purpose that is essential to the central belief that man is sacred. When Jonah asks Frank Hoenikker what is sacred to Bokononists, Frank tells him, "Man . . . That's all. Just man" (p. 143). If any foma approach truth in Bokononism, it is this value on the dignity of humankind.

The dignity achieved by Bokononists on San Lorenzo is a result of their understanding their role in the game. They realize much earlier than Howard W. Campbell, Jr. that they are pawns in a game. "They were all employed full time as actors in a play they understood, that any human being anywhere could understand and applaud" (p. 119). But as Bokonon tells us: "'God never wrote a good play in His Life'" (p. 161). Nevertheless, the sense of purpose experienced by the people of San Lorenzo results from their knowledge that they are "actors" in roles that are determined for them.

Connected with the dignity that comes from the sense of purpose is the value on love. One of the rituals of Bokononism is bokomaru, the mingling of souls through the soles of the feet. When Jonah

inherits the chance to marry Mona, the most beautiful girl on the island, he wants to keep all of her love for himself. He forbids her to boko-maru with anyone but himself. She calls him a sin-wat, "a man who wants all of somebody's love" (p. 141). Bokononism and Christianity have the common doctrine to "love thy neighbor." As we have seen in The Sirens of Titan and Mother Night, love is a positive value in Vonnegut's universe.

The effect of the Bokononist philosophy in the world of Cat's Cradle can best be seen through Jonah. At the beginning of the novel, he is about to write a book called The Day the World Ended which is to deal with the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. By the end of the novel, Jonah is one of six survivors of the destruction of the world by ice-nine, and we realize that we have been reading a book which very well might have been entitled The Day the World Ended. Jonah tells us early that he is a Bokononist, but we learn through his narration that his "conversion" was gradual. The one incident that pushes him over the edge into acceptance of Bokononsim occurs when Frank Hoenikker, who is in line to be made President of San Lorenzo, asks Jonah to take his place. At this point Jonah feels that "All things conspired to form one cosmic vin-dit" (p. 137). This cosmic shove into accepting the Presidency of San Lorenzo can be interpreted only as zah-mah-ki-bo, inevitable destiny.

Earlier in the novel Jonah comments that Frank "had made me feel as though my own free will were as irrelevant as the free will of piggy-wig arriving at the Chicago stockyards" (p. 128). The acceptance of such fate is the focal point of Bokononism. It is when man questions the meaning of things that he becomes insecure of his "role in the game." Yet part of man's role seems to be to question.

Bokonon wrote:

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

The rub is this: man's fate seems to be to wonder what part he plays in his fate. Raymond Olderman suggests that Vonnegut's rationale for this concept of fate is different from the Greek idea, and that "we need not ask about the powers that rule and the meaning of life because life is meaningless; we should not ask because the question misplaces emphasis and makes us wonder about Meaning. . . . Once we discard all notions that life is meaningful or purposeful, we can turn to each other and recognize as Bokonon does that purposeful or not the only thing sacred is man."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Raymond M. Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 194-195.

There is something in man, however, that does make him ask about the meaning of life and his role in it. Despite the Bokononist realizations about Fate and the machinery of life that Jonah has, he is a frustrated pessimist at the end of the novel. He dreams of climbing the tallest mountain on San Lorenzo, but he is frustrated in deciding what magnificent symbol he should take with him to plant at the peak. He declares that Bokononism is a depressing religion; he curses Bokonon and speaks of "meaningful, individual heroic acts" (p. 190). Jonah, like Bokonon, as we discover, rebels against Fate. The last sentence in The Books of Bokonon and Cat's Cradle reads:

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

We do not know Who. The forces of the universe (God, Tralfamadore, Time, Nature, whatever) remain indifferent to our attempts to find meaning in life. Bokononism does not solve this dilemma for us. "Where man imposes his own patterns on existence and divides men, countries, ethical issues and much else, into rigid black-and-white units, Bokononism accepts that there no doubt are subtle arrangements and configurations in life, but exactly what they are and how they

operate will always be, finally, a mystery."<sup>3</sup>

In the novel, man is left to puzzle over who is really in charge and what meaning or purpose life has. He is virtually in the web of a cat's cradle as Newt Hoenikker describes it:

"No wonder kids grow up crazy. A cat's cradle is nothing but a bunch of X's between somebody's hands, and little kids look and look and look at all those X's . . . "

"And?" [Jonah asks.]

"No damn cat, and no damn cradle" (p. 114).

The "X's," like the pattern of the game played in hunting Bokonon, are patterns man can see but in which he can find no meaning.

In Cat's Cradle man is left again to play roles in a game controlled by forces he does not understand. The game becomes more than a game in this novel. It becomes a metaphor for man's condition in the universe. Man has no choice but to "play the roles forced upon him, just as the people of San Lorenzo were "forced" to play the game of Bokonon. As in Mother Night, there is the warning that we must be careful in what we pretend. In Cat's Cradle Bokonon and McCabe begin the game in the roles of religious and political leader. In the end they become exactly what they pretend and become dependent upon the roles of one another to give meaning to their lives.

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<sup>3</sup>Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970 (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 190.

In the world Vonnegut creates in Cat's Cradle there is no free will. Man's hope lies in love. Peter Reed offers the guiding principle from the novel: "Much of Bokononism, then, builds around the notion that there are incomprehensible forces determining our lives. Or that there are not, but that it is generally helpful to proceed as if there were."<sup>4</sup> There is no choice but to play the game.

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<sup>4</sup>Peter J. Reed, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1972), p. 127.

## Chapter V

### God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater: Blessed Are the Poor

Vonnegut tells us in the first sentence of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater that "A sum of money is a leading character in this tale about people. . . ." (p. 7).<sup>1</sup> The sum of money, \$87,472,033.61, produces an income of "\$3,500,000 a year, nearly \$10,000 a day --Sundays, too" (p. 7). The money belongs to the Rosewater Foundation which was established by Senator Lister Ames Rosewater to prevent the Rosewater fortune from being taxed. The presidency of the Foundation is inherited by the closest and oldest heirs of Senator Rosewater and is relinquished only upon death or proven insanity. The paradox of the controlled controller which we have seen already in Vonnegut's works is the central paradox of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, for as we shall see, the sum of money is indeed a leading character because it is the governing force of the characters in the novel.

Eliot Rosewater, the son of the Senator, is the central character of the novel. He is considered unfit for the presidency of the Rosewater Foundation for several reasons. One reason is his alcoholism;

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1965). Page numbers for all citations will be included parenthetically in the text.

another is his passion for volunteer fire departments. Eliot quite often disappears from home only to be heard from days later from some small town. His letters always indicate that he has visited the volunteer fire department in whatever town he is in. These two reasons, however, are not the major ones for doubting Eliot's competency. The major reason is that Eliot feels a sense of being directed toward a goal which is unknown to him. He writes to his wife, Sylvia, from a volunteer fire department in Elsinore, California:

Maybe I flatter myself when I think that I have things in common with Hamlet, that I have an important mission, that I'm temporarily mixed up about how it should be done. Hamlet had one big edge on me. His father's ghost told him exactly what he had to do, while I am operating without instructions. But from somewhere something is trying to tell me where to go, what to do there, and why to do it . . . There is this feeling that I have a destiny far away from the shallow and preposterous posing that is our life in New York. And I roam (p. 31).

Eliot is typical of Vonnegut's characters, who are all pilgrims in search of meaning and purpose. Eliot, like Howard W. Campbell, Jr., Jonah, and as we shall see, Billy Pilgrim, believes in a meaningful universe and "is a pilgrim engaged in an uncertain quest along an unmapped route."<sup>2</sup> Eliot is different from the others, however,

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<sup>2</sup>David Goldsmith, Kurt Vonnegut: Fantasist of Fire and Ice (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), p. 1.

because he discovers early in the novel what his mission is. He telephones Sylvia from his original hometown of Rosewater in Rosewater County, Indiana, and tells her that he has found his destiny. "I'm going to care about these people. . . I'm going to love these discarded Americans, even though they're useless and unattractive. That is going to be my work of art" (pp. 35-36). Malachi's discovery in The Sirens of Titan (p. 313) that one purpose of human life is "to love whoever is around to be loved" is applied by Eliot in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater.

Eliot's decision to love the people of Rosewater and his fervor for volunteer fire departments are results of his feelings of guilt. There are two traumatic events in his life about which he feels guilty. One is that Eliot feels responsible for the death of his mother who drowned in a sailing accident. The second and more shocking is an incident that occurred when Eliot served in World War II. On patrol one day Eliot mistook a group of volunteer firemen for S. S. troops and killed three innocent men. This explains his interest in volunteer firemen and his realization of the tendency of things to combine with oxygen and be consumed. Eliot, like Howard W. Campbell, Jr., is guilty of acting in a dehumanizing way toward other people. Unlike Campbell, however, Eliot attempts to ~~comp~~ensate for these "accidents of Fate" over which he had no control. He does so by setting up a branch of the Rosewater Foundation in Rosewater where he stays and

receives calls from people who need money or simply someone to talk to. Eliot overcompensates by trying to love the people "uncritically."

It is after Eliot makes his declaration to care for the people of Rosewater that we begin to discover how he and most of the other characters are compelled to act in relationship to their attitudes toward the sum of money. Senator Rosewater despairs because he sees Eliot's conduct as the beginning of the end of the Rosewaters. The Senator arranges for Eliot to meet Sylvia, who has had two nervous breakdowns and is suffering from Samaritrophia, which is "hysterical indifference to the troubles of those less fortunate than oneself" (p. 41), and who has begun divorce proceedings against Eliot. The Senator's scheme is for Eliot and Sylvia to spend one more night together with the hope that a child will be conceived so that the presidency of the Foundation will remain in the direct line of descent. If there is no child, the control of the Foundation goes to another branch of the family, Fred and Caroline Rosewater, who live in Pisquontuit, Rhode Island. There is a plot underway by Norman Mushari, a young assistant in the firm of McAllister, Robjent, Reed, and McGee, to prove that Eliot is insane and to help Fred Rosewater gain control of the Foundation. If successful, Mushari would be in the position to gain a large sum of money. Thus, "a large sum of money" influences directly the lives of the characters. In Cat's Cradle the money would

be considered a wampeter.

In addition to the money, another restricting device utilized by Vonnegut is the contrast between the attitudes of the rich and the poor toward money and each other. The prevailing attitude of the rich is the motto of Noah Rosewater who made the Rosewater fortune. That motto is "Grab much too much, or you'll get nothing at all" (p. 13). Senator Rosewater states his contempt for the people Eliot chooses to help when he says, "Eliot doesn't love those awful people out there any more than I do. He couldn't possibly love them, if he weren't drunk all the time. . . . If Eliot's booze were shut off, his compassion for the maggots in the slime on the bottom of the human garbage pail would vanish." (p. 46).

Another example of the posture assumed by the rich is found in an oath taken by an upstairs maid in the service of the Buntlines of Pisquontuit. The service is required to help "an intelligent, clean female orphan . . . to learn about the better things in life, and perhaps to be inspired to climb a few rungs of the ladder of cultural and social grace" (p. 133). The oath reads as follows:

I do solemnly swear that I will respect the sacred private property of others, and that I will be content with whatever station in life God Almighty may assign me to. I will be grateful to those who employ me, and will never complain about wages and hours, but will ask myself instead, "What more can I do for my employer, my republic, and my God?" I understand that I have not been placed on Earth to be happy. I am here to be tested.

If I am to pass the test, I must be always unselfish, always sober, always truthful, always respectful to those to whom God has, in His Wisdom, placed above me. If I pass the test, I will go to joy everlasting in Heaven when I die. If I fail, I shall roast in hell while the Devil laughs and Jesus weeps (pp. 133-34).

The attitude held by the rich restricts them from the compassion in human relationships that is valued by Vonnegut. The rich are especially unaware of the need to love uncritically "whoever is around to be loved." The rich are guilty of the crime of dehumanization as Howard W. Campbell, Jr. is guilty. By ignoring or treating people (Jews, blacks, poor) as less important human beings, the rich (and Campbell) commit the sin that Senator Rosewater calls "the most unspeakable of modern crimes: Dis-crim-i-nay-tion" (p. 65). For this reason, they are incomplete human beings and victims of their own selfishness.

The poor in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater fall into two groups. The first is the social climbers like Caroline Rosewater, who pretends to have more means than she really does in order to associate with Amanita Buntline. Caroline's aspirations almost bring about the ruin of her marriage and tempt her husband, Fred, to commit suicide. Vonnegut imposes his theme from Mother Night of becoming what we pretend through Caroline and Fred. In a last desperate attempt to save their marriage, Fred tells Caroline:

"The point I'm trying to make . . . is-- we are somebody. I am sick and I am tired of pretending that we just aren't anybody."

"I never pretended we weren't anybody."

"You've pretended I wasn't anybody" (p. 144).

Fred and Caroline are trapped like Howard Campbell in roles they are compelled to play. The controlling force in this case is "a large sum of money" rather than Government.

The second group of poor in the novel is the one in which the people of Rosewater, Indiana, belong. They are the blessed poor who are truly appreciative of Eliot's concern for them. Eliot represents an authority very close to a God-figure to these people. There are those who through pride and/or resentment refuse any aid from the Rosewater Foundation, but most of the people are like Diana Moon Glampers who is described as being "ugly, stupid, and boring" (p. 56). Diana is convinced she will die from lightning striking her in the kidneys. She calls Eliot on the telephone every time there is a thunderstorm, and he talks to her until she is calmed down. Diana is representative of the blessed poor who are confined by the attitude of the rich toward them and by their own limited resources, material and spiritual.

The theme of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater is the same as that of The Sirens of Titan and Cat's Cradle. It is stated in the scene in the mental institution where Eliot spends a year frozen much like Howard Campbell freezes when he no longer has a reason

to move. Eliot freezes, or blacks out, because his dream/mission "clicks off." Kilgore Trout states the theme when he says, "The problem is this: How to love people who have no use?" (p. 183). The answer in Trout's words is ". . . if we can't find reasons and methods for treasuring human beings because they are human beings, then we might as well, as has so often been suggested, rub them out" (p. 183). We know that Vonnegut is not in favor of rubbing people out because Howard Campbell is guilty of that crime in Mother Night. The answer to the question of how to love people who have no use is simply to remember that ". . . people can use all the uncritical love they can get" (p. 186).

The characters in the novel have no free will. As I have attempted to point out, they are restricted in fulfilling their potential to be complete human beings by their greed, selfishness, and in the case of both the rich and the poor, their social status. Eliot is the one character who comes closest to being a complete human being. His efforts in Rosewater fail, but at the ambiguous end of the novel in a final act of benevolence, he adopts fifty-seven children whose mothers claim him as the father. By doing this he creates for himself another illusion to escape the reality that his mission has failed. The two possibilities Vonnegut offers in a world without free will are ". . . we can learn to love each other, or we can each create our own illusion. . . . Neither possibility makes life meaningful, but both do offer

a way to stay alive, and maybe even have some fun."<sup>3</sup> Vonnegut shows us in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater that money is part of the pattern of control in modern society, and he shows us that we are all poor in our ability to love uncritically. The poor are to be pitied.

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<sup>3</sup>Raymond M. Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 191.

## Chapter VI

### Slaughterhouse-Five: The Pilgrim's Progress

In Slaughterhouse-Five Vonnegut confronts one of the most haunting experiences of his life, the fire-bombing of Dresden, Germany, during World War II. In this confrontation he also combines the patterns of control that have been presented in his earlier novels by structuring a universe in which man has no potential for free will because he is a victim of time, as Rumfoord is in The Sirens of Titan, and determinism or Fate, as are the characters in Cat's Cradle. Slaughterhouse-Five is, perhaps, more pessimistic about man's place in the universe than the earlier works because there is not the indication that love will redeem us. All that there is for man to do in the world of Slaughterhouse-Five is to passively accept whatever comes his way. Each moment is structured that way.

In my discussion of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, I stated that all of Vonnegut's characters are pilgrims on an uncertain quest for meaning and purpose. Ironically, in Slaughterhouse-Five the central character is named Billy Pilgrim. It is ironic because Billy is more a passive victim of the forces of control than any other character in Vonnegut's work. For one thing, Billy Pilgrim cannot control where he is in time:

Billy is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren't necessarily fun. He is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next (p. 23).<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Billy is unstuck in time emphasizes the role playing theme Vonnegut employs in Mother Night. Billy finds himself time traveling from the present of the novel, 1968, backward in time to 1944-45 and to various points in between. Billy also travels to the planet Tralfamadore, where he learns about the structure of time and the universe. In each of these time zones, Billy assumes a different role ranging from a meek but successful optometrist to a clown-figure of a soldier and prisoner of war to a specimen in a Tralfamadorian zoo. In Slaughterhouse-Five the man does not make the time, the time makes the man.

The planet Tralfamadore in Slaughterhouse-Five is changed from Vonnegut's description of it in The Sirens of Titan. The Tralfamadorians are not yet concerned with directing Earthling affairs. When first taken aboard the flying saucer by them in 1967, Billy asks, "Why me?" The response is, "That is a very Earthling question to ask, Mr. Pilgrim. Why you? Why us for that matter? Why anything?"

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse-Five (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969). Page numbers for all citations will be included parenthetically in the text.

Because this moment simply is . . . here we are, Mr. Pilgrim, trapped in the amber of this moment. There is no why" (pp. 76-77). The Tralfamadorians, like Billy and all other Earthlings, are puppets of the forces of the universe, yet they have a perspective of time Billy does not. Billy learns from them the same thing that Rumfoord does: "All moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist" (p. 27). It is this pattern of time that allows Billy to travel into the past and future.

Another perspective of the universe that the Tralfamadorians share with Billy is the fact that there is no free will. When Billy asks how he got to Tralfamadore, the reply is that, "It would take another Earthling to explain it to you. Earthlings are the great explainers explaining why this event is structured as it is, telling how other events may be achieved or avoided. . . . All time is time. It does not change . . . .It simply is. Take it moment by moment, and you will find that we are all, as I've said before, bugs in amber" (pp. 85-86).

Billy Pilgrim says, "You sound to me as though you don't believe in free will" (p. 86). He is told that "only on Earth is there any talk of free will" (p. 86).

Billy also learns how the universe will end when he asks the secret of how a planet can live in peace. He wants to tell the secret to the people of Earth in order to avoid the destruction of the universe by Earth.

"We know how the Universe ends--" said the guide, "and Earth has nothing to do with it, except that it gets wiped out, too."

"How--how does the Universe end?" said Billy.

"We blow it up, experimenting with new fuels for our flying saucers. A Tralfamadorian test pilot presses a starter button, and the whole Universe disappears."

"If you know this," said Billy, "isn't there some way you can prevent it? Can't you keep the pilot from pressing the button?"

"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" (pp. 116-117).

So we find that man can perform no meaningful acts in the pre-determined universe of Slaughterhouse-Five. The one question Vonnegut does not answer for us, however, is who or what is in control. It is not the Tralfamadorians as it appears in The Sirens of Titan. There are no characters who dominate others as in Mother Night. There is a cosmic game to be played as in Cat's Cradle, but in Slaughterhouse-Five only Billy and the Tralfamadorians seem to be aware of being pawns, or rather robots (because the Tralfamadorians "say that every creature and plant in the Universe is a machine. It amuses them that so many Earthlings are offended by the idea of being machines" (p. 154). Indeed the characters in Slaughterhouse-Five are not fully developed human beings. They are merely intimations of characters. Vonnegut himself admits, "There are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations, because most of the people in it are so sick and so much the listless playthings

of enormous forces" (p. 164). In chapter one of Slaughterhouse-Five, Vonnegut tells us he has been accused by his father of not having villains in his books, to which he pleads guilty (p. 8). It is different to see characters as good or evil when they are "listless playthings of enormous forces."

The answer to the question of who or what is in control is not answered for us in Slaughterhouse-Five. There is no indication in any of Vonnegut's novels except, possibly, Cat's Cradle, that the prime mover is God. Ernest Ranly comments on the question of God in Vonnegut's novels by saying, "If no human villain can be discovered, then Vonnegut seems tempted to say that perhaps God is the villain. But Vonnegut seldom addresses the question of God directly. Through his style, his humor, and especially through the form of science (and religious) fiction, Vonnegut is able to sidestep every direct confrontation with the question of God."<sup>2</sup>

If, then, there is no answer given to the question of who is in control, what alternative does man have to find meaning and purpose? There is one alternate philosophy in the novel, but in context its message is negated by irony. The alternative is inscribed on a wall plaque in Billy's office and on a locket between Montana Wildhack's breasts--

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<sup>2</sup>Ernest Ranly, "What Are People For?" Commonweal, 94  
7 May 1971, p. 209.

"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" (pp. 60, 209). The irony lies in the fact that "among the things Billy Pilgrim (Everyman) could not change were the past, the present, and the future" (p. 60).

The universe of Slaughterhouse-Five leaves man as little free will as a leaf in a tornado. He is part of a cosmic pattern of control, but the navigator is an impersonal, indifferent automatic pilot. Peter Reed says, "The essential pattern emerges of an unheroic man who is a wanderer and prisoner in an absurd universe, a perpetual child dominated by forces he scarce understands, shocked and stunned by incomprehensible horrors, yet somehow finding happiness in moments of joy and love, and doggedly persisting in the effort to be a decent person and to find meaning in existence."<sup>3</sup>

If man has no free will, all that is left for him to do, according to the message of Slaughterhouse-Five, is "to accept the things [he] cannot change." This is the lesson Billy Pilgrim learns from the Tralfamadorians: "That's one thing Earthlings might learn to do, if they tried hard enough: Ignore the awful times, and concentrate on the good ones" (p. 117). So it is that Billy fulfills all of the roles

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<sup>3</sup>Peter J. Reed, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1972), p. 193.

required of him by the structure of the universe by accepting passively whatever happens to him. Optometrist-businessman, modest, loving husband, talk-show crank, preacher of life-in-spite of death, traumatized survivor of Dresden, and prisoner both on Earth and Tralfamadore<sup>4</sup>--Billy Pilgrim fulfills what is required of him. Whenever he looks ridiculous to others, he is unaware. His passive acceptance often brings out hostility in others, especially Roland Weary and Paul Lazzaro, who have dreams of glory for themselves. Theirs is the futile rage of men who attempt futile deeds in the world of Slaughterhouse-Five. They do not endure because they do not accept. Even though Paul Lazzaro kills Billy, as Billy knew he would, it is not a triumph because "the moment was so structured" that he had to do so. As with Billy, all other characters are costumed by "Fate, and a feeble will to survive" (p. 151). Even the foreknowledge of his own death does not bother Billy. He has learned that death is an illusion since the person exists in other moments. Billy, like the Tralfamadorians when they see a corpse, thinks "that the dead person is in bad condition in that particular moment, but that same person is just fine in plenty of other moments" (p. 27). The Tralfamadorian reaction to death is "So it goes."

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<sup>4</sup>Reed, pp. 193-194.

"So it goes" is all that is left for man to say about the events in history and the universe which he cannot change. "If the accident will" (p. 2) is Vonnegut's description of history. Man cannot alter history, the present, or the future, according to the structure of time and the universe in Slaughterhouse-Five. All that he can do is passively accept whatever "the accident will." We are left like Billy Pilgrim to say, "So it goes."

## Chapter VII

### Breakfast of Champions: Adapting to Chaos

In Breakfast of Champions, which Vonnegut claims to be his last novel ever, the author often interjects his own voice to comment on the actions of his characters, or culture, and on the question of free will. Vonnegut also confronts the issues of role playing and the purpose of life as discussed in the earlier novels, and the answers he allows us are much the same. It is the relationship between creator and creation that is the central focus of Breakfast of Champions, and a parallel is implied within the novel between Vonnegut and his character creations and the Creator of the universe and human beings. Vonnegut declares his intention in the novel to free all of his characters from his books and "to make my head as empty as it was when I was born onto this damaged planet fifty years ago" (p. 5).<sup>1</sup> The idea of freedom for his characters and for humankind is closely connected with the creator-creation relationship. In an interview in 1971, Vonnegut said, "I have a strong feeling that I am a robot. I am totally

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, Breakfast of Champions (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973). Page numbers for all citations will be included parenthetically in the text.

following a program and we all are. I am here because I utterly have to be."<sup>2</sup> This statement is reinforced in Breakfast of Champions through the author's comments and through the central character, Dwayne Hoover.

Dwayne Hoover is approaching insanity because of "bad chemicals." In the Preface Vonnegut writes, "I tend to think of human beings as huge, rubbery test tubes, too, with chemical reactions seething inside . . . . So it is a big temptation to me, when I create a character for a novel, to say that he is what he is because of faulty wiring, or because of microscopic amounts of chemicals which he ate or failed to eat on that particular day" (p. 4). Dwayne Hoover is one such creation whose "body was manufacturing certain chemicals which unbalanced his mind. But Dwayne, like all novice lunatics, needed some bad ideas, too, so that his craziness could have shape and direction" (p. 14).

The bad ideas that push Dwayne over the edge are provided in a novel by Kilgore Trout. The novel is written in the form of a letter from the Creator of the Universe to an experimental creature. At the time he reads the novel, Dwayne is convinced, with help from his bad chemicals, that he is the experimental creature being tested by his

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<sup>2</sup>Richard Todd, "The Masks of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.," New York Times Magazine, 24 January 1971, p. 26.

creator. What he believes is that "Of all the creatures in the Universe, only Dwayne was thinking and feeling and worrying and planning and so on. Nobody else knew what pain was. Nobody else had any choices to make. Everybody else was a fully automatic machine, whose purpose was to stimulate Dwayne. . . . Only Dwayne Hoover had free will" (pp. 14-15). Ironically the bad chemicals and the bad ideas combine to negate Dwayne's free will because he is a helpless victim of these stimuli which do not allow him the possibility of making a choice.

As I discussed in Chapter VI, Vonnegut does not directly confront the question of God in his novels. In Breakfast of Champions the idea of God is hinted at only through the Creator of the Universe in Trout's novel. Although the Creator possesses characteristics of Yahweh in Genesis, He, too, is a robot "according to Kilgore Trout" (p. 174). The Man in the novel acts as though he does indeed have free will. Trout writes that "The Creator never knew what he was going to yell, since The Creator had no control over him" (p. 174). The epitaph for The Man at the end of Trout's book reads: "Not Even The Creator of the Universe Knew What The Man Was Going to Say Next" (p. 175). If even The Creator of the Universe is a robot, then The Man becomes sacred in Vonnegut's world because he is not a robot. The sacredness of man is a theme of Cat's Cradle, and if my logic is correct, it is also a theme of Breakfast of Champions. Yet in Breakfast of Champions, Vonnegut is more specific about

what is sacred about man. The author's voice tells us "As for myself: I had come to the conclusion that there was nothing sacred about myself or about any human being, that we were all machines, doomed to collide and collide" (p. 219. Italics are mine). Later in the novel, Vonnegut has a character explain a piece of modern art by saying that it represents "the immaterial core of every animal--the 'I am' to which all messages are sent . . . Our awareness is all that is alive and maybe sacred in any of us. Everything else about us is dead machinery" (p. 221). Four pages later the voice of the author contradicts the declaration made in the past tense quoted above. He confesses, "this book is being written by a meat machine in cooperation with a machine made of metal and plastic. . . . And at the core of the writing meat machine is something sacred, which is an unwavering band of light" (p. 235. Italics mine). So Vonnegut, like Faulkner, recognizes the "central I Am" of man and represents it in Breakfast of Champions as "an unwavering band of light." This awareness possessed by each individual is what Vonnegut considers sacred in man.

Yet, Vonnegut's characters do not realize their own sacredness and continue to seek for the purpose of life outside themselves. Kilgore Trout answers the question of the purpose of life in this novel when he finds the question, "What is the purpose of life?" scrawled on a bathroom wall in a dirty movie house in New York. His answer is that man should be "the eyes and ears and conscience of the Creator of the

Universe" (p. 67). The answer may seem pretentious, but in view of Vonnegut's belief that the universe is indifferent and man alone is sacred, the theme of "man's capacity to retain an awareness of his humanity in the midst of an arbitrarily determined, mechanistic universe and a society that works very hard at turning people into robots"<sup>3</sup> is expanded here to include man's responsibility to fill the void left by the cosmic indifference of the universe. This purpose of life is what Vonnegut calls adapting to chaos.

Vonnegut has much to say about adapting to chaos in Breakfast of Champions. As in The Sirens of Titan and Slaughterhouse-Five, the idea of the progression of time in a straight line is denied. Vonnegut blames some writers for our belief in chronological sequence. These writers are those who "make people believe that life had leading characters, minor characters, significant details, insignificant details, that it had lessons to be learned, tests to be passed, and a beginning, a middle, and an end" (p. 209). His comment on modern society is that we try to "live like people invented in story books" (p. 210). Instead of creating the illusion that the world is ordered, "we must adapt ourselves to the requirements of chaos instead" (p. 210). The one character in Breakfast of Champions who most completely adapts

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<sup>3</sup>Carey Horwitz, "An Interview with Kurt Vonnegut" Library Journal, 15 April 1973, p. 1311.

is Wayne Hoobler, a recent parolee from prison. He is the least machine-like of the characters because he is reduced by his situation and his experience to the level of simply having to survive. Vonnegut suggests that a good epitaph for Hoobler when he dies would be, "He Adapted to What There Was to Adapt to" (p. 189). Wayne Hoobler does not have enough imagination to create illusions; he simply adapts.

The other characters, and modern man by implication, are machines programmed to perform certain duties, to play specific roles. Vonnegut describes the people of Midland City:

Every person had a clearly defined part to play--as a black person, a female high school drop-out, a Pontiac dealer, a gynecologist, a gas-conversion burner installer. If a person stopped living up to expectations, because of bad chemicals or one thing or another, everybody went on imagining that the person was living up to expectations anyway (p. 142).

When Dwayne Hoover goes berserk and injures nine people, he thinks of them as only machines programmed for his entertainment. Hoover thinks his homosexual son is "a God damn cock-sucking machine" (p. 258); Wayne Hoobler, who dodges every time Dwayne tries to hit him, is a "dodging machine" (p. 263); and his secretary is the "Best fucking machine in the State" (p. 272). The machine motif is the heart of Vonnegut's thesis of free will. Throughout the novel, he has developed the robot-machine roles played by the characters. Prostitutes give up their free will to a pimp and become "fucking machines," and a fifteen year old girl who is the Women's Two Hundred Meter

Breast Stroke Champion of the World is called an "outboard motor" (p. 218). Man in the role of machine has no free will.

I mentioned earlier the parallel between Vonnegut's relationship to the characters he creates in Breakfast of Champions and the relationship between the Creator of the Universe and his creations. I have tried to make clear the fact that in the novels, both Vonnegut's and Trout's, the Creator of the Universe is not in control, the pattern of the universe is chaos, and man must make order out of the chaos by adapting. Vonnegut continues the analogy of creator into the field of writing in order to make further comments on free will.

Throughout the novel, Vonnegut writes that a character is the way he is because he, Vonnegut, created him that way. Yet Vonnegut admits that his characters often do things on their own:

Here was the thing about my control over the characters I created: I could only guide their movements approximately, since they were such big animals. There was inertia to overcome. It wasn't as though I was connected to them by steel wires. It was more as though I was connected to them by stale rubberbands (p. 202).

Kilgore Trout is the only one of Vonnegut's characters who suspects that he might be the creation of someone else. In the Epilog of Breakfast of Champions Vonnegut, as a character in the novel, confronts Trout to tell him he is going to set him free. But one wonders how free Trout really is if, as Vonnegut says, he himself is a robot, and if the connection made by stale rubberbands does not overcome

the inertia. It has been three years since the publication of Breakfast of Champions and to this date Vonnegut has published no new novel. Perhaps he did succeed in freeing his characters.

In Breakfast of Champions there is no free will for the characters or for Vonnegut, by his own admission. By analogy, man does not have free will either, but lives in a chaotic, indifferent universe. In this last novel, Vonnegut does not leave us with the admonition to love, or to be human, or even not to pretend. His only advice is to "adapt ourselves to the requirements of chaos." He does not imply that our adapting requires love and compassion. If Vonnegut writes no more novels, he has left us with Breakfast of Champions in which "he asks us to . . . concentrate on the quality of life and not our importance in the scheme of things, and most of all to share the thump on the back that life hands out."<sup>4</sup> In Breakfast of Champions is the unification of all the targets of satire and the philosophy of what humans must do in order to survive on this planet as Vonnegut has defined them through the body of his novels.

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<sup>4</sup>Raymond M. Olderman, Beyond the Wasteland: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 195.

## Chapter VIII

### Conclusions: The Pattern Completed

A discerning reader will have observed that Vonnegut is increasingly pessimistic in his portrayal of man's free will in the scheme of things. In The Sirens of Titan Vonnegut is ambiguous in his conclusions of how much free will man has. Through the succeeding novels, Vonnegut progresses (?) to a view that man has no free will. At the most, man is allowed only the will to free will. As Vonnegut sees man in the scheme of things, man is the victim of forces, cosmic and terrestrial, which restrict his actions. There is no order or pattern to the universe except time, and time itself is not subject to chronological progression. Even the forces which control man do not fit a rigid pattern.

Vonnegut depicts man as the victim of two basic forces. One is the cosmic influence of the universe, which often implies determinism or fate. The other is the restrictions man places upon other people (and as a result upon himself) such as Governments and money, which dehumanize relationships among people. The latter often triggers guilt because of an incapacity to love, as Vonnegut portrays in his novels. Within the novels there is enough repetition of these forces that a discernible pattern emerges in Vonnegut's application of these

forces to his view of man's free will.

In The Sirens of Titan, man is the agent/victim of the Tralfamadorians, who represent the cosmic puppet-masters of the universe. In Mother Night man is shown to be hindered in his pursuit of free will by his incapacity to love, which in this novel produces guilt. Cat's Cradle depicts man as a pawn in some universal game which man recognizes but has no choice as to whether he plays or not. In God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater Vonnegut returns to the confining power of lack of love and also demonstrates the influence of material possessions on man's free will. Slaughterhouse-Five again establishes man as a victim of cosmic determinism, and Breakfast of Champions unites all of the determining restrictions to which man is subjugated. The overall pattern of control that emerges in the novels is one of alternation between the two basic forces that limit free will. The Sirens of Titan, Cat's Cradle, Slaughterhouse-Five, and Breakfast of Champions picture man controlled by cosmic determinism. Mother Night, God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater and to a lesser extent Breakfast of Champions show man restricted by other people and aspects of society like Government and Money and Bad Ideas. This alternating of forces that restrict man's free will is the pattern of control in the works of Kurt Vonnegut.

Although Vonnegut's is a world without free will, it is not a world without sin. There is also a pattern or repetition of the sins Vonnegut considers most serious in his world. In each of the novels,

a lack of love or the inability to love uncritically others and self is the sin which prevents the characters from being fulfilled as human beings. In a universe in which man has no choices to make before he acts, love is the quality Vonnegut values to give man a sense of purpose and meaning in his life.

The overriding theme of love in Vonnegut takes several forms but remains unchanged. In The Sirens of Titan, Constant discovers that it is best "to love whoever is around to be loved." Howard W. Campbell, Jr. learns too late the value of finding and keeping love because he deceives himself by pretending to be insensitive to others, and at the end of Mother Night he becomes what he pretended to be. In Cat's Cradle the greatest sin is pride of purpose because it kills the ability to love others. "Bokonon often points out that people commit atrocities in the name of God, claiming to have some inside information on God's real purpose."<sup>1</sup> In God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater Eliot fails in his mission to love people uncritically. Vonnegut also shows in this novel through the greed and selfishness of the other characters, that "the love of money is the root of all evil." Together the novels express Vonnegut's emphasis on love as a means for making order out of chaos.

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond M. Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 215.

To Vonnegut, as to Bokonon, man is sacred. Regardless of his imperfections, his sins, and his inability to exercise free will, man remains the center of the universe. Imbedded in the view of the universe that Vonnegut leads us to see in his novels is the implication that man is the measure of all things. The realizations of Vonnegut's characters from Malachi Constant, who recognizes that the meaning of life lies within each individual, to Vonnegut himself in Breakfast of Champions, who warns us that we as individuals must adapt to chaos, are the same: "that the way to understanding and meaning in life lies in knowledge of ourselves rather than in seeking answers outside."<sup>2</sup>

To Vonnegut, then, man is both the victim of determining patterns of control in a chaotic universe and the agent of his own hope for meaning and purpose in life. The patterns of control exist externally to man; the hope for meaning and purpose is internal. But after the internal realization that love, uncritical love and compassion for our fellow human beings, is the answer, we are instructed to demonstrate that love externally in our relationships with one another. After we do this, we will have become what we are supposed to be in Vonnegut's world. It is then that we will find the answer to the most asked questions in Vonnegut's novels: What is the meaning and purpose of life? and What are people for?

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<sup>2</sup>Peter J. Reed, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1972), p. 219.

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