

**TOWARDS A 'TRALFAMADORIAN FICTION':  
A CRITIQUE OF KURT VONNEGUT, JR'S NOVELS**

**BY  
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CERTIFICATE

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## ABSTRACT

The 'literary disruptionists' who came into limelight superceding the old stalwarts in the field of American fiction were Kurt Vonnegut, Richard Brautigan, Donald Barthelme, Ronald Sukenick, William Gass, and others. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., has been one of the heralds of the new era in fiction.

I have surveyed the post-contemporary breakthrough in American fictional genre and its impact on Vonnegut's style. The tentative hypothesis that I have arrived at is: Vonnegut's fiction is a definite break from the traditional mode. He is also the first American novelist to translate the post-contemporary sensibility, viz. that of deliberate disintegration, into the fictional genre. Through his novels Vonnegut formulates the "Tralfamadorian" pattern which is "telegraphic schizophrenic." It is non-linear in structure and breaks the norms of space and time. The denial of spatio-temporal limitations gives Vonnegut the freedom to mould and restructure the fictional experience he has at hand. His works can be read as a continuous piece and his characters reappear from novel to novel. "Kurt Vonnegut's novels abound in test cases for a new strategy of self-definition" through the construction of a mythical world.

Thus, on the one hand, Vonnegut's fiction is a natural corollary to the internal dialectic in the genre. But on a paradigmatic plane it is a reflection and re-statement of the contemporary American myth as well as reality. In Vonnegut we find the cult hero of popular American revolt grappling with the 'Protean' American self embodied in the multi-faceted truth of American dream.

The thesis has been divided into five chapters. In the first chapter I have made a cursory survey of post-war American literature, the various movements in the genre, and also traced the emergence of Vonnegut into a prominent 'post-contemporary' novelist. Chapter two deals with the earlier novels of Vonnegut -- Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan, Mother Night, Cat's Cradle, and God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater. His first novel Player Piano is only briefly mentioned because it adheres to the traditional form. In chapter three, Slaughterhouse-Five is taken up for full length study. In this novel Vonnegut gives us the prescription for a 'Tralfamadorian novel.' The Tralfamadorian mode blossomed into a full fledged form in Slaughterhouse-Five. The theme of Dresden bombing during World War II has at last found expression in this novel. In chapter four, an attempt has been made to trace the truly experimental techniques employed in Breakfast of Champions. Vonnegut's eighth novel Slapstick

is analysed in the fifth chapter of my thesis. Vonnegut's last novel to-date, Jailbird, came out in 1979. I have discussed it very briefly in a "Postscript" to chapter five.

In "conclusion" the main points have been summarized and the characteristics of the Tralfamadorian pattern have been traced. The following points are revealed from the analytical study of Kurt Vonnegut's novels: a) Vonnegut is a social critic who prescribes "corrective lenses" through his novels which help his readers to see things in the right perspective. b) Vonnegut's world is largely ruled by the laws of madness and his characters are generally schizophrenics. c) The content of 'Instrumental Reason' when presented in art form inevitably influences the form. Therefore, the Tralfamadorian form in Vonnegut's fiction reflects a 'Tralfamadorian Sensibility.'

## CLARIFICATIONS

I have used British spelling in this dissertation and retained the original spelling in the quotes.

I have followed the conventions given in The MLA Style Sheet (2nd edition).

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