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POSTMODERNISM IN KURT VONNEGUT'S  
SLAUGHTERHOUSE 5  
&  
CAT'S CRADLE

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Prepared For: Dr. Fakrul Alam  
Prepared By: Rahat S. Wahid  
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## INTRODUCTION

My major focus in this study is to show how Kurt Vonnegut in his fictions *Cat's Cradle* and *Slaughterhouse Five* parodies conventional ways of thinking and transports us to the postmodernism world of hyper-reality where the idea of the original no longer exists. Postmodernism is usually understood as a phenomenon origins in Western countries. In it nothing is what it appears to be. The failure of reason is what postmodernism had learned from the world wars. Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) was perhaps the first novel to embody the sentiments of the culture that emerged after the end of the Second World War. Vonnegut's war experience left clear marks on his writing and the book *Cat's Cradle* (1963) is also no exception. We notice in Vonnegut's fictions that postmodern literature is subversive and playful. Both books are based on Vonnegut's own experience in World War Two. They are playfully ironic and yet serious.

Postmodernists, likewise, are much concerned with the fragmentariness of contemporary experience, the artificiality of identity and meaning, and with the ultimately subjective nature of all experience. Unlike modernist writers, however, they tend to celebrate this rather than regarding it as evidence of some sort of crisis. The tortured, isolated anti-heroes of, say, Knut Hamson or Samuel Beckett, and the nightmare world of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, make way in postmodernist writing for the playfully deconstructed and self-reflexive narrators of novels by John Fowles, John Barth, or Julian Barnes. Meanwhile, authors such as Don DeLillo, and Thomas Pynchon in the novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, satirise paranoid system-building of the kind associated, by postmodernists, with Enlightenment modernity. Postmodernism is a complicated term, or set of ideas, one that has only emerged as an area of academic study since the mid-1980s.

As a direct witness of the bombing of Dresden, Vonnegut was left with unforgettable memories of the war. The scenes of senseless misery and of mass destruction at Dresden played an important role in forming Vonnegut's intellect and led him to adopt pacifist views. The Hoenikker family of the novel consists of two sons and a daughter. *Cat's Cradle* (1963) is an extremely interesting book, both in content and technique. There are 287 pages in the novel and 127 different chapters. The opening line "Nothing in the Book is true" (Vonnegut, qtd in Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*. 1942:V) immediately catches ones attention for it signals the fact that Postmodern fiction is often playfully ironic.

John, a writer, is the fictional author of a book, which he calls "The Day the World Ended." He decides to write about Felix Hoenikker, one of the creators of the atomic bomb and his family on the day when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. In the course of his research, John gets in touch with Newt Hoenikker, the youngest, midget son of Felix Hoenikker. Newt writes letters to John and tells him about his brother Frank and sister Angela. Newt also describes the day when the bomb was dropped, the day when his father went to play with him and scared him with his ugly face. The title of *Cat's Cradle* refers to a string game, which Felix was playing that morning. Individual chapters, and their compositions utilize postmodernist methods. Chapters are short and consists of titles such as: "A Nice Midget; O.K., Mom; No Pain; Communists, Nazis, Royalists, Parachutists, and Draft Dodgers..."

*Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) in contrast has two narratives, one apparently based on the fact his life and the other impersonal. The latter narrative consists of the story of Billy Pilgrim who, like the author, fought in World War Two, was taken prisoner by the Germans, and witnessed the fire- storming of Dresden. The

autobiographical narrative is Vonnegut's own story about writing a book about the worst experience of his life. It appears mostly in the first chapter, and describes his temptation to write a book about Dresden and his efforts to finally produce it. Billy Pilgrim has the unique ability to become "unstuck in time", which means that he can uncontrollably drift from one part of his life to another. It consists of numerous sections and paragraphs strung together in no chronological order, seemingly at random. The whole narration is in the past tense, so that the reader cannot identify where the author's starting point is. Vonnegut parodies the form of a book and gives it a topsy-turvy structure. Postmodernism tells us that we must not depend on tradition. *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) breaks all the rules of a traditional novel and challenges reality.

*Cat's Cradle* is Vonnegut's satirical commentary on modern man and his insanity. An apocalyptic tale of this planet's ultimate fate, it features a midget as the protagonist; a complete original theology created by a calypso singer, and a vision of the future that is at once bleakly fatalistic and hilariously funny. It is a book that left an indelible mark on an entire generation of readers. The message is *Slaughterhouse Five* is different. In it Vonnegut wants to tell the readers, that no matter what happens, we should retain our humanity. We should not let anybody or anything dominate us, be it a god, a politician or anybody else. We should be ourselves – and be humane. Prisoner of war, optometrist, time traveller- these are the roles created by Vonnegut for Billy Pilgrim. His mixed ways of writing immediately makes his writing very unusual and allusive. Vonnegut's makes up words and chapters in one paragraphs and sometimes in three to four lines subverts the traditional style of a novel.

The objective of the study is to show how Vonnegut's novel represents postmodernism and how it is important for literature. It will focus on how Vonnegut's work it can create a different perspective for future generations and why it plays an important role. An important aspect of postmodernism in literature and entertainment media is the relaxation of strict time lines, sometimes called discontinuous time (<http://www.milford.org/school/jslaw/postmodernism.htm>). Often an author will construct a sequence of events that have no time relationships to each other, which is similar to what we notice in *Slaughterhouse Five*. In literature this requires the reader to create a time line, which the author may upset later in the story. However, Vonnegut managed well and kept the book going. At times both the novels depicted no beginning and no end.

Postmodernism is not merely a literary movement but this fiction is symptomatic of the postwar culture as a whole. *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut are examples of how postmodern traits appear in literature. In postmodernist fiction, the depth approach, that is to say, seeing people as multi-faceted beings with unique hidden depths is replaced that by surface. In other words the technique is not one of spatial 'depth' but temporal multiplicity. "History and politics also recur as liberalism's eternal immanent truths and values are replaced by choices forced on the individual from the outside and temporal character development is re-seen as conditioned by historical external change. The inconsistencies of character in postmodern fiction serve to undermine the reader's possible attempt to pin the 'character' to a list of qualities or properties - to resist essentialism and notions of identity" (Riley quoted in *Contemporary Literature Criticism Vol 2*. 1974.

Terry Eagleton says: "There is perhaps a degree of consensus  
that the typical postmodernist artefact is playful, self-ironizing, and

even schizoid; and that it reacts to the austere autonomy of high modernism by impudently embracing the language of commerce and the commodity ([www.hku.hk/english/courses2000-](http://www.hku.hk/english/courses2000-) Liverpool John Moors University).

According to David Lodge, ([www.hku.hk/english/courses2000-](http://www.hku.hk/english/courses2000-) Liverpool John Moors University) Postmodern Stylistics consist of the following:

1. Contradiction
2. Permutations (and Choice)
3. Discontinuity (lack of causation)
4. Randomness (no authorial guidance in role of God/destiny)
5. Excess (example after example etc)
6. Short Circuit (breaking the frame or exposing literary conventions)

"Like much contemporary literary theory, the postmodernist novel puts into question that entire series of interconnected concepts that have come to be associated with what we can conveniently label as liberal humanism: autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, centre, continuity, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, origin" (Hutcheon qtd in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*.1988: 57).

An interesting side of postmodernism is that it is fundamentally eclectic. Its' best works are characteristically double coded and ironic, making a feature of the wide choice, conflict and discontinuity of traditions, and its heterogeneity most clearly captures our pluralism (Jencks, *The Truth About the Truth*: [www.Miforded.org.postmodehome](http://www.Miforded.org.postmodehome)). There are lot of questions to be asked about postmodernism, and one of the most important is about the politics involved or, more

simply, is this movement toward fragmentation, provisionability, performance, and instability.

Vonnegut endures as an interesting and controversial figure in twentieth century fiction and postmodern culture. His imaginative world is seen in both novels. He moved from conventional thinking to unconventional. Through his books Vonnegut puts forward an important message very comically. A key principle of *Slaughterhouse Five* is the constant awareness of the person Vonnegut as the creator of the text. Rather than choosing the traditionally removed impersonal or passive narrator Vonnegut uses his own. Similarly *Cat's Cradle* is full of a very distinctive humor, and an anarchic view of religion and history. The main narrator of the book differs from his modernist predecessors and regular heroes. The importance of understanding and dissecting these novels will make us understand our own lives where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain. We come to know Jonah, Newt and Billy, characters created by Vonnegut and their lives, their distorted images of life.

Postmodernism can be seen as the skeptical, negative realization of epistemological uncertainty or as the positive celebration and acknowledgement of diversity and difference. Both the books *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Cat's Cradle* are strongly satirical and ironical; Vonnegut often uses very dark humor, funny compassionate and extremely wise. While reading his books, readers either will enjoy the unreal world or will reject. The key to enjoy Vonnegut's fiction is to let go of reality and tradition. Replace history with nostalgia and believe in multiple recreations.

In 1990 Robert Merrill, in his introduction to Critical Essays on Kurt Vonnegut (1990), questioned the position of Vonnegut as a major figure in American literature. At first glance it may seem odd for an editor of a critical work to ask about the very subject he wishes to examine. Merrill, however, points to the depth of Vonnegut's work and argues for his importance as a contemporary chronicler of American culture and history, prophetically concludes by saying with great optimism: "I suspect that Vonnegut criticism is about to undergo a marked resurgence" (Merrill qtd in *Critical Essay on Kurt Vonnegut*. 1990:22).

Leonard Mustazza serves a fine companion to Merrill's collection, offering an overview of both the popular and the academic response to Vonnegut's novels. Mustazza attempts to make sense of the unusual turns in Vonnegut's career, including his early forays into public relations and his success as a writer of science fiction. Critics have pointed that the themes that run through Vonnegut's novels are also reflected in his essays and speeches, which often recount his family history.

Postmodernism is hard to define, because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology. It's hard to locate it temporally or historically, because it's not clear exactly when postmodernism begins. Perhaps the easiest way to start thinking about postmodernism is by thinking about modernism, the movement from which postmodernism seems to grow or emerge.

## CHAPTER 1: THEORY OF POSTMODERNISM

Firstly, postmodernism was a movement in architecture that rejected the modernist, avant garde, passion for the new. Modernism is here understood in art and architecture as the project of rejecting tradition in favor of going "where no man has gone before" (Star Trek) or better: to create forms for no other purpose than novelty. Modernism was an exploration of possibilities and a perpetual search for uniqueness and its cognate--individuality. Modernism's valorization of the new was rejected by architectural postmodernism in the 50's and 60's for conservative reasons. They wanted to maintain elements of modern utility while returning to the reassuring classical forms of the past. The result of this was an ironic brick-a-brick or *collage* approach to construction that combines several traditional styles into one structure. As collage, meaning is found in combinations of *already* created patterns. *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (1996)

Subsequently the modern romantic image of the lone creative artist was abandoned for the playful technician (perhaps computer hacker) who could retrieve and recombine creations from the past--data alone becomes necessary. This synthetic approach has been taken up, in a politically radical way, by the visual, musical, and literary arts where collage is used to startle viewers into reflection upon the meaning of reproduction. Here, pop-art reflects culture (American). The foundation of authenticity has been overturned as the relativism of collage has set in. We see a pattern in the arts and everyday spiritual life away from universal standards into an atmosphere of multidimensionality and complexity, and most importantly--the dissolving of distinctions. In sum, we could simplistically outline this movement in historical terms:

1. premodernism: Original meaning is possessed by authority (for example, the Catholic Church). The individual is dominated by tradition.
2. modernism: The enlightenment-humanist rejection of tradition and authority in favor of reason and natural science. This is founded upon the assumption of the autonomous individual as the sole source of meaning and truth--the Cartesian cogito. Progress and novelty are valorized within a linear conception of history--a history of a "real" world that becomes increasingly real or objectified. One could view this as a Protestant mode of consciousness.
3. postmodernism: A rejection of the sovereign autonomous individual with an emphasis upon anarchic collective, anonymous experience. Collage, diversity, the mystically unrepresentable, Dionysian passion are the foci of attention. Most importantly we see the dissolution of distinctions, the merging of subject and object, self and other. This is a sarcastic playful parody of western modernity and the "John Wayne" individual and a radical, anarchist rejection of all attempts to define, reify or re-present the human subject.

Jean Francois Lyotard was at the center of debates about postmodernism during the 1980s and 1990s. His celebrated announcement of the demise of "grand narratives" made the most succinct, accessible, and memorable manifesto of the postmodernist position (Lyotard qtd in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2001:1609). Another way of saying this, according to Jean Baudrillard, is that in postmodern society there are no originals, only copies--or what he calls "simulacra." You might think, for example, about painting or sculpture, where there is an original work (by Van Gogh, for instance), and there might also be thousands of copies, but the original is the one with the highest value (particularly monetary value). Contrast that with Compact discs or music recordings, where there is no "original," as in painting--no

recording that is hung on a wall, or kept in a vault; rather, there are only copies, by the millions, that are all the same, and all sold for (approximately) the same amount of money. Another version of Baudrillard's "simulacrum" would be the concept of virtual reality, a reality created by simulation, for which there is no original (Baudrillard qtd in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2001:1729-1731).

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for the new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of unrepresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by reestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the next or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for.

The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an event; hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization always begin to soon. Post Modern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future anterior (Lyotard qtd in *Modernism to Postmodernism, What is Postmodernism*. 46). Postmodernism being incredulous towards metanarratives, rejects the idea of grand narratives. There is no total answer to anything. One is judged by performance, there should be no question of justice. There is paralogy-

logically unjustified conclusion (Lyotard qtd in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. 1996: 481).

Postmodern thought owes much to its allied school, post-structuralism (deconstruction) which sought to destabilise the relationship between language and the objects to which it referred. Postmodernism has applications in many modern academic and non-academic disciplines; philosophy, theology, art, architecture, film, television, music, sociology, fashion, technology, literature, and communications are all heavily influenced by postmodern trends and ideas, and are rigorously scrutinised from postmodern perspectives. Postmodernism has usually been understood as a phenomenon taking place primarily within Western countries. What sets Postmodernism apart its predecessors is the reaction of its practioners to the rational, scientific, and historical aspects of the modern age. For postmodernists this took guise of being self-conscious, experimental and ironic. The postmodernist is concerned with imprecision and unreliabilty of language and with epistemology, the study of what knowledge is. For me, a symbol of postmodernism is an African woman in a Bangladeshi saree, drinking Heineken Beer, sitting on Rick-shaw with Nike sneakers.

## CHAPTER 2: *SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE* IN THE LIGHT OF POSTMODERNISM

*Slaughterhouse Five* is the story of Billy Pilgrim. Pilgrim is a time traveling war veteran who is unstuck in time. The entire novel is a journey through our universe. He visits strange planets and witnesses the bombing of Dresden in Germany. Human cruelty is the overall theme of the novel. It is the behaviour of men that they will harm anything weak. There is always a bully in every community. Weary's attitude as a bully is apparent in all sections of human kind. The bombing in Germany is an example of human cruelty. It shows our blind vengeance and poor ability to reason. The mop-up after a battle also proves the same point. The complicating incidents are his continuing adventures during his imprisonment in the war. The climax is the bombing of Dresden. The setting varies in time and place in many instances but is mainly in Germany towards the end of the war. Pilgrim even travels to distant galaxies, such as Tralfamador.

The major characters are Billy Pilgrim and Kilgore Trout. Billy Pilgrim tries to survive the ordeals he is thrown into and is a true adventurer. Trout is also stuck in the fray. The style of the novel is light and even funny. The language reflects the story and is rambling, and occasionally little complicated. The book uses its comedy to help get the reader through the complex plot which demands lot of thinking. All the sci-fi incidents capture imagination. The first sentence in *Slaughterhouse Five* implies the onstability inherent in the text and calls the reader's attention to the authenticity of Vonnegut's story, 'All this happened, more or less' (Vonnegut 1). Vonnegut immediately breaks with the tradition of a linear, climactic plot by revealing something of what happens later on in the narrative and also reminds the reader of his artistic license to embellish and fictionalise where he so desires.

The meta-narrative stance of this first chapter makes it seem more like a preface than a part of the fiction. The unimaginable violence which is so much a part of the book is immediately established in a typically blunt and prosaic manner; 'one guy I knew really was shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his. Another guy I knew really did threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. And so on' (Vonnegut 8). Just as Vonnegut is not afraid to demonstrate the limitations of language in describing war, the facts that he is able to establish are made with a matter of fact irreverence... 'There must be tons of human bone meal in the ground' (Vonnegut 67). Even at this very early stage one becomes aware of Vonnegut's abhorrence of the atrocity of war, which is presented at the same time as both terrifying and almost comically banal.

It is indeed very interesting that Billy's last name is Pilgrim. *Slaughterhouse Five* was a postmodern journey, totally fragmented and free from reality. Vonnegut subverted our thoughts and mixed truth with fiction. In the whole story Vonnegut played with the idea of tangibility. *Slaughterhouse Five* is a hybrid of reality and fantasy. Along with visiting unknown planets, he also went to the bombing of Dresden in Germany during World War Two. Once again a chance for the readers to think deeper and see what is not in the text but what is beyond. Billy's constant travel to one planet to another makes him a pilgrim in search of answers and finally ended up meeting extraterrestrials depicts the absurdity of the story. Visiting Dresden however brings in a serious mood, a harsh reality, and the worst experience of Vonnegut himself.

The inclusion of this science fiction dimension of the novel has several purposes, for Billy it provides a way of understanding his life's events and represents the general human obsession for non-human life as the need for not only explaining

outer space but our own existences and it also suggests an entire area of knowledge that is uncertain to man and emphasizes the vulnerability and ignorance that man who thinks he has the answer to everything in fact barely even knows many of the right questions. Essentially *Slaughterhouse Five* was the book that Vonnegut felt he needed to write about his experience of the Second World War, and the result was his conclusion that he had set himself an impossible task. And critically Vonnegut understood that a book about war was a fallacy. In *Slaughterhouse Five* Vonnegut addresses the problems of trying to represent a reality through language head-on and that trying to write about war is the extreme test of all. *Slaughterhouse Five* questions the possibility/desirability of the humanist separation of history and art from ideology and investigates the unavoidable ideological consequences of fiction and their making.

The most often expressed theme of the book, is that we, people are “bugs in amber”. The phrase first appears when Billy is kidnapped by the Tralfamadorian flying saucer:

‘Welcome abroad, Mr. Pilgrim,’ said the loud speaker. ‘Any question?’  
 ‘Billy Licked his lips, thought a while, inquired at last: ‘Why me?’  
 ‘That is very earthling question to ask, Mr. Pilgrim. Why you? Why us for that matter? Why anything? Because this moment simply *is*. Have you ever seen bugs trapped in amber?’  
 ‘Yes. Billy, in fact, had a paperweight in this office which has a blob of polished amber with three lady-bugs embedded in it.  
 ‘Well, here we are, Mr. Pilgrim, trapped in the amber of this moment. There is no why’ (Vonnegut 55).

This rather extraterrestrial opinion can be interpreted as our being physically stuck in this world, that we do not have any choice over what we, humankind as a whole, do and what we head for. The only thing we can do is think about everything, but we

will not affect anything. This idea appears many times throughout the novel. Billy's later discussion with the Tralfamadorian regarding war, they tell him that it is stupid trying to stop war on Earth. This means there will always be war on Earth that we, people, are 'designed' that way. There are might be people striving for eternal peace, but those people must be very naïve and probably do not know humankind's nature. Truth does not matter; justice does not matter, we are caught up in a cycle. Truth is what created technology, ultimately it is a power game. It is a very bleak view of the world. There is no way out, we are in and caught up. Here we see the postmodernist feature put forwarded by Lyotard and clearly *Slaughterhouse Five* depicts that.

Another theme and perhaps the most obvious in *Slaughterhouse Five*, is the war and its' contrast with love, beauty, humanity and innocence. Vonnegut manages to tell us that it would be better for us to love one another. To find the war's contrast with love is quite difficult, because the book does not talk about any couple that was cruelly torn apart by the war (Billy did not love his wife for example). Vonnegut expresses it very lightly, uses the word 'love' very rarely, yet effectively. He tries to look for love and beauty in things that seemingly are neither lovely nor beautiful. An interesting contrast in Vonnegut's books is the one between men and women. Male characters are often engaging in fights are wars, and females try to prevent them from it. The woman characters are often mentally strong, have strong will, and are very loving and humane. The idea of women being the weaker sex is eliminated and the stereotyped mentality is challenged.

The obvious theme of death is inevitable in the book and that no matter who dies, life still goes on. The phrase "so it goes" recurs one hundred and six times. It appears every time anybody dies in the novel, and sustains the circular quality of the book. It enables the book, and thus Vonnegut to go on with the narration. There are

no heroes, no villains in the book. There are only characters- funny, comic, illusive and somewhat not very conventional. Everybody may see something else in the main meaning. Vonnegut's message to the reader is that no matter what, we should preserve our humanity, we should not let any power reign upon us. He rejects any sort of institution and so does postmodernism.

CHAPTER 3: *CAT'S CRADLE* IN THE LIGHT OF POSTMODERNISM

A Cat's Cradle is actually one of the figures made with a string. In the fiction *Cat's Cradle* Felix Hoenikker, the "father" of the atom bomb and of three children played this game on the day when the atom bomb was dropped. He never played this game with his children, almost never spoke to them, but he played on this fatal day. There are no shocking visions described in connection with this day, just an account of this children's game, which eases the atmosphere of that day. Even Hoenikker's lab looks like a child's room. It is filled with things such as a kite with a broken spine, a bubble pipe, or a fish bowl. This eccentric scientist was always absorbed in thoughts, which resembled children's questions like: "I wonder about turtles. When they pull in their heads, do the spines buckle or contract?" (Vonnegut 15) Hoenikker's second invention, Ice-nine, is actually a game as well. The typical role of a scientist is switched here. He plays with it in his kitchen and cooks it in a pan. Invents Ice-Nine, which eventually is meant to destroy the world. Scientist other than being the hero is portrayed negatively. One common postmodern characteristic is found in both the novels.

The main focus in *Cat's Cradle* is of Bokononism; it's meanings and origins. After the first 80 pages or so, the author's focus shifts from a book about Dr. Hoenikker to Bokononism and its teachings. Several chapters refer to the books of Bokonon, and throughout the novel there are references to biblical themes, such as John wanting to take a flag to the top of Mount McCabe and leaving it there, as of an offering. The theme of this novel is nowhere directly stated, and is also not obviously defined anywhere in Vonnegut's writing. However, Vonnegut most likely intends to concentrate on the powerful lies that can form the foundation of a society as a whole. Though there may have been lack of clarity to well define the theme, the novel

still provides many interesting ideas and principles. Vonnegut's view on religion is certainly controversial and religion is one topic which Vonnegut seemed to feel very comfortable in criticizing.

Postmodern fiction is inevitably experimental, futuristic and depends on technology. It no longer accepts the traditional narratives. Vonnegut in his fictions portrays reality as contingent. In *Cat's Cradle* his reality is his own made up religion, Bokononism. His dream was to have Utopian life and re-invent history. Postmodern fiction attacks one-track mind. Vonnegut very subtly takes a serious topic such as World War, but wants to write a story on the scientist who invented the atom bomb. Any traditional thinker would first think of the disaster in Hiroshima, yet Vonnegut playfully chooses to write on the topic we least considered where he mocks human intelligence. He creates Ice-Nine in his novel, something similar to the atom bomb, which also destroys the world. He invents Books of Bokonon to convey his thoughts, to call humans foolish and to mock religion. He satires the intelligent scientist and formed a fluid world, a world of science fiction.

After reading this novel, one might become perplexed at the plot and general story line of the book. *Cat's Cradle* entangles itself in many interesting changes of events; strange outlandish ideas and psychological "black holes" can be found with just the flip of a page. When talking about Bokonon, the whole Bokononism is a kind of postmodernist religion. The ending -ism itself refers to the thesis, which all these -isms claim, (capitalism, communism, socialism...) and that is: that only their -ism is the right one for the world. The founder of Bokononism was Lionel Boyd Johnson, whose name was corrupted by the island dialect. Bokononism contains postmodernist misreadings and is anarchic in appearance.

The first verse in the Book of Bokonons says: "All of the true things that I am to tell you are shameless lies" (Vonnegut 5). Here we can see Vonnegut's opinion about religion. He tells us, that people always look for something to what they can believe. Another part of Bokononism I took note of was the different books of its teachings. All the books seem to be contradictory, and very satirical towards mankind, such as the fourteenth book, titled "What Can A Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?" (Vonnegut 244). The book only has one word, "Nothing." (Vonnegut 245). I took this to be Vonnegut's way of saying that mankind is self destructive, and based on past history; there is no hope for the future.

He represents a generation, which finds pleasure subverting our deepest convictions and beliefs. All this he masterly manages with his superb humor and inventive style, despite the fact, that many of the themes are not optimistic about human fate at all. Vonnegut's partly autobiographic book *Cat's Cradle* is full of playfulness, striking oppositions and metonymical comparisons. On a presentation of made up religion he shows human stupidity and blind faith, which we need for our lives, which we need, to give our lives some meaning, a way fulfillment.

The part of the first book that I felt was significant the chapters describe ice-nine. Dr. Hoenikker was propositioned by the military to create something that could be used to solidify swampy ground, so that the Marines would not get bogged down while moving. Dr. Hoenikker explained to the marine general that ice nine could be used to harden, or freeze any type of land. As far as anyone knew, this substance did not, and could not exist. However, it is later revealed that ice-nine does in fact exist, and that Dr. Hoenikker's three children each have a small portion. I did not know it at the time, but this becomes an integral part of the story later on. I think Vonnegut uses

this idea satirically to scoff at militaries and governments, and how mankind sometimes uses magnificent creations for evil and destruction.

Individual chapters and their structures represents postmodernist playfulness. Different postmodernist points of view are seen in the presentation of Newt's painting. He likes painting, even though his paintings resemble children's doodles rather than real paintings. Here we see the inclination towards play, anarchy (seen in the chaotic drawings) and deconstruction. The postmodernist dynamic tension is represented symbolically throughout the work.

The reader should be reminded that the author uses *Cat's Cradle* as a way of communicating his own thoughts. The novel was used as an outlet almost as a way for the author to "empty his head". Vonnegut's method of expressing himself was mainly through "his" fictional religion of Bokonism. Through the use of this religion he is able to freely able to express him and express his viewpoints without feeling that he is speaking against religion; this is because these are not "his" beliefs, they belong to the "religion". Obviously, Vonnegut is the creator of this religion, yet he still can use the excuse of claiming all ideas to be fictional.

Vonnegut's style is one that, even though perhaps offensive to an extremely religious reader, still grabs the attention. The entire book seems to be made up of bits and pieces but this are important in the context in which they are used, and continue to have no further meaning. So while the reader continues to ponder over their significance. Vonnegut plants sub-conscious ideas that eventually take effect in the reader's mind. To put it simply, *Cat's Cradle* might be considered a "thinking-novel". Vonnegut's excellent technique is excellent. The thought-provoking text and incredibly well developed characters are not to be forgotten either. It would be an

understatement to say that *Cat's Cradle* is a commendable literary work. Vonnegut has certainly composed a masterpiece that will be talked about for years to come.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

In both the fictions we come across postmodernist features. Vonnegut's novel represents for us postmodernism as a cultural style connected with what some historians call "Late Capitalism," a stage of commodity capitalism wherein the consumption of commodities becomes the central focus of meaning and the central means for constructing, maintaining, and repairing identity and moods.

Postmodernism is a new enough phenomenon that scholars and others are still arguing about its characteristics and about whether or not it is a "good" thing for humans.

Postmodernism can be seen as the skeptical, negative realization of epistemological uncertainty or as the positive celebration and acknowledgement of diversity and difference. Both the books *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Cat's Cradle* are strongly satirical and ironical; Vonnegut often uses very dark humor, funny compassionate and extremely wise. While reading his books, readers either will enjoy the unreal world or will reject. The key to enjoy Vonnegut's fiction is to let go of reality and tradition. Replace history with nostalgia and believe in multiple recreations he seems to be telling us.

Postmodernism is a movement, which will take thoughts and humankind forward. It is a beginning to what is yet to be discovered. Above all, postmodernism is defined as an attack on the 'myth' of modernity. It creates path to take a journey to reinvent history and through which anything can be done with words. Theory is the philosophy of literature, the base from which we explore. Windows through which we get into the text itself. Postmodernism plays with the expectations. It is a breakthrough from official high culture. One aspect of postmodernism among many is nostalgia. We see it in both the novels- the theme of war. Postmodernism denies reality; we can create our own aura and take away the tradition. Reality is copied from

something, which is not real. Gives more reasons to create and re-create what any imagination would want to generate. One should not rely on the ground rules and produce what is expected but to bring forward what is not. The future generation should challenge the reality and the original. One should revolt against meaning and representation.

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