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Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Confronts the Death of the Author

Justin Philip Mayerchak

Florida International University, jmaye017@fiu.edu

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

KURT VONNEGUT JR. CONFRONTS THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Justin Philip Mayerchak

2016

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Justin Philip Mayerchak, and entitled Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Confronts the Death of the Author, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Bruce Harvey

Ana Lusczynka

Nathaniel Cadle, Major Professor

Date of Defense: April 1, 2016

The thesis of Justin Philip Mayerchak is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2016

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

KURT VONNEGUT JR. CONFRONTS THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

by

Justin Philip Mayerchak

Florida International University, 2016

Miami, Florida

Professor Nathaniel Cadle, Major Professor

Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s literary style transforms from his first novel, "Player's Piano" (1952), to his final book, "Timequake" (1997). Most of his novels adhere to a similar style – the narrators face a puzzling societal fault that is exaggerated in their dystopian societies, which hides Vonnegut's humanistic leanings.

This thesis, however, focuses on Vonnegut's authorial identity, his use of the alter ego, and eventual entrance into the novel. His authorial role challenges the literary theory expressed in "The Death of the Author" (1967) by Roland Barthes and further discussed in "What is an Author" (1969) by Michel Foucault. Barthes explains an author metaphorically dies after his book is published and Foucault questions the author's role and importance to his novel.

Vonnegut juxtaposes fictional and nonfictional material whereby his character is paramount to his work. Therefore, Vonnegut challenges Barthes and Foucault's notion that an author restricts his work; rather, Vonnegut's identity empowers his novels.

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VONNEGUT'S STATUS IN THE LITERARY WORLD

Modernist literature is often posttraumatic – authors would write about their wartime experiences or their struggles when reentering society and confronting these wartime personas. Writing was cathartic because discussing past transgressions helped writers analyze their current internal conflicts. Novels became less focused on representing truths; rather, they challenged reader by not adhering to a conventional structure or style. Characters were complex and unpredictable, their emotions guiding their actions. Authors embraced this new freedom to create fictional representations of society: stories were about these struggling individuals. Kurt Vonnegut, though publishing his first novel in 1952, wrote his first several novels in the modernist style: his stories depicted troubled individuals discovering their societal identity.

Most Vonnegutian narrators lead unique and troubled lives in dystopian societies. His novels rarely portrayed reality accurately, but contained certain historical truths and then distanced themselves through science fiction elements or fabricated futures. Vonnegut utilizes these methods to portray real individuals; his characters commonly resemble his own friends or people in his life, yet he takes liberties with their attributes to fictionalize them and provide them room for development. These characters faced fairly common internal or external conflicts, while his science fiction afforded Vonnegut the opportunity to highlight his own issues with society. Throughout his literary career, Vonnegut maintained this focus: each novel centers on a single societal issue and the narrator must overcome this hindrance and attempt to unravel its purpose.

Vonnegut was credited as a humanist: most of his novels criticized humanity's faults and the novel's conclusion suggested a cure or an escape. Also, he utilized satire to successfully engage the reader in his cause; his black humor was a constant, whereby jokes or catch phrases were made to emphasize how life is consistently troubling. Two different narrators popularized these repetitive phrases throughout their respective stories. Billy Pilgrim, in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), says, "Now, when I myself hear someone is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is, 'So it goes'" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 34) to illustrate pain and conflict's predictable occurrence. Also, Eugene Hartke Debs Jr., in *Hocus Pocus* (1990), explains, "The expression I will be using here and there for the end of the Vietnam War, for example, will be: 'when the excrement hit the air-conditioning,'" (*Hocus Pocus* 4) adjusting a common cruder cliché to reference death and dismay. Both novels contained veteran narrators, confronting their wartime trauma while struggling to understand society's confounding faults. However, Vonnegut supplied these characters with comical catch phrases, emphasizing their frustrations as real and repetitive.

Vonnegut's literature frequently illustrated identity as a tasking goal. Mostly, Vonnegut's narrators discussed, sometimes with the reader, their discomfort with their surroundings. Their individuality was tested, whether discovering themselves in their interpersonal relationships or their status in society. His characters question their purpose, commonly after their actions conflict with their environment. After evaluating their actions and how those actions define their character, there is rarely acceptance but rather submission. They claim to understand society's faults yet make excuses or mock the conclusion rather than address their issues. This futility is an extension of Vonnegut's

own societal perspective. His humanism motivates him to address these societal faults, his novels mocking their confounding and foolish nature, yet an answer is never truly achieved, just postulated—and then, a punch line. This reoccurring motif emphasizes Vonnegut’s own perspective: he can write about these concerns, make humorous inferences and comments, yet he struggles with a solution.

These narrators mirror Vonnegut’s own struggles with his identity, in particular his role as an author. His literature progresses throughout his career. Though authors are consistently invested in improving their craft and gaining confidence in their writing, his transformation is significant because it develops alongside a literary theory discussing an author’s role towards his novel and within the literary field. Several prominent poststructuralists, in particular Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, write about the author’s identity as absent or limited in relation to the literature he or she writes. Foucault, in his lecture “What is an Author” (1969), questions the author’s role, what he provides to the novel and its audience, and whether his existence is influential and beneficial. However, he concludes, “The author function will disappear” (Foucault 14) and the reader’s role will bolster the novel’s substance. Barthes, in his essay “Death of the Author” (1967), conjectures that the author is a restrictive force and that the reader should be respected and admired for his role: the author’s perspective and goal are secondary to the reader, the possessor of the novel. Barthes asserts the reader provides literature with the most potential through a plethora of opinions and inferences, rather than limiting the novel to the author’s purpose. Therefore, Barthes claims the author’s decline offers the reader and the novel growth.

These philosophers published their works during the 1960s alongside postmodernist literature's growth. This movement further distanced itself from the nineteenth century's realism and expanded upon modernism's unreliable characters and overtly fictional nature. Postmodernist writers commonly used metafiction to emphasize the novel as a fabrication: the author would hide his authorial role, often by claiming an editorial role, expressed in an editor's note, or the narrator would speak directly to the reader, acknowledging his identity. Postmodernism was self-reflexive, analyzing the novel's actual purpose and effect. Also, characters were unreliable and their morality questionable; through the stream-of-consciousness techniques, their thoughts were shared directly with the reader and their insecurities blatantly stated.

In this thesis, I will explain how Vonnegut's authorial role grows from adhering to modernist conventions to embracing postmodernist commitments, thereby challenging the literary theories that postulate the author's demise occurs contemporaneously alongside his literature. Through his alter egos and his own eventual entrance into his works, Vonnegut confronts these theories – his novels evidence an author asserting his identity, maintaining his puppeteer position, and refusing to allow his literature to escape his grasp.

Vonnegut's earlier works would more appropriately be considered modernist creations, because they contain narrators rather than characters that repeatedly address the audience, and present Vonnegut as the editor of several novels. His first novel, *Player's Piano* (1952), and several other early works show Vonnegut learning to be an author. Though the novel contains a dystopian society and a narrator utilizing stream-of-consciousness, several Vonnegutian techniques are absent. His black humor and societal

attacks are limited; rather, the novel addresses a possible future and analyzes its rationale. Though Paul Proteus, the narrator, evidences characteristics similar to narrators in later books, Vonnegut refrains from using his narrator to express his biting satire. Also, Proteus rarely engages with the reader, and his internal monologues are terse, expressing insecurities rather than aggressive societal criticism. Therefore, this novel parallels Vonnegut's authorial identity: his early works express his growing confidence and a restricted style.

Analyzing Vonnegut's literary chronology illustrates his authorial growth. His first several novels adhere closely to modernism, yet as his works become more popular and respected, his style switches to postmodernism. He utilizes his satire more frequently and aggressively, his narrators' opinions start to mirror Vonnegut's own, and his novels are more stylistically complex. Also, he creates an alter ego character: an individual whose career, perspectives, and peculiar personality significantly reflected Vonnegut. Kilgore Trout, his alter ego, appears in several novels as a science fiction author, writing short stories that create fantastical settings but address real societal issues. Vonnegut's narrators would acknowledge Trout as a clever writer despite lacking prominence and his stories appearing in seedy publications, commonly pornographic magazines, or at adult bookstores. Also, Trout would send his stories away to many different publishing houses without a return address and not requesting money, further distancing himself from receiving acclaim. Though alter egos or mouthpieces are common stylistic choices for novelists, Trout is a unique individual because he appears in several different works, gaining more influential roles and eventually becoming the main character. His rise

parallels Vonnegut's development as an author: Vonnegut's later novels are more insightful, hilarious, and critical.

Trout provides further insight into Vonnegut's authorial identity. Trout's stories parallel Vonnegut's novels: both authors mask their societal criticism through science fiction. Trout rarely appears center stage, but as an outside influential character motivating or impressing the narrator, similar to an author's effect on a novel. These commonalities stress Trout's importance: his development emphasizes Vonnegut's own progression. Through recreating his own self as a character, Vonnegut asserts his existence and search for identity. Trout first appears in Vonnegut's fifth novel, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965); the narrator praises his short stories and eventually converses with him while interned at a mental asylum. Trout is quirky, yet offers sage advice to the narrator, establishing himself as a consultant. His role is brief, appearing in less than ten pages; however, his appearance emphasizes Vonnegut's attempts to explain his work. He describes the narrator's struggles to the other characters, makes a few jokes, and then the novel concludes. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), Vonnegut's next novel, Trout reappears, but not as a physical character: Eliot Rosewater, the previous novel's narrator, offers Trout's works to Billy Pilgrim, *Slaughterhouse-Five's* narrator. Therefore, Trout's writing is important to both novels, not his identity. However, in *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), Trout shares the spotlight with Dwayne Hoover, a Pontiac dealer spiraling into lunacy. Though Trout's characteristics rarely change through these three novels, his prominence does. Vonnegut writes in *Slaughterhouse-Five's* (1969) first chapter that his goal throughout his early career was to write about his experience in World War II, specifically as a prisoner of war witnessing the Dresden firebombing. Therefore,

publishing this novel, achieving this feat, and receiving many accolades strengthened his confidence.

Breakfast of Champions (1973) affords Trout a primary role, emphasizing authorial pride. Also, Vonnegut enters the novel too, hiding amongst other nondescript characters, describing himself only through one characteristic: wearing mirrored lenses. He hides throughout the novel, only revealing his identity to Kilgore Trout in the epilogue. Also, he narrates the novel and infrequently comments on his control over the characters, guiding them towards certain actions and responses. Vonnegut toys with his role: Trout's and Hoover's stories fill the pages while Vonnegut only discusses his existence when he shares the scene with either character. He remains this mysterious fellow in the back, observing and controlling. Though Vonnegut "enters" the novel, he shies away from controlling the plot –flexing his authorial abilities while claiming to limit his influence.

Vonnegut's last novel, *Timequake* (1997), makes another leap: Trout and "Vonnegut" interact fluidly without acknowledging their relationship. *Timequake* (1997) further challenges the poststructuralist concept of authorship because the book appears both as fiction and nonfiction. Vonnegut inputs many facts about his own life and his own responses to the fictional world, and he regularly converses with Trout. However, he does not allow Trout to further challenge his identity as creator, rather as co-author. Vonnegut asserts this book is the crumbs of a purely fictional novel he was working on which fell apart. He includes many elements from the alleged original novel, attributing it to that fictional enterprise, yet his character regularly interferes. Several times throughout the novel he has lengthy conversations with Trout, hanging out with him at a clambake.

This absurd experience tests the novel's fictional limits: is this a Vonnegut creation or the actual conclusion for his alter ego? He continually discusses how Trout's stories are insightful and how impressed he is with Trout's conversations with other authors, yet Trout is Vonnegut's doppelganger. Therefore, his praise suggests a proud identity; Trout's literary skill is admired, mirroring Vonnegut's own literary accomplishments.

Trout goes through a persistent character development between his first appearance in *God Bless You, Rosewater* and final appearance in *Timequake*. Therefore, Trout can be used to analyze Vonnegut's authorial growth. An alter ego can strengthen a novel's tie with the author rather than allow the author to efface his role. Trout, despite being a fictional character, exists as Vonnegut's best mouthpiece. Creating an alter ego expresses an author's desire to showcase his own identity, rather than simply generate other minor characters with bits and pieces of his thoughts. Therefore, using an alter ego cements an author's association with his novel. Furthermore, Vonnegut's decision to "enter" a novel, highlighting his authorial control and status, confronts and challenges Barthes and Foucault's assertions about authorship: his own role never dissipates because the novel requires his narration and his quirky insight. His authorial identity helps the novel progress rather than limits it.

CHAPTER 1 – MODERNIST BEGINNINGS

Vonnegut's literary style transforms throughout his literary career. His first novel, *Player Piano* (1952), was published alongside many other modernist novels. His style and character-driven plots characterize Vonnegut in this literary period. However, crediting Vonnegut as a modernist requires certain attributes. David Lodge's essay "Metaphor and Metonymy in Modern Fiction" addresses this category. Lodge posits that certain works function either metaphorically, containing representations and references to other things, or metonymically, grouping contiguous sentences and repeating diction to convey an idea to the reader. Lodge writes,

Modernist fiction is much concerned with consciousness, and also with the subconscious or unconscious workings of the human mind. Hence the structure of the external objective events essential to traditional narrative art is diminished in scope and scale, or presented selectively and obliquely, in order to make room for introspection, analysis, reflection, and reverie. (Lodge 75)

Vonnegut's modernist leanings exemplify Lodge's definition. His first several novels contain narrators pondering their present situation rather than a character thrust into an easily creatable conflict such as a mystery or love story. His narrator's internal monologue addresses a multitude of issues, whether concerns towards his society or uncertainty about his personal relationships. Through characters, Vonnegut inserts his own concerns about society. Also, creating unique and fictional environments affords Vonnegut a chance to highlight certain issues, thereby focusing the reader on the novel's purpose.

Narration further aligns Vonnegut with Lodge's concept of modernist fiction. Lodge states, "Modernist fiction eschews the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrators. It employs, instead,

either a single, limited point of view or a mode of multiple viewpoints, all more or less limited and fallible” (Lodge 75). Unreliable narrators populate most of Vonnegut’s works. Their opinions appear throughout the novel, discussing their environment or explaining their perspectives and actions. The reader experiences the novel through the narrator, rarely given a different viewpoint. Vonnegut’s adherence to this method stresses the narrator’s role as crucial in each novel: his internal thoughts and external actions guide the novel.

Player Piano (1952) and *Sirens of Titan* (1959) emphasize his modernist leanings and further solidify several Vonnegut attributes, but also portray his developing literary confidence. His two narrators begin the novel comfortable in their environment; however, their issues with society are too obstructive, leading them to rebel and eventually escape their habitual lives. Though his narrators are unreliable, they are not too outlandish to interfere with the main themes. His first two works show Vonnegut discovering his authorial motivations. His narrators are paramount to the novels’ progression, maneuvering through their dystopian societies, commenting on their surroundings, and battling with their own statuses in society. These three elements appear throughout Vonnegut’s literature, yet their method adjusts as Vonnegut progresses through his career. Therefore, analyzing these narrators shows Vonnegut exercising his early literary craft without directly involving his own character or perspectives.

Paul Proteus, in *Player Piano*, is understandably frustrated with his automaton-like lifestyle, despite his apparently elite social standing. Though his life appears desirable, he upends his situation because of his radical friend, Ed Finnerty, and his boredom; challenges his society’s dependency on machines for daily functions; and

abandons his social status. Vonnegut creates an understandably twisted society, lacking human creativity and droning on in support of an oppressive government that has traded its human workforce for machines. This reality is unappealing: it lacks humanity.

Vonnegut takes issue with machines' invasion into society and with corporations' indifference towards their human workforce. This setting emphasizes Vonnegut's humanist tendencies; he has previously stated,

I've worried some about why write books when Presidents and Senators and generals do not read them, and the university experience taught me a very good reason: you catch people before they become generals and Senators and Presidents, and you poison their minds with humanity. Encourage them to make a better world. ("Postmodern (Midwestern) Morality," Davis 5)

Sirens of Titan depicts a similar narrator. Malachi Constant, the narrator, guided by a mysterious space-time traveler named X, realizes his actions determine society's survival during and after a Martian invasion, and eventually is banished to a distant planet. He discovers his life is a product of another species controlling humans, rather than a random series of catastrophic effects. Vonnegut's second novel shows a man's struggle with free will, whether Constant's decisions are due to his own volition or to his status as a mere puppet.

These two novels adhere to Vonnegut's early modernism. His narrators initially struggle, then overcome several internal conflicts, and eventually escape their social restrictions, whether challenging a society dependent upon technology and lacking humanity, or discovering free will and choosing to act, rather than following fate. These novels also cement Vonnegut's reputation as a young author, promoting his main literary goal: humanism. However, he relies on his narrators to develop these perspectives, and he limits his own personality within the texts. Also, his first two novels exist in a

fictional, dystopian setting and contain several science fiction elements; Vonnegut uses science fiction to cope with his uncertainty or insecurity with his works.

These books can be compared to those by several different modernist authors. For example, Ernest Hemingway frequently depicts a main character battling with his social and political identity, such as Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). Jordan joins an anti-fascist guerilla unit during the Spanish Civil War. However, he falls in love with the guerilla unit's cook, Maria, which interferes with his sense of duty. Likewise, John Steinbeck utilizes his characters to show the harsh realities of country life and the battered emotional status of poor farmers. The Joads, in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), are an Oklahoma farming family homeless and unemployed, combating the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression and traveling to California for a new life. Though Vonnegut has been considered a postmodern author, his two early works can comfortably stand alongside other modernist writings.

These first novels show Vonnegut testing his abilities, creating these fictional environments to highlight his societal concerns. However, Vonnegut is especially renowned for his quips, which begin to appear in his later fiction, cementing his reputation for another technique: black humor. Todd F. Davis states, "For Vonnegut, issues of such significance demand that the writer be understood; the goal of the writer is to communicate as quickly and effectively—and quite often for Vonnegut, as ironically and humorously—as possible" (Davis 4). Vonnegut pursues this dark comedy to mask his disagreement with society's absent humanity. His novels frequently circle around a main concept; his earlier works contain this focus, yet he does not use his sardonic approach until his third novel. This delay emphasizes his growth as an author: initially, he depends

upon his characters to achieve his purposes and speaks through the narrator. However, once he gains authorial traction and critical admiration for his works, he ignores the separation between narrator and author, his thoughts intermingling with his narrator's dialogue.

Vonnegut begins *Mother Night* (1961) testing out a different technique – asserting his role as editor, not author. He writes, “In preparing this, the American edition of the confessions of Howard W. Campbell Jr., I have had to deal with writings concerned with more than mere informing or deceiving, as the case may be” (*Mother Night* ix). He claims no direct authorial role, yet pursuing this method helps Vonnegut develop his authorial persona. Vonnegut, as editor, can claim distance from the work, yet still has an influential role in the book's production.

The editor's note is an uncommon place to establish Vonnegut's goal for *Mother Night*, yet he begins his note discussing the concept of lying, mocking his own assumed role as editor. He states, “... I will risk the opinion that lies told for the sake of artistic effect...can be, in a higher sense, the most beguiling forms of truth” (*Mother Night* X). Vonnegut challenges lying, despite clearly speaking falsely to sell his editorial role. The novel's protagonist, Howard J. Campbell, struggles with his own disguise; his confessions in the novel suggest a constant fear of discovery, during the war amongst his German peers and while hiding out in New York City, a broken and anti-social older man. Campbell describes his New York life, stating, “And I, hiding from many people who might want to hurt or kill me, often longed for someone...to end my endless game of hide-and-seek...” (*Mother Night* 24). Campbell is downtrodden: an artist without passion, lacking the motivation to create, avoiding his past and ignoring his current identity.

Vonnegut parallels Campbell's inner conflict in his editor's note. Certain paragraphs express his supposedly unbiased editing; he writes, "My duties as an editor are in no sense polemic. They are simply to pass on, in the most satisfactory style, the confessions of Campbell" (*Mother Night* X). Vonnegut repeatedly attempts to separate himself from the book. Throughout the note, he asserts this separation, yet shortly after stating his minor corrections, his rationale for these corrections does assert pride for his role. He says, "As for my own tinkering with the text, they are few. I have corrected some spelling, removed some exclamation points, and all the italics are mine" (*Mother Night* X). Vonnegut sells his editorial role but hesitates when declaring any major influence over the ideas being expressed in the text. These small adjustments, however, are furthered by his next comment. He states, "I have in several instances changed names, in order to spare embarrassment or worse to innocent people still living" (*Mother Night* X). He thus solidifies his novel's fictional reality. The book does contain historical relevance: frequently, certain notorious Nazis engage Campbell, praising him or welcoming him into their confidence. Therefore, Vonnegut's decision to provide pseudonyms for those 'still living' expresses a different goal: veneration.

He masks three characters' identity: a Jewish doctor, an American lieutenant, and an American spy. The lieutenant is Vonnegut's own friend, using his exact name and a similar, only slightly fictionalized war experience: his character is a victorious man, liberating concentration camps, yet weakened by his pursuit for vengeance against Campbell. However, Vonnegut does not reveal the lieutenant stands in for his friend until *Slaughterhouse-Five's* nonfictional first chapter: "...an old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare..." (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 1). Vonnegut's character shows a World War II veteran

haunted by his wartime role. This character mirrors Vonnegut's own struggles: he cannot escape his experience in Dresden, nor can he write about it. Though he eventually details his wartime trauma in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), early in his career he can only express himself through creating this character, and he further distances himself from this lieutenant naming him after his friend, a World War II veteran. Several narrators in Vonnegut's later works openly discuss their wartime experiences; however, Vonnegut hides from his experience initially through his editorship, seemingly retelling others' experiences.

The Jewish doctor is another interesting creation: his mother is a Holocaust survivor who neighbors Campbell and frequently rants against any reference to Germany, assuming all Germans to be Nazis. However, the doctor ignores his mother's rants, asking her to move on, not accepting her narrow perspective. For example, the doctor says, "They [the Holocaust] belong to a period of insanity that should be forgotten as quickly as possible" (*Mother Night* 32). Later in the novel, Campbell surrenders himself to the doctor to be brought to justice; the doctor responds by calling several acquaintances, affording them the honor to arrest a known Nazi collaborator. The doctor epitomizes an individual accepting the past through living and viewing society in the present. His character is admirable and desirable: he is inherently good, an absent quality in many of Vonnegut's characters.

The third individual is Campbell's spy handler, whose random interventions and appearances emphasize his fantastical nature; Campbell also refers to him as "My Blue Fairy Godmother" (*Mother Night* 40). The handler appears throughout Campbell's experiences in Germany, helps him escape into anonymity in New York, and only

appears when Campbell is close to being arrested or convicted. Vonnegut can save his narrator through this character, emphasizing Campbell as worthy of surviving his aggressors. These three characters each contain certain qualities Vonnegut deems desirable or akin to his own personality. Therefore, he further masks their identities, preventing comparisons to his own character. Vonnegut can hide behind these individuals and maintain his editorial distance, yet not completely attribute the novel to Campbell.

The editor's note further addresses the fictional world when Vonnegut states, "I have made significant cuts in only two places" (*Mother Night IX*). The first cut, "... was insisted upon by my publisher's lawyer..." regarding an absurd scene where one character claims, "his father invented I-Am-An-American Day" (*Mother Night IX*). Removing this hilarious jest highlights Vonnegut's use of the editor's note to simulate reality. First, he creates pseudonyms for three characters, then improvises legal issues to further express this goal; Vonnegut writes, "The lawyer's feeling is that to reproduce the claim in the body of the text would be to slander those persons who really did invent 'I-Am-An-American Day'" (*Mother Night IX*). Vonnegut confirms his editorship through this statement; his publisher's lawyer taking issue with the work, providing legal guidance, and requiring Vonnegut to change his work highlights his editorial role.

Vonnegut explains the second cut: "I would have considered myself honor-bound to present that chapter unbowdlerized, were it not for Campbell's request, right in the body of the text, that some editor perform the emasculation" (*Mother Night XII*). He explains the original was "pornographic" (*Mother Night XII*); however, Vonnegut rarely censors this aspect: rather, he takes pride in crudeness. Therefore, Vonnegut illustrates how the novel is stylistically different. Vonnegut uses inappropriate content frequently,

whether through his word choice or his random scenes and character interactions. In *Mother Night*, however, Vonnegut states he would have not removed the material, yet he followed the author's wishes: his style conflicts with his narrator's novel.

The note continues with Campbell discussing the novel's dedication. Campbell writes, "I wrote the dedication – 'To Mata Hari.' She whored in the interest of espionage, and so did I" (*Mother Night* XII). However, Campbell struggles with this dedication: "Now that I've seen some of the book, I would prefer to dedicate it to someone less exotic, less fantastic, more contemporary – less of a creature of silent film" (*Mother Night* XII). Vonnegut states Campbell included this comment in a chapter Campbell removed; though an author does edit his own work, constantly disposing of chapters or scenes to strengthen the novel, Vonnegut includes this disavowed dedication to portray his narrator's growth and persona.

Campbell's new dedication and rationale are more powerful than his initial comedic statement. He writes,

"I would prefer to dedicate it to one familiar person, male or female, widely known to have done evil while saying to himself, 'A very good me, the real me, a me made in heaven, is hidden deep inside.' ...Let me honor myself in that fashion, then: This book is rededicated to Howard W. Campbell, Jr., a man who served evil too openly and good too secretly, the crime of his times." (*Mother Night* XIII)

Vonnegut praises Campbell for his bravery, yet challenges the necessity for secrecy.

Though Campbell's hidden espionage is eventually recognized, his Nazi persona cannot be ignored. This closing statement attacks war's punitive nature: Vonnegut's own struggles to write about the war parallels Campbell's war-corrupted identity. *Mother Night* was published prior to Vonnegut's most notable World War II story, *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). *Mother Night* is therefore indirectly cathartic: Vonnegut can

write about Campbell's war experience without depicting his own involvement. His editorial influence assists Campbell in telling his story, thereby helping Vonnegut approach this topic but remain distant.

Mother Night sharpened Vonnegut's literary skill. Though authors have utilized the editor's note prior to Vonnegut, Vonnegut's note illustrated his personal connection with the novel and its characters. The characters he hides, the situations he excised, and his minor alterations emphasize his novel's fictional environment. Vonnegut centers his novels on a main concept, frequently a societal issue, and then satirizes his characters and their interactions to push them towards realizing this missing quality. However, the editorial note progresses past this theme: Campbell's path to self-actualization.

Discovering a compromise between his internal persona versus his external Nazi mirrors Vonnegut's own battle to write about his wartime experience. Therefore, Vonnegut masks his fight through assuming the role of editor: he can write about World War II without fully engaging his personal experiences.

Vonnegut moves from his status as editor towards another recurring motif: his alter ego. Many writers have utilized alter egos to insert themselves into their literature, whether to assist or distract from the novel. Though these mouthpieces are commonly the main character or a supporting, but important one, authors rarely continuously use their alter egos. James Joyce created Stephen Dedalus, the main character of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), to depict his struggles through his early years. Dedalus' experiences mirror Joyce's conflicts with his religion, schooling, and literary goals. Through Dedalus' character growth, Joyce shows his own response to his environment and search for identity. Joyce then utilizes Dedalus, now a supporting character, in his

second novel, *Ulysses* (1922), affording Dedalus more self-confidence, but still embodying many immature aspects. Rarely does an alter ego exist in multiple books; Joyce, however, is known for challenging the literary field and expanding modernist literary genres.

Kilgore Trout, similar to Dedalus, acts as Vonnegut's alter ego, appearing in several works. Though incorporating Trout directly into Vonnegut's fiction does not occur until later works, his depiction is consistent: an unkempt hermit admired for his literature.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965) contains Trout's first appearance, albeit in a minor role. Eliot Rosewater, the main character, is a drunken philanthropist, beginning his life along a respectable path, graduating from Harvard Law School, maintaining offices in the Empire State Building, and eventually going on a drunken journey ending in Rosewater, Indiana. His wife eventually goes insane, must be treated in Switzerland, and eventually files for divorce; in response, Eliot opens up an office for the Rosewater Foundation, dedicated to assisting his fellow citizens. His ancestors accumulated massive wealth, and therefore, many factories and public buildings bear the Rosewater name. However, Eliot's office is dirty and small; he answers phone calls, providing advice and money – mostly to local Rosewater inhabitants – while taking sips from Southern Comfort.

The novel analyzes money's effect on society. Eliot epitomizes a unique persona: an individual completely disinterested in his wealth, disbursing it quite freely. Though his insanity can be credited to his postwar trauma and constantly drunken state, his character

does represent wealth's potentially positive effect. Vonnegut utilizes Rosewater to represent a true philanthropist, despite his tragically flawed character.

The novel's unique character study is juxtaposed alongside Vonnegut's first introduction of Kilgore Trout. Rosewater is an avid Trout reader and interrupts a science-fiction convention on one of his several drunken escapades. He tells the audience,

I only wish Kilgore Trout were here...so I could shake his hand and tell him that he is the greatest writer alive today. I have just been told that he could not come because he could not afford to leave his job! And what job does this society give its greatest prophet... They have made him a stock clerk in a trading stamp redemption center. (*God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* 19)

Though Rosewater's speech is sullied by his hazy stupor, Kilgore Trout's first reference emphasizes Vonnegut's desire to represent himself in his novel. "Trout, the author of eighty-seven paperback books, was a very poor man, and unknown outside the science-fiction field" (*God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* 19), and he appears in several Vonnegut novels as this unknown writer. Though this initial introduction is brief, Trout appears throughout Vonnegut's fiction as an intelligent and underappreciated writer.

Rosewater concludes his address, oddly, emphasizing the novel's main theme: "I leave it to you friends and neighbors, and especially the immortal Kilgore Trout: think about the silly ways money gets passed around, and then think up better ways" (*God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* 22). Rosewater epitomizes this concept: his character frequently disburses checks to random individuals, whether or not they request it. Vonnegut utilizes Rosewater to focus the reader on both the novel's main economic theme and to align himself with Trout: Vonnegut did write *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* about money's absurd purpose. Though many Trout short stories present a fantastical science fiction tale, they still analyze many societal concerns; Vonnegut uses

the same technique. Therefore, Vonnegut appears to reaffirm his decision to write the novel, invoking Trout's name as the writer most capable of discussing society's absurd monetary obsession.

Kilgore Trout enters the narrative in the novel's final pages. He becomes Rosewater's consultant to assist in a legal matter in the conclusion. Fred, Rosewater's distant relative, is suing for the Rosewater inheritance because Rosewater experiences a severe mental breakdown. Rosewater wakes in a mental hospital, surrounded by the doctor, Trout, and Rosewater's father, the senator, who exclaims, "You said Trout could explain the meaning of everything you'd done in Rosewater, even if you couldn't" (*God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* 182). Vonnegut cleverly has his alter ego explain the novel's main character and his philanthropy. Up to this point in the novel, intermittent references to Trout are confined to his writings and portrait; though Rosewater praises his short stories, he never directly affects the plot. However, Vonnegut affords his alter ego center stage – the individual who explains it all. Trout dissects the novel's plot into understandable parts for the main character, crucial to the novel's conclusion.

Trout describes Rosewater's timeline during his philanthropy through a very general lens. He says,

...what you did in Rosewater County was far from insane. It was quite possibly the most important social experiment of our time, for it dealt on a very small scale with a problem whose queasy horrors will eventually be made world-wide by the sophistication of machines. The problem is this: How to love people who have no use? (*God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* 183)

Vonnegut further cements his association with Trout through this comment. Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano*, describes the world that Trout is denouncing: machines have become indispensable whereas people are merely engineers and mechanics who create

and fix these machines. Therefore, Trout's description highlights Vonnegut's authorial progression. His first novel depicted this shocking dystopia, yet this novel with Trout challenges that dystopia. Rosewater's society "means that our hatred of useless human beings and the cruelties we inflict upon them for their own good need not be parts of human nature. Thanks to the example of Eliot Rosewater, millions upon millions of people may learn to love and help whomever they see" (*God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* 187). Vonnegut's humanism is apparent in Trout's explanation. Vonnegut can declare his own perspective through Trout's dialogue, rather than through other indirect methods: Trout's short stories. Therefore, this comment shows Vonnegut discovering his own voice through utilizing his alter ego to criticize society's faults.

Trout's speech is interrupted a couple times by the senator, one moment indirectly but clearly associating Trout with Vonnegut. He states, "You should have been a public relations man!" (*God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* 185) *Player Piano* was written in response to Vonnegut's own public relations job at General Electric; Davis states, "...much of Vonnegut's writing maintains standards first established by his work as a student journalist and public relations writer for General Electric" (Davis 4). Therefore, Trout's skills mirror Vonnegut's own.

Kilgore Trout rarely asserts a pivotal role nor does he consistently appear to advise the narrator. Trout is often an off-stage presence: his short stories receive respect, yet never to the degree of equaling Rosewater's admiration. Vonnegut's tendency to posit Trout as advisor emphasizes his authorial goals: Vonnegut does not want acclaim, yet does want his works to be discussed and respected. Therefore, Trout's short stories appear throughout Vonnegut's works, yet Trout remains in the backdrop providing

additional social commentary and affording Vonnegut further opportunity to dissect society's flaws.

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater establishes several Vonnegut techniques, and most novels following this publication solidify his mature style. He repeatedly utilizes a satirical slant, social commentary, and quirky yet impactful characters. Also, his science fiction conventions become sporadic and minimal rather than a consistent part of his plots: he may design unusual or peculiar plots, but he generally creates dystopian societies that are recognizable rather than pure science fiction. However, Trout's stories are always science fiction, and frequently Vonnegut reuses the same Trout stories in multiple novels. Trout and his stories tie Vonnegut's literature together, showing his authorial growth. Though Vonnegut may use wholly different narrators, Trout is a constant, gradually growing in importance from his consultant role to main character. Trout's progression towards becoming a narrator in his own right highlights Vonnegut's literary development. Initially, he lacks the confidence to state his societal criticisms in his own voice, utilizing Trout's short stories or hiding his black humor amongst his unique narrators or claiming an editorial role. However, once Trout's story is depicted, as the next chapter explores, Vonnegut can proudly lay claim to his own authorial identity.

CHAPTER 2 – VONNEGUT ENTERS HIS WORKS

Vonnegut's early novels utilize narrators to provide commentary, maintain his distance from his works through editorial notes, and develop characters whose attributes mirror the author's own. These motifs are pervasive amongst many writers: Vonnegut entered the literary sphere with works worthy of reading yet not varying or challenging modernist conventions. Furthermore, his earlier works did not receive as much acclaim as his later texts, in particular *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). This novel pivots Vonnegut towards challenging literary conventions because he can divulge his own perspectives entirely. He mentions in several prefaces his inability to discuss his own experiences during World War II until *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). He begins this novel by stating,

All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true. 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. I've changed all the names. (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 1)

The novel does include Vonnegut's personal experience as a prisoner of war in Dresden, witnessing the firebombing and cleaning up the corpses after the destruction. However, Billy Pilgrim experiencing the destruction overshadows Vonnegut's personal connection. Vonnegut hides his reality behind his science fiction tale about Pilgrim's time-traveling, space-exploring adventure. Vonnegut had used time-travel in a previous novel, *Sirens of Titan* (1959), and his use of science fiction conventions is common. Nevertheless, *Slaughterhouse-Five* represents a significant shift in Vonnegut's self-confidence. This novel contains several elements that emphasize his authorial identity.

The first chapter has very little association with the rest of the novel: it is an explanation of how Vonnegut struggled to write the novel. He details his initial inability

to explain his experience, to organize its plot and characters, and to include himself in his work. Though Vonnegut's early style expresses hesitation when including satirical social commentary, this novel showcases Vonnegut aggressively making jokes, mocking himself and his literature. He writes, "I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and time...I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden... that it would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was so big" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 2). Through expressing his frustrations, Vonnegut involves himself in the novel, a character struggling with his wartime experience. Several times throughout the novel, Vonnegut asserts his identity, stating, "I was there" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 86). Pilgrim's story is told in third person; therefore, this first-person pronoun, lacking association with any other characters, clearly refers to Vonnegut as the narrator. He includes himself as a prisoner of war alongside Pilgrim; therefore, the imprisonment is viewed through Vonnegut's eyes. Vonnegut writes, "The Americans arrived in Dresden at five in the afternoon. The boxcar doors were opened...somebody behind him [Pilgrim] said, 'Oz.' That was I. That was me" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 189). Though the novel is not an autobiography, the first chapter alludes to the story of Vonnegut overcoming his own conflict: writing about Dresden. He says, "But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then – not enough of them to make a book, anyway. And not many words come now, either, when I have become an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls...I think of how useless the Dresden part of my memory has been..." (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 3). Therefore, Vonnegut juxtaposes Pilgrim and his science fiction adventure against Vonnegut's own experience because he cannot write an autobiography.

Vonnegut expands upon this inability throughout the first chapter. He writes, “Over the years, people I’ve met have often asked me what I’m working on, and I’ve usually replied that the main thing was a book about Dresden” (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 4). This book has been an ongoing project, paralleling his growing authorial identity. It is written roughly halfway through his career, his first several novels avoiding any war reference or narrators overcoming their posttraumatic stress. Through writing this novel, Vonnegut achieves a literary goal: to write about the war directly. Vonnegut builds upon this confidence several pages later, saying, “As a trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue and suspense and confrontations, I had outlined the Dresden story many times. The best outline I ever made, or anyway the prettiest one, was on the back of a roll of wallpaper” (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 6). This sentence reveals several things about Vonnegut’s writing process. His quirky nature is revealed: his outline is on scraps of wallpaper, using a crayon. Though Vonnegut’s comedy has become a common attribute, his first several novels do not contain his absurd humor; More frequently, his dryness and social criticism supersede his desire to be funny. Also, he praises himself, discussing his literary ego. Vonnegut mocks many of his works, wishing he wrote better or more accurately; therefore, claiming his writing aptitude cements his newfound authorial confidence. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is his sixth novel, yet his works were not widely read until this novel was published.

Vonnegut’s insecurity is further emphasized when he visits a fellow prisoner of war while researching the story. Throughout this first chapter, Vonnegut details his conversation with his friend attempting to recall Dresden. Vonnegut says, “I don’t think this book of mine is ever going to be finished. I must have written five thousand pages by

now, and thrown them all away” (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 19). His exaggeration and frustration are highlighted through this comment. This perspective is stressed further in the chapter’s conclusion: “I’ve finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun. This one is a failure...” (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 28). Vonnegut’s mockery should be viewed alongside this novel’s positive reception. Donald E. Morse writes,

...review of *Slaughterhouse-Five* placed Vonnegut with the satirists Jonathan Swift and Mark Twain, a comparison that later became standard in Vonnegut criticism...the chorus of praise for the novel that became both a critical and popular success leading to the reprinting of all of Vonnegut’s previous novels. (Morse 43)

This novel positioned Vonnegut as a hugely popular and skilled American writer, yet he still doubts his aptitude. Though Vonnegut repeatedly hides behind his dry humor, this statement still contains an interesting concept. Completing this novel provides partial relief: he has completed his main objective. Therefore, he can pursue novels that appeal to him, novels whereby he can continue his aggressive social commentary and dark humor. Completing *Slaughterhouse-Five* frees him from restricting himself to a “war-book.” His next novels showcase this freedom: his narrators can address real issues plaguing society; he can write jokes without doubting his talent; and he can include himself in his novels without rebuke. He has a solid readership; therefore, he can challenge literary styles and refine his authorial role.

This first chapter segues directly into Billy Pilgrim’s adventures. Vonnegut writes in the first chapter’s conclusion, “It begins like this... it ends like this” (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 28). Despite its content, this chapter is not titled the preface. Vonnegut personally narrates the first chapter, detailing his progression towards completing this novel: Pilgrim

does not enter the story until chapter two, nor does he ever become the narrator. Therefore, this first chapter emphasizes that the story belongs to Vonnegut. Despite Vonnegut rarely appearing in the novel – and only through a terse “I was there” (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 86) – the novel contains his perspectives. The characters and the setting are explained through his viewpoint: Vonnegut is the omniscient narrator, intermittently asserting his identity.

Breakfast of Champions (1973) is Vonnegut’s next novel, whereby he significantly challenges the novel’s fictional context and further establishes himself as the main narrator. Kilgore Trout and Dwayne Hoover are the two main characters, yet Vonnegut never affords them the narrator role: Vonnegut narrates, explains their thoughts and actions, and frequently enters the text through using the first-person pronoun “I.” Vonnegut controls the novel through his narrator role, describing his characters’ surroundings and expressing their thoughts, rather than allowing them a voice on their own. Infrequently he does portray his own interactions with his fictional characters, yet limits these encounters and the dialogue, hiding his authorial identity. The novel is clearly postmodernist: it establishes its own fictional nature; the author/narrator role is peculiar, challenging the reader’s perception of the scenes; and the novel’s style further stresses its odd progression. It is written with the assumption the reader has little to no grasp of society: frequently, doodles appear in order to depict simple concepts. For example, Vonnegut writes, “Trout and Hoover were citizens of the United States of America. A country which was called *America* for short. This was their national anthem, which was pure balderdash, like so much they were expected to take seriously” (*Breakfast of Champions* 7-8). And the following block quotation and image appear:

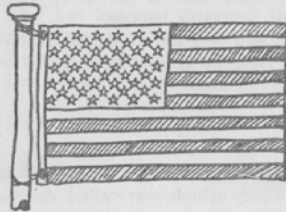
Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

This was their national anthem, which was pure balderdash, like so much they were expected to take seriously:

*O, say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's
last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars,
thru the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watched were so
gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs
bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our
flag was still there.
O, say does that star-spangled banner
yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home
of the brave?*

◆ There were one quadrillion nations in the Universe, but the nation Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout belonged to was the only one with a national anthem which was gibberish sprinkled with question marks.

Here is what their flag looked like:



8

Throughout the novel, similar pictures appear alongside Vonnegut's descriptions and quips, either to illustrate what Trout or Hoover are witnessing or merely to explain things most readers would likely know already. Therefore, Vonnegut highlights one of his own techniques immediately: the novel's sardonic nature.

Vonnegut explains in the preface, "I think I am trying to clear my head of all the junk in there...I'm throwing out characters from my other books, too. I'm not going to put on any more puppet shows. I think I am trying to make my head as empty as it was when I was born onto this damaged planet fifty years ago" (*Breakfast of Champions* 5). This joke emphasizes the novel's transitory purpose: it is written as a literary timestamp

between his earlier and later works. This novel is published after *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and it includes references and several narrators from previous novels. Rosewater makes an appearance, once again as Trout's loyal fan, and also motivates Trout to make his cross-country adventure in the novel. Hoover appeared in an earlier work, yet never as the main character. Therefore, this preface highlights Vonnegut's stylistic goals: he has become a confident author and therefore can test literary boundaries rather than repeat his old characters or maintain a monotonous style.

One key motif does reappear: he uses a repetitive phrase following unexplainable or uncomfortable situations. He writes, "and so on" (*Breakfast of Champions* 13), mirroring similar rhetorical devices used in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Hocus Pocus*.

However, his explanation for using this device is different from other works. He says,

The proper ending for any story about people it seems to me, since life is now a polymer in which the Earth is wrapped so tightly, should be that same abbreviation, which I now write large because I feel like it: ETC. And it is in order to acknowledge the continuity of this polymer that I begin so many sentences with 'And' and 'So,' and end so many paragraphs with '...and so on' (*Breakfast of Champions* 235).

His rationale complements his societal viewpoint: repetition, whether positive or negative, occurs throughout society. Therefore, he uses these three simple words to calmly express his frustration.

Vonnegut utilizes these catch phrases as one method to express his societal criticism, yet the novel contains several other techniques that further exemplify this goal. The novel contains many odd characters, the plot jumps around amongst the cast, and the cynical perspectives highlight society's faults. He explains, "... I understood how innocent and natural it was for them to behave so abominably, and with such abominable results: they were doing their best to live like people invented in story books" (*Breakfast*

of Champions 214). This section responds to several characters whose work makes them feel empowered despite Vonnegut saying, “I had no respect whatsoever for the creative works of either the painter or the novelist” (*Breakfast of Champions* 214). Vonnegut belittles his own characters, a common theme in the novel. He continues, “Why were so many Americans treated by their government as though their lives were as disposable as paper facial tissues? Because that was the way authors customarily treated bit-part players in their made-up tales. And so on” (*Breakfast of Champions* 215). His comments illustrate his satirical literary style: he creates characters he dislikes and then, bitterly mocks them. Therefore, he concludes with his rhetorical phrase to poke fun at his own works and repetitive strategies to emphasize the novel’s goal of criticizing society.

Breakfast of Champions transitions away from *Slaughterhouse-Five* through its differing chapters’ structure. Vonnegut alternates between detailing Hoover’s and Trout’s days, interspersing various commentary, but always maintaining the narration. Vonnegut mostly presents his own perspectives, not those of Hoover or Trout, thereby maintaining his hold on the novel despite not being the main character. Also, the preface further distances him from the novel. Though Vonnegut narrates Hoover and Trout’s story, writing a preface further showcases his identity confidently entering the text: he establishes his persona in the preface and continues his narrator role throughout *Breakfast of Champions* rather than slyly using the first-person perspective throughout *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Vonnegut does not shy away from inserting his own character alongside his fictional characters because his authorial role becomes an interesting and challenging stylistic choice.

The first chapter begins on page seventeen, yet Vonnegut also enters himself, stating, “Dwayne Hoover had oodles of charm. I can have oodles of charm when I want too. A lot of people have oodles of charm” (*Breakfast of Champions* 20). His aggressive entrance juxtaposes his identity alongside his characters. Though his comment is a jest, it also challenges the fiction: his real character co-exists with his fabricated characters, thereby asserting his authorial presence. Throughout the novel, Vonnegut aligns himself with Hoover and Trout; for example he writes, “When Dwayne was a boy, when Kilgore Trout was a boy, when I was a boy, and even when we became middle-aged men and older...” (*Breakfast of Champions* 24). This parallel emphasizes the novel as pertaining to all three individuals and furthermore highlights Vonnegut experiencing the story with his characters. Positioning his own character amongst his creations challenges the novel’s fictional universe and stresses his duality as author and character.

Trout’s short fiction also appears throughout the novel, explained each time by Vonnegut. He writes, “As for the story itself, it was entitled ‘The Dancing Fool.’ Like so many Trout stories, it was about a tragic failure to communicate. Here was the plot...” (*Breakfast of Champions* 58). Vonnegut repeatedly describes many short stories throughout the novel, always prefacing the stories as Trout’s works. An odd method: despite Vonnegut creating these short science fiction tales, he repeatedly credits it to his alter ego. He writes, “No reputable publisher had ever heard of him, for that matter, even though he had written one hundred and seventeen novels and two thousand short stories...” (*Breakfast of Champions* 20). Writing about this massive output emphasizes Trout’s prodigious career, but it also explains why Trout’s fiction affects many Vonnegutian narrators: there are ample works to reference and they commonly address

Vonnegut's own social criticisms. Vonnegut fabricates this expansive Trout library, describing many new and undiscovered works to highlight Trout and his literature's importance.

Trout's anonymity is a frequent theme throughout Vonnegut's works. However, this novel's plot challenges this conception. Initially, Vonnegut writes, "Trout considered himself not only harmless but invisible. The world had paid so little attention to him that he supposed he was dead. He hoped he was dead. But he learned from his encounter with Dwayne that he was alive enough to give a fellow human being ideas which would turn him into a monster" (*Breakfast of Champions* 14). His literature appears throughout Vonnegut's works, usually indirectly affecting the narrator or suggested by a minor character as insightful and a necessary read. Trout's literary progression parallels Vonnegut's own: as Vonnegut gains pride and critical acclaim for his works, so do Trout's works gain importance in the novels.

This novel's style assists in analyzing Vonnegut's authorial progression. Trout's main character role parallels Vonnegut asserting his authorial identity – Vonnegut proudly includes himself in scenes alongside his characters. Also, Vonnegut narrates directly to the reader, his voice crucial to the novel's peculiar story-telling method. However, the novel further emphasizes Vonnegut's authorial confidence and status through its frequent comparisons with individuals who inspired his characters. Vonnegut makes several references to his mother, his father, and other people in his background, evidencing this novel's conflicted fictional state.

Vonnegut starts to describe Hoover's deceased wife: "Her biggest secret, of course, was one that Bunny didn't detect until she knocked herself off with Draño: Celia

Hoover was crazy as a bedbug. My mother was, too” (*Breakfast of Champions* 186).

Vonnegut sneaks in this comment, and then continues his comparison between these two characters. He writes two paragraphs showing their similarities: his mother and Celia Hoover both exhibited similar versions of insanity, responding the same way to several triggers, and both eventually commit suicide. He writes, “Listen: Bunny’s mother and my mother were different sorts of human beings...And both our mothers committed suicide...My mother ate sleeping pills, which wasn’t nearly as horrible” (*Breakfast of Champions* 186). Creating a character mirroring a real individual is a common technique, yet Vonnegut’s method differs. Vonnegut’s abrupt entrance into the novel through utilizing “Hoover, Trout, and I” mimics how he writes about Bunny and his mother. This technique evidences his invasion into the work. Rather than giving several characters attributes associated with his life, the real and fictional characters are described in the same sentence or paragraph. He writes, “And Bunny’s mother and my mother had one really bizarre symptom in common: neither one could stand to have her picture taken. They were usually fine in the daytime. They usually concealed their frenzies until late at night” (*Breakfast of Champions* 186). He uses the plural, not separating these two women, highlighting their insanity as a shared experience. Therefore, Celia Hoover does not solely act as an indirect method to discuss his mother’s suicide. His mother’s suicide is different, though each woman possesses similar characteristics. Vonnegut cannot conflate their tragedy, but needs to express their disparity. His mother’s appearance in the novel shows Vonnegut transforming his novels from strict fiction into stories juxtaposing their real and fabricated contents, associating them directly with Vonnegut’s own life.

Vonnegut's father also enters the novel, yet his doppelganger is even odder: Trout possesses several of his father's physical attributes. First, it is his clothing: "It was a lot like a tuxedo I'd seen my father put on when he was an old, old man" (*Breakfast of Champions* 34). Though Trout consistently appears as Vonnegut's alter ego, an individual whose career, disposition, and repeated occurrence emphasize this role, he also possesses a fatherly aesthetic. Despite Trout's science fiction mirroring Vonnegut's own literature, his elderly representation presents another status: a fatherly figure for Vonnegut. Earlier in the novel, Vonnegut praises Trout for his expansive literary works; several previous narrators praise Trout's works; and Vonnegut repeatedly describes Trout's methodology as venerable, his desire for anonymity combined with his accurate story-telling abilities. Though Trout's works may appear in seedy publications, their critical content presents Vonnegut's societal frustrations, and furthermore this novel contains several stories expanded: Vonnegut is promoting his mouthpiece's works.

The second comparison illustrates Trout's fatherly figure: "Kilgore Trout had my father's shins. They were a present from me. I gave him my father's feet, too, which were long and narrow and sensitive. They were azure. They were artistic feet" (*Breakfast of Champions* 229). Vonnegut expresses ownership over Trout. Throughout the novel, Vonnegut interjects himself as the creator, giving characters certain attributes and causing the novel's progression. Despite Trout's importance, his appearance is a secondary description: only in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965) is his physicality described. This novel, however, showcases Trout's full character: Trout prides himself upon his disheveled persona, his poverty-stricken lifestyle, and his absent identity. Furthermore, giving Trout his father's 'artistic feet' presents a more pleasing depiction, challenging

Trout's grungy nature. Several inferences can be made: Trout and Vonnegut share both physical and literary similarities or Vonnegut aspires to be Trout, viewing him as an elder. Both these perspectives show Vonnegut solidifying Trout as his alter ego, rather than merely creating another character possessing similar qualities.

Another small reference places Hoover amongst his family. Vonnegut explains, "Dwayne reserved most of his conversation for the dog. He would get down on the floor and roll around with Sparky, and he would say things like, 'You and me, Spark,' and 'How's my old buddy?' and so on" (*Breakfast of Champions* 18). However, a main difference appears later in the novel; he writes, "This book is made up, of course...As for Dwayne Hoover's dog Sparky, who couldn't wag his tail: Sparky is modeled after a dog my brother owns, who has to fight all the time, because he can't wag his tail. There really is such a dog" (*Breakfast of Champions* 221-2). Initially, Vonnegut hides this detail: he describes Sparky's issues and constant fights with other dogs without clarifying Sparky as based on something real. Restricting this insight shows the novel's progression: Vonnegut gains the courage to associate his characters with reality.

Many authors utilize real individuals to inspire their fictional characters, giving their characters comparable attributes to themselves or other people in their lives, such as family members. Vonnegut using his brother's dog or his father's peculiar feet is not an uncommon technique, yet the approach stresses Vonnegut's style and authorial identity. Though associating Hoover with Vonnegut's brother is a stretch, Sparky is Hoover's 'best' friend, a constant in the novel. His reappearance stresses not only Hoover's kindness, but also Vonnegut's association with his family. Through asserting the novel as fiction alongside this comment, Vonnegut highlights the novel's conflicted nature. He

acts as both character and author, directly entering the novel or adding details confirming the novel's reality. Also, Trout's identity is further clouded: Vonnegut gives him both his and his father's characteristics. Creating this duality illustrates Trout's importance: Vonnegut can aspire to Trout's literary productivity, posing him as a fatherly figure or portraying him as an equal. Either way, he achieves the same humanistic aims as Trout does through his science fiction stories.

Trout's character, however, appears most akin to Vonnegut himself. Throughout Vonnegut's literature, Trout plays the broken-down author. He is unknown yet his science fiction addresses many issues corrupting society: Vonnegut's stated literary goal. Davis says, "...it is Vonnegut's insistence that writing is an 'act of good citizenship or an attempt, at any rate, to be a good citizen'" (Davis 5). Though Vonnegut does not always rely upon science fiction to present his concerns, several works utilize this same style, hiding their humanistic themes amongst their fantastical stories.

Vonnegut's black humor has been praised and appears in most novels; rarely do his novels avoid this method, nor does he present sincere or harsh comments without a mocking tone. Robert Tally writes, "...Vonnegut's humor [was] necessary given the horror of the Dresden massacre and his use of the comic absurdity of life" (Tally 43). Trout also possesses this penchant for sardonic humor. Throughout the novel, Trout's interactions with most characters solidify this comparable attribute. For example, Trout has been invited to the opening of a Memorial Center for the Arts, hitchhikes to the event, and ignores his personal hygiene throughout his journey. Trout states, "I'm going out there to show them what nobody has ever sees at an arts festival before: a representative of all the thousands of artists who devoted their entire lives to a search for truth and

beauty – and didn't find doodley-squat!" (*Breakfast of Champions* 37). A serious comment is followed by a joke. Throughout the novel, Trout's interactions depict this sentiment: he makes short pithy remarks to other characters attempting sincerity. For example, Trout's conversation with a trucker highlights this motif: "'I can't tell if you're serious or not,' said the driver. 'I won't know myself until I find out whether life is serious or not,' said Trout. 'It's dangerous, I know, and it can hurt a lot. That doesn't necessarily mean it's serious, too'" (*Breakfast of Champions* 88). This comment conflates Vonnegut and Trout. Vonnegut's works repeatedly depict this issue: life's inhumanity and harshness push Vonnegut, and Trout, to wonder whether embracing sincerity is the best method.

Trout and Vonnegut also share the same opinion towards their work, further emphasizing their indivisible personas. Vonnegut writes in his preface, "What do I myself think of this particular book? I feel lousy about it, but I always feel lousy about my books. My friend Knox Burger said one time that a certain cumbersome novel '...read as though it had been written by Philboyd Studge.' That's who I think I am when I write what I am seemingly programmed to write" (*Breakfast of Champions* 4). Vonnegut expresses this perspective several times in his own essays, always shying away from expressing pride in his works, despite his popularity and readers' admiration. Vonnegut states, "So this book is a sidewalk strewn with junk, trash which I throw over my shoulder..." (*Breakfast of Champions* 5), rather than respecting his own literature.

Trout's works are created through similar methods: throughout his journey, he ponders stories based upon his perplexing surroundings. Also, Trout "made carbon copies of nothing he wrote. He mailed off manuscripts without enclosing stamped, self-

addressed envelopes for their safe return. Sometimes he didn't even include a return address" (*Breakfast of Champions* 20). Each author removes his association with his works despite wanting them to be published; Vonnegut even signs the preface 'Phillboyd Studge.' This disinterest appears on Trout's journey: "It was an amazing coincidence that the truck driver had read a book by Kilgore Trout. Trout had never met a reader before, and his response now was interesting: He did not admit that he was the father of the book" (*Breakfast of Champions* 133). Trout's travels epitomize this indifference and disassociation; when he was invited to the Arts Center, he laughed and was shocked anybody has read his work, and he attends for spite rather than pride. He greets the hotel concierge where the festival occurs with more sarcasm: "I have come to Midland City to have myself acknowledged, before I die, as the great artist I believe myself to be" (*Breakfast of Champions* 235). However, his cynicism fails. The concierge responds, "Mr. Trout... I'd know you anywhere...you had to be you'...Trout was deflated – neutralized. He dropped his arms, became child-like now. 'Nobody ever knew who I was before'" (*Breakfast of Champions* 236). His goal to astonish fails, and so does his prideful demeanor. Throughout Trout's journey, he discovers his works have been disseminated; though few characters have read them, it still surpasses his expectation. Therefore, his journey is a path of discovery: how does he comprehend his newfound fame?

Breakfast of Champions was written shortly after Vonnegut's hugely successful *Slaughterhouse-Five* and provided an opportunity for Vonnegut to analyze his new success. Trout, as Vonnegut's alter ego, embodies this achievement: Vonnegut is not an unknown author anymore; therefore, he cannot merely make jests and anonymously write

science fiction stories. Vonnegut writes, “This book is my fiftieth birthday present to myself. I feel as though I am crossing the spine of a roof – having ascended one slope. I am programmed at fifty to perform childishly” (*Breakfast of Champions* 5). Though Vonnegut does describe Trout’s response as ‘child-like,’ the more important facet is his reference to climbing. Vonnegut discovers his authorial power and effect upon the literary field; this novel, despite its hilarious premise and disjointed structure, presents a turning point in his career. He can confidently write whatever he likes: “I’m throwing out characters from my other books, too. I’m not going to put on any more puppet shows” (*Breakfast of Champions* 5). Trout, alongside Vonnegut, discovers an appreciation for his works and must embrace this new popularity.

Vonnegut transitions from using his mouthpiece to entering the novel and discussing his own perspectives. However, Trout’s importance does not disappear. Vonnegut frequently details Trout’s science fiction, and the novel’s plot remains focused upon Trout and Hoover eventually interacting. Though Vonnegut writes himself into the novel, Trout is a useful character to discuss concepts Vonnegut has not fully embraced, and furthermore Trout is fictional; therefore, Vonnegut can exercise his authorial role. Vonnegut repeatedly discusses his role as creator, including how he influences characters and causes their actions, even when he interacts directly with them. He plays with his characters, distracts them from his presence, and enjoys talking to them. For example, he describes a scene where he jokes with his waitress, “The waitress brought me another drink... ‘I can tell fortunes,’ I said. ‘You want your fortune told?’” (*Breakfast of Champions* 206). Through this creator role, Vonnegut further evidences his authorial persona and importance in the novel. Though he claims to not fully control his

characters' actions, this mockery provides more opportunity to delve into Vonnegut's authorial role rather than appear as another Vonnegut punch line.

The novel's structure creates a constant parallel between Vonnegut, Hoover, and Trout. Vonnegut uses it when referencing reality, placing the plot in a certain time period and frequently describing to the reader simple concepts. Vonnegut writes, "Choo-choo trains and steamboats and factories had whistles which were blown by steam when Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout and I were boys – when our fathers were boys, when our grandfathers were boys" (*Breakfast of Champions* 125). Despite this hilarious simplification, the fiction is challenged: Vonnegut utilizes the plural first-person perspective to highlight his association with his two characters.

Engaging with his characters presents another interesting situation. He explains, "I had come to the Arts Festival incognito. I was there to watch a confrontation between two human beings I had created: Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout. I was not eager to be recognized. The waitress lit the hurricane lamp on my table. I pinched out the flame with my fingers" (*Breakfast of Champions* 197). Another peculiar situation: throughout his appearances in the novel, Vonnegut avoids discovery by his characters despite including himself in many different scenes. He interacts with several different characters, can control their perception, yet continually acts as if there is a possibility he will be discovered. He adds,

I had bought a pair of sunglasses... I wore them in the darkness now... The lenses were silvered, were mirrors to anyone looking my way. Anyone wanting to know what my eyes were like was confronted with his or her own twin reflections. Where other people in the cocktail lounge had eyes, I had two holes into another universe. I had leaks. (*Breakfast of Champions* 197-8)

A clever trick: Vonnegut can hide from his characters, yet also his mirrored attire emphasizes his influence reflecting back to their character. Though Vonnegut creates the bar's environment and guides his characters towards their actions, he keeps pushing his need for anonymity. His sunglasses, ignoring their superficial purpose, highlight his absence too: anybody looking at him discovers themselves rather than Vonnegut. His individuality is sacrificed to reflect his characters.

Vonnegut also chooses to repeat an interesting metaphor: leaks. Earlier in the novel, he explains, "Trout did another thing which some people might have considered eccentric: he called mirrors *leaks*. It amused him to pretend that mirrors were holes between two universes" (*Breakfast of Champions* 19). Using this description emphasizes a multiverse concept whereby Vonnegut's reality and his fictional world intersect. This also reinforces Trout's importance: Vonnegut uses the same term as his alter ego to appropriate Trout's previous comical mirror description and focus the scene upon Vonnegut's existence inside his own fiction. The mirrored lenses emphasize this duality: Vonnegut reflects his characters' identity when they look at him, yet his own viewpoint is not hindered. Vonnegut can experience his surroundings freely without detection, thereby controlling and existing in the scene. Also, he reuses Trout's definition because it is an accurate description: Vonnegut exists in the fictional book and the real world. Through applying this term, Vonnegut highlights Trout's quirk as more than just a quip. Trout's analytical viewpoints, his comical indifference, and odd nature parallel Vonnegut's own character; therefore, applying "leaks" in this situation confirms Trout's progression from unknown science fiction writer to insightful main character.

Trout affirms this role throughout the novel despite his sarcastic remarks. Though he attempts to hide his thoughtfulness through disfiguring his attire, trudging through grime, and appearing insane, his internal quality still receives praise. Trout “knew how ridiculous he looked. He expected to be received abominably...But the sacred part of him, his awareness, remained an unwavering band of light” (*Breakfast of Champions* 231). Vonnegut utilizes this comparison throughout the novel, yet he follows this sentiment by comparing Trout to himself. He writes, “And this book is being written by a meat machine...and at the core of the writing meat machine is something sacred, which is an unwavering band of light. At the core of each person who reads this book is a band of unwavering light” (*Breakfast of Champions* 231). Initially, Trout acts as Vonnegut’s mouthpiece: his science fiction stories in earlier novels attack societal concerns, his antagonism towards the arts festival expresses Vonnegut’s own questioning perspective, and his sardonic approach to conversations with other characters mirrors Vonnegut’s style as a writer. However, Vonnegut does not need Trout to express this humanistic viewpoint. Therefore, the next line is, “My doorbell has just rung in my New York apartment. And I know what I will find when I open my front door: an unwavering band of light” (*Breakfast of Champions* 231). He does not require his mouthpiece, exists within the fictional universe, and proclaims his own perspective.

The novel’s climax occurs when Hoover, Trout, and Vonnegut share the same scene. However, their direct interaction – Hoover pestering Trout with questions about the world – does not fully address the novel’s purpose. Vonnegut utilizes this singular scene to revisit his conflicted authorial role alongside his two main characters. He says, “Dwayne and Trout and I could have been included in an equilateral triangle about

twelve feet on a side. As three unwavering bands of light, we were simple and separate and beautiful” (*Breakfast of Champions* 242). He references his earlier humanistic discussion, and then describes his equality with Hoover and Trout. Both characters represent two aspects of Vonnegut, yet until this novel Vonnegut never openly discusses his concerns towards his own mental health. However, frequently throughout this novel, Vonnegut’s comments suggest a similar mentality to Hoover. He writes, ““This is a very bad book you’re writing,’ I said to myself behind my leaks. ‘I know,’ I said. You’re afraid you’ll kill yourself the way your mother did,’ I said. ‘I know,’ I said” (*Breakfast of Champions* 198). Therefore, this novel affords Vonnegut two characters to exhibit his own persona. Though Trout is undeniably the main alter ego, Vonnegut can write about his mental insecurities through Hoover. He can address his concerns about his new literary acclaim and combat his mental instability. Shortly after discussing this struggle, he writes, “I am better now. Word of honor: I am better now” (*Breakfast of Champions* 199). Writing this novel was cathartic: Vonnegut gained authorial confidence after the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, as depicted through Trout’s invitation to the Arts Festival. And his mental health victory leads him to create Hoover. Therefore, throughout this novel he can proudly enter the fiction alongside his characters, rather than solely remain as an invisible puppeteer.

Vonnegut compares himself to Trout and Hoover frequently, yet rarely does he describe his creator role. His authorial strength grows throughout the novel, as expressed by intermittent comments emphasizing this role. He writes,

As machines, we were flabby bags of ancient plumbing and wiring, of rusty hinges and feeble springs. And our interrelationships were Byzantine. After all, I had created both Dwayne and Trout, and now Trout was about to drive Dwayne

into full-blown insanity, and Dwayne would soon bite off the tip of Trout's finger.
(*Breakfast of Champions* 243)

This transition from aligning his main characters with himself highlights his dual persona. Vonnegut discovers his authorial identity through his fiction. Through his first several novels, he maintains his distance, his criticisms represented solely through his narrator or expressed through the novel's theme. However, using first-person pronouns in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Breakfast of Champions* highlights his growth: he can confidently assert his own identity. This quotation represents his initial unimportance, akin to his aged fictional characters. However, his authorial assertion follows this comparison: he created Hoover and Trout, controls how the novel will progress, and therefore foreshadows the novel's conclusion.

These creator jests appear infrequently in the novel's beginning, yet Vonnegut proudly includes these statements alongside his entrance into the novel. He says, "I was on a par with the Creator of the Universe there in the dark in the cocktail lounge" (*Breakfast of Champions* 205). The cocktail lounge is the catalyst for the novel's conclusion: Hoover and Trout first meet there, and Vonnegut directly engages with his characters while still asserting some control. However, Vonnegut also appreciates his anonymity. He sits in the dark, wearing his mirrored sunglasses. He maintains this hidden role during his first discussion with the cocktail waitress. He writes, "'Can you see anything in the dark, with your sunglasses on' she asked me. 'The big show is inside my head'" (*Breakfast of Champions* 206). His playfulness, however, creeps out the waitress: "The bartender took several anxious looks in my direction. All he could see were the leaks over my eyes. I did not worry about his asking me to leave the establishment. I had created him, after all" (*Breakfast of Champions* 207). Vonnegut toys with his characters,

then acknowledges his power. Vonnegut's quirky nature is epitomized through this exchange: he wants to engage with his characters directly, yet limits their awareness. He continues, "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...It was more as though I was connected to them by stale rubberbands" (*Breakfast of Champions* 207). Despite this predicament, Vonnegut resorts to humor. His mockery shields him from addressing this arrangement: how can his characters function without him? Acting as a character and creator affords him a happy medium: he can choose to reveal certain attributes, such as his prior mental instability and his biting opinions towards society. However, he can also maintain the novel's fictional purpose through developing his characters, creating peculiar interactions, and eventually causing a climactic shift in the plot: Hoover going insane.

Vonnegut prevents all characters from discovering his identity except Trout. After Hoover goes insane and starts to physically accost several individuals, including Trout and Vonnegut, the novel ends. However, the epilogue depicts Vonnegut engaging directly with Trout, chasing him down and confronting him about his fictional identity. Initially, Trout has some insight about Vonnegut: "Trout was the only character I ever created who had enough imagination to suspect that he might be the creation of another human being" (*Breakfast of Champions* 246). Trout's awareness separates him from the other characters; though Hoover's mental instability aligns him with Vonnegut and other characters are suspicious, Trout almost immediately realizes the truth. Vonnegut writes, "Now Trout was beginning to catch on that he was sitting very close to the person who had created him. He was embarrassed. It was hard for him to know how to respond,

particularly since his responses were going to be anything I said they were” (*Breakfast of Champions* 247). Though Vonnegut acknowledges his control over Trout, he does not prevent Trout from discovering his creator. This affords Trout a unique position: he can knowingly interact with his creator, understand his fictional environment, and confirm his suspicions about his own identity.

Trout says, “...all I can think of is that I’m a character in a book by somebody who wants to write about somebody who suffers all the time” (*Breakfast of Champions* 247). Trout is stylistically important: his awareness highlights the novel as a work of metafiction and furthermore strengthens his alter ego status. Also, Trout becoming a main character further emphasizes Vonnegut discovering his authorial status. Vonnegut writes Trout into infrequent roles throughout his earlier works, afraid his mouthpiece will interfere with the novel; however, Vonnegut can be proud of his literary achievements, and therefore, Trout gains recognition. These parallels progress throughout the novel. Trout’s journey from his basement depicts Vonnegut’s path towards his new status: after writing several novels whereby he received little admiration, *Slaughterhouse-Five* granted him enough courage to write a novel for himself. Therefore, Vonnegut can address his humanistic concerns, can write peculiar characters representing individuals he either respects or despises, and can fully utilize Trout.

Vonnegut and Trout finally talk in the novel’s concluding pages. Vonnegut writes, “I was waiting to intercept him” (*Breakfast of Champions* 292), interjecting himself into Trout’s world. Their interaction is brief: Vonnegut mostly speaks and reveals the novel’s rationale, similar to the preface’s explanation. He says, “I’m your Creator... you’re in the middle of a book right now—close to the end of it, actually” (*Breakfast of*

Champions 299). Trout expresses doubt, yet eventually succumbs to Vonnegut's assertion. Vonnegut continues,

I am approaching my fiftieth birthday, Mr. Trout...I am cleansing and renewing myself for the very different sort of years to come...I am going to set at liberty all the literary characters who have served me so loyally during my writing career. You are the only one I am telling. For the others, tonight will be a night like any other night. Arise, Mr. Trout, you are free, you are *free*. (*Breakfast of Champions* 301-2)

Vonnegut earlier emphasized his desire to avoid being a puppeteer, yet throughout the novel he consistently comments on guiding his characters towards certain actions.

However, his conclusion shows him transforming himself from his previous novelistic intentions. He talks to Trout because it is an internal dialogue: he has overcome his mental issues, he is a confident author, and therefore, he chooses to talk directly with his alter ego. An alter ego maintains an author's identity in the novel, yet can also be limited: Trout has several Vonnegutian characteristics, yet does not fully embody Vonnegut. He has some similarities to Vonnegut's father and his comments range from hilarious to absurd, depending entirely upon Vonnegut's literary decision. However, Vonnegut does not need to limit himself anymore: he frees Trout because he does not need a fictional representation of himself.

Vonnegut's next novels address many different humanistic issues because he can confidently write about them. Also, Vonnegut can include his black humor directly; his criticism appears alongside his characters' dialogue rather than needing a fictional voice. His postmodern technique expands greatly, he addresses varying societal concerns without hesitation, and he does not require Trout as a mouthpiece any longer. As the next chapter shows, this transformation is evidenced through his following novels, showcasing a strong authorial identity and solidifying his novels as Vonnegutian.

CHAPTER 3 – BATTLING AN AUTHOR’S APPARENT DEMISE

Vonnegut’s authorial identity transformed throughout his works, beginning as a detached and restricted author and then turning into an influential voice and actual fictional character. His authorship’s growth parallels his works: as his books improved, addressed more issues, and gained prominence his authorial confidence strengthened. Becoming a character also stressed his identity’s importance. Vonnegut became a character in order to draw attention to his identity rather than ignore his influential role. This upfront approach showcases his authorial influence as crucial to his novels. Though prior novels to *Breakfast of Champions* exhibited certain Vonnegutian characteristics and still aptly criticized society, his voice provided another dimension to the writing: his viewpoints were presented directly and aggressively. However, Vonnegut still maintained his guise in the novel: an author entering the text yet not fully embracing his peculiar role.

This limitation disappears in his final novel, *Timequake* (1997). The novel hops between fiction and nonfiction consistently: Vonnegut discusses his own surroundings and then depicts Trout’s fictional environment. Vonnegut describes his process when writing the first draft in the preface, saying, “And then I found myself in the winter of 1996 the creator of a novel which did not work, which had no point, which had never wanted to be written in the first place” (*Timequake* xiv). Vonnegut doubts his own work and questions its purpose; though a common practice for authors, his next step emphasizes a unique approach. He writes, “My great big fish, which stunk so, was entitled *Timequake*. Let us think of it as *Timequake One*. And let us think of this one, a stew made from its best parts mixed with thoughts and experiences during the past seven

months or so, as *Timequake Two*" (*Timequake* xiv). Throughout the novel, the two versions of *Timequake* alternate back and forth. Despite spacing between paragraphs, the chapters are mixed and Vonnegut narrates both fictional and nonfictional aspects; Trout and other fictional characters are included, yet Vonnegut controls the point of view. Also, Vonnegut only converses with Trout, not acknowledging his creator role, and thus differing from his odd conversations with minor characters in *Breakfast of Champions*.

Trout's characterization changes from *Breakfast of Champion*, too: he is still a writer, yet his anonymity is more radical. Vonnegut explains,

I said Trout had been a hobo, throwing away his stories instead of offering them to publications, since the autumn of 1975. I said that was after he received news of the death of his own only child, Leon, a deserter from the United States Marine Corps... I said Trout was fifty-nine when he hit the road, never to have a home again until he was given, when he was about to die, the Ernest Hemingway Suite at the Rhode Island writer's retreat called Xanadu. (*Timequake* 54)

Though Trout still disowns his writings, he throws them out rather than anonymously disseminates them. Also, his transient nature suggests indifference: previous novels contain praise for Trout because his works are luckily discovered and still read, despite their seedy locations. Now, however, his writings are created and thrown out; their potential critique is ignored and their influence immediately lost.

Studying Vonnegut through Trout becomes unnecessary in this novel. Vonnegut openly describes his own background, sometimes comparing his family to fictional characters, but more frequently offering analysis without fictional comparisons. Also, he details his own rote actions, such as writing the novel or running errands alongside describing Trout's adventures: no breaks exist between the fiction and reality, emphasizing this novel's hodgepodge structure. Therefore, the novel is not plot-driven but progresses according to Vonnegut's whims. This method makes *Timequake* another

opportunity to delve into Vonnegut's authorial identity, and thus the novel serves as a means of responding to Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes' essays discussing the author's role.

Foucault explores the authorial concept this way: "...it does not seem necessary that the author function remain constant in form, complexity, and even in existence" (Foucault 14). Utilizing this perspective provides an opening analysis into Vonnegut's experiments with combining fiction and nonfiction. Foucault defines the authorial role and then discusses its purpose and development. However, he also believes it to be limiting: "I think that, as our society changes...the author function will disappear... that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint – one that will no longer be the author but will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced" (Foucault 14). Therefore, the text is stronger without the author, requiring only the reader's inference. Vonnegut's earlier works adhere to this principle, yet *Timequake* could not exist without Vonnegut: his character, whether fictional or real, fills the pages and provides content to build the novel.

Barthes' essay concludes with a contention similar to Foucault's: "...there is someone who understands each word in its duplicity, and understands further...the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him: this someone is precisely the reader" (Barthes 6). Barthes believes the author to be a limiting factor, harmful to the novel's reception. He writes, "[The author] is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted" (Barthes 6). Therefore, applying this concept to *Timequake* offers an interesting challenge: *Timequake* depends upon Vonnegut's influence and interference. Though the novel contains both fictional and

nonfictional content, his authorial role cannot be ignored nor does dissecting the novel exist without analyzing the rationale for including his own self in the novel.

Applying these two poststructuralist essays to *Timequake* presents an interesting question: how does this novel exist unless a reader comes to terms with Vonnegut's role? Many novels do not need their author; their reception is wholly based on their content, character development, and historical significance. However, Vonnegut's influence strengthens rather than limits *Timequake*'s ability to be enjoyed by readers. His references to his own society, his routines, and his familial background do not limit the work but bolster its narrative power. He successfully describes his authorial role and identity through these aspects, thereby transforming the novel from a purely fictional creation to an encompassing analysis of his literary career. Also, Trout's alter ego role becomes secondary in this work. Vonnegut writes, "Trout doesn't really exist. He has been my alter ego in several of my other novels. But most of what I have chosen to preserve from *Timequake One* has to do with his adventures and opinions" (*Timequake* xv). Trout's adventures and perspectives are infrequent; his fictional sphere is extremely limited and provides more comic relief than substance to the novel. Therefore, the novel requires Vonnegut and his odd storytelling.

Timequake's style mixes several fictional aspects that were included in the original creation, nicknamed *Timequake One*, and Vonnegut's ramblings, observations, and personal details. Vonnegut rarely includes transitions, never separating the two contexts, and frequently, they combine to form complete thoughts. He writes, "In *Timequake One*, Kilgore Trout wrote a story about the atom bomb. Because of the timequake, he had to write it twice. The ten-year rerun following the timequake,

remember, made him and me, *and you*, and everybody do everything we'd done...a second time" (*Timequake* 8). Vonnegut utilizes several methods through this statement. He engages the reader directly, associating the timequake with the fictional displacement in the novel and suggesting it also affected reality. This parallel highlights the novel's odd development: the fiction and the reality both add to the novel. Speaking to the audience invites them to experience the novel, rather than maintain a detached role. Therefore, the timequake concept can exist as an unexpected fantastical occurrence or can apply to society's repetitive nature.

Foucault anticipates this approach to writing: "Writing unfolds like a game that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits...the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is... a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears" (Foucault 1). Vonnegut applies this concept throughout his work: Trout's adventures start randomly and end abruptly. Also, this work is erratic; sections begin discussing Vonnegut's family and then jump into describing something Trout wrote or analyzing the timequake's effect on the novel's fictional characters. Vonnegut writes, "Yes, and all the people falling down in *Timequake One*, and now in this book, are like 'FUCK ART!' spray-painted across the steel front door of the academy. They are homage to my sister Allie. They are Allie's kind of porno: people deprived of dignified postures by gravity instead of sex" (*Timequake* 117). Vonnegut analyzes his fiction through its appeal to his sister: he draws upon reality to mock his fiction – combining these two features. Therefore, this novel expands upon Foucault's concept of disappearance: the timequake

affords Vonnegut opportunity to discuss his perspectives, rather than limits the novel to a science fiction tale.

Vonnegut details his own experience caused by the timequake, further stressing its effect on reality. He says,

I myself was zapped back to this house near the tip of Long Island, New York, where I am writing now, halfway through the rerun. In 1991, as now, I was gazing at a list of all I'd published, and wondering, "How the hell did I do that?" I was feeling as I feel now, like whalers Herman Melville described, who didn't talk anymore. They had said absolutely everything they could ever say. (*Timequake* 91)

Vonnegut's character appears frequently in the novel, whether talking to Trout at the clambake or discussing his writing process. Vonnegut's timequake experience expresses his frustration with his work: writing *Timequake One* felt repetitive and automatic, not creative or exciting. Also, Vonnegut appears shocked about his prolific career, further highlighting this frustration. Barthes offers insight into Vonnegut's negative writing perspective: "...the writer can only imitate a gesture forever anterior, never original; his only power is to combine the different kinds of writing, to oppose some by others, so as never to sustain himself by just one of them..." (Barthes 4). *Timequake* evokes a similar style: it combines science fiction elements, Trout's short stories, and a few peculiar fictional characters with Vonnegut's personal reflections and background

Ridiculing *Timequake One* consistently occurs throughout the novel, yet Vonnegut also uses his mockery to discuss writing's appeal. He explains, "And when I started out as a writer, I could refer to events and personalities in the past...with a reasonable expectation that a fair number of readers would respond with some emotion, whether positive or negative, when I mentioned them" (*Timequake* 222). Another

structural method emerges: Vonnegut discusses literature's dynamic nature alongside his annoyance with *Timequake One*. He continues,

Case in point: The murder of the greatest President this country will ever have, Abraham Lincoln, by the twenty-six-year-old ham actor John Wilkes Booth. That assassination was a major event in *Timequake One*. Who is there left under the age of sixty, and not in a History department, to give a damn? (*Timequake* 222). Creating *Timequake* afforded Vonnegut a place to discuss literature while still

maintaining some fictional components from *Timequake One*. This method focuses the reader on *Timequake One*'s weak finished product, but also relates to Barthes' concept of literature. Barthes says, "...the writer no longer contains within himself passions, humors, sentiments, impressions, but that enormous dictionary, from which he derives a writing which can know no end or halt: life can only imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, a lost, infinitely remote imitation" (Barthes 5). Barthes comments on literature's reflexivity: it utilizes reality to create a foundation for the novel's context and then progresses towards its fictional goals. Vonnegut's process from *Timequake One* to *Timequake* epitomizes this style. He continues, "Elias Pembroke, a fictitious Rhode Island naval architect who was Abraham Lincoln's Assistant Secretary...was a character in *Timequake One*...was neglectful of his wife, Julia, who fell in love with a dashing young actor and rakehell named John Wilkes Booth" (*Timequake* 223). Though these characters only appear in *Timequake* through referencing their inclusion in *Timequake One*, it shows that Vonnegut's initial process imitates history, supporting Barthes' comment. However, *Timequake* also supports the second perspective, 'a tissue of signs,' whereby this novel references Vonnegut's late literary struggles, rather than maintains a completely fictional structure.

Vonnegut confronts his struggles with literature through criticizing *Timequake One*'s plot, but also through discussing literature's comparison with reality. He writes,

I always had trouble ending short stories in ways that would satisfy a general public. In real life, as during a rerun following a timequake, people don't change, don't learn anything from their mistakes, and don't apologize. In a short story they have to do at least two out of three of those things, or you might as well throw it away... (*Timequake* 161)

Throughout this novel, Vonnegut analyzes literature because *Timequake One*'s failure underscores his concern about his works' importance and strength. Early in the novel, quoted above, he laughs at his works or juxtaposes random plot portions with comments poking fun at that version's odd characters and peculiar progression. However, he also expresses frustration with the general writing act. He continues, "But after I had a character change and/or learn something and/or apologize, that left the cast standing around with their thumbs up their asses. That is no way to tell a reader the show is over" (*Timequake* 161). For Vonnegut, contemplating this process is cathartic, because he can examine his long literary career despite falling short with *Timequake One*. Also, it emphasizes this novel's running commentary: Vonnegut talks to the reader about his struggle to imitate reality.

Foucault addresses this expectation, writing, "Critics doubtless try to give this being of reason [the author] a realistic status, by discerning, in the individual, a 'deep' motive, a 'creative' power, or a 'design,' the milieu in which writing originates" (Foucault 7). Foucault could be describing Vonnegut's insecurities through this assertion: prolific authors, due to their long careers and influential works, create the expectation that their novels are more than plot- and character-driven works. Through chopping *Timequake One* into various sections to use in *Timequake* Vonnegut depicts this struggle

to publish a novel that fulfills this expectation. However, Foucault disapproves of this conception of literary production:

Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations we force texts to undergo, the connections we make, the traits we establish as pertinent, the continuities we recognize, or the exclusions we practice. (Foucault 7)

Vonnegut's novels can be described through their various characteristics, for example his sarcastic narrative voice or his combination of black humor with science fiction.

However, Foucault suggests many attributes have been coerced into texts rather than consistently utilized. Though arguing against Vonnegut's sardonic nature would be a tough feat, several works can be read for their punch lines and quirky characters.

Vonnegut writes in the prologue, "Trout doesn't really exist. He has been my alter ego in several of my other novels. But most of what I have chosen to preserve from *Timequake One* has to do with his adventures and opinions. I have salvaged a few of the thousand stories he wrote between 1931...and 2001, when he died" (*Timequake* xvi). Despite Vonnegut openly acknowledging Trout's fictional status, Trout frequently appears in settings wherein they engage directly with one another. However, dissimilar to *Breakfast of Champions*, neither Vonnegut nor Trout discusses their weird relationship. Vonnegut explains, "I stood behind him in his suite in order to tie the tie for him, just as my big brother had done for me before I myself could tie a bow tie" (*Timequake* 240). This odd situation could emphasize Vonnegut's creator role, assisting his character with his appearance and appealing to his audience, yet he does not dwell on it. Rather, Vonnegut further describes his interaction with Trout at the clambake: "Like a magician seeking a volunteer from the audience, he asked someone to stand beside him and do

what he said. I held up my hand. ‘Me, please, me,’ I said. The crowd fell quiet as I took my place to his right” (*Timequake* 241). Though Trout’s characteristics differ in this novel from previous works, he is still a crucial character.

Foucault writes, “...an author’s name...performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. In addition, it establishes a relationship among the texts” (Foucault 5). Trout is a significant Vonnegutian characteristic, traversing between fiction and reality through conversing with real individuals. Vonnegut writes, “Yes, and I myself was a character in *Timequake One*, making a cameo appearance at a clambake on the beach at the writer’s retreat Xanadu in the summer of 2001...I was there with several fictitious persons from the book, including Kilgore Trout” (*Timequake* xvii). Though the clambake is the final setting in *Timequake One*, it also highlights Trout’s importance to Vonnegut and the novel. It exists as a bridge between the fiction and nonfiction in the novel: the clambake’s characters may be real or fictional, yet most are there to listen to Trout.

Vonnegut uses the clambake to praise Trout and give the science fiction writer a real celebration. Vonnegut explains, “Also in the flesh at the clambake were five men half my age who made me want to keep on going in my sunset years because of their interest in my work. They weren’t there to see me. They wanted at long last to meet Kilgore Trout” (*Timequake* 234). He continues, “My children and grandchildren weren’t there. That was OK, perfectly understandable. It wasn’t my birthday, and I wasn’t a guest of honor. The heroes that evening were Frank Smith and Kilgore Trout” (*Timequake* 235). Trout’s importance overshadows his alter ego status; both real and fictional people

are attuned to his speech, emphasizing the clambake as his final scene. Vonnegut's authorial role does not hinder Trout nor express control: it is secondary to Trout's speech. Vonnegut, the author, is another character in the audience, downplaying his role while empowering the clambake's importance. Despite Trout's consistent alter ego persona, he escapes this limitation to complement the novel's unique combination of fiction and nonfiction.

Trout's short stories appear in many Vonnegut novels; however, their role changes throughout Vonnegut's works. Earlier novels utilize the stories to motivate and appeal to each novel's narrators. Vonnegut includes these short stories throughout *Timequake* to reference their role in *Timequake One*, yet their inclusion now serves a different purpose. Vonnegut explains, "All I do with short story ideas now is rough them out, credit them to Kilgore Trout, and put them in a novel. Here's the start of another one hacked from the carcass of *Timequake One*..." (*Timequake* 17). Throughout the novel, Vonnegut describes these stories, continuously crediting Trout as author despite this statement. Vonnegut maintains this ghostwriter position to uphold Trout's role in this novel and further associate Trout's present character with his role in previous novels. Trout may alter minutely between several novels, yet his literary prowess remains a constant: Vonnegut requires Trout to be his alter ego.

Barthes analyzes this concept, writing, "The explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his confidence" (Barthes 2). Vonnegut, through acknowledging his authorial role for the short stories, evidences pride for his works. Barthes continues, "...it

is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a preexisting impersonality...that point where language alone acts, 'performs'..." (Barthes 3). Trout acts as this medium through which Vonnegut creates these short stories. Vonnegut laments, "I still think up short stories from time to time, as though there were money in it. The habit dies hard. There used to be fleeting fame in it, too" (*Timequake* 17). Vonnegut acknowledges his desire to continuously produce short stories despite the lack of demand; therefore, Trout's ample short story collection epitomizes Vonnegut's wish that short stories created respect, rather than indifference. Barthes describes how an author only reaches an audience through his language: these short stories exist as language, reaching Vonnegut's variety of narrators, either corrupting them into insanity like Hoover in *Breakfast of Champions*, or gaining praise and admiration similar to Rosewater's zeal towards Trout in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*.

Trout, however, repeatedly throws out his short stories in *Timequake*; Vonnegut writes, "Then he went outdoors again...and he put the manuscript into the lidless wire trash receptacle, which was chained and padlocked to a fire hydrant in front of the American Academy of Arts and Letters" (*Timequake* 54). This act differentiates Trout from previous novels: usually, he would anonymously send them to random publishers. However, despite disposing of his work this way, Trout's works are repeatedly saved. Vonnegut explains, "When Trout returned to the shelter, though, the armed guard [of the American Academy of Arts and Letters] Dudley Prince unbolted the steel front door and, motivated by boredom and curiosity, retrieved the manuscript" (*Timequake* 62). Including this scene from *Timequake One* adheres to Vonnegut's earlier statement about retaining Trout's adventures. This short story affects three separate people; however,

each character responds differently. “Dudley Prince thought Trout’s ‘The Sisters B-36’ just might be a message for the Academy from God Himself” (*Timequake* 64), emphasizing Prince as a reference to previous Vonnegutian characters. Then Prince gives the story to his boss’s wife: “Monica read ‘The Sisters B-36’ quickly, with increasing impatience, and declared it ridiculous” (*Timequake* 68). Monica then gives it her husband, Zoltan Pepper, who “got no further than the name of author before he became electrified... [because he] copied a story from one his father’s collection of old science fiction magazines... [and] submitted it to his English teacher...as his own creation. It was one of last stories Kilgore Trout would ever submit to a publisher” (*Timequake* 68). Their responses depict three distinct perspectives: Prince believes it to be true, Monica assumes it is absurd, and Zoltan becomes angered despite his previous plagiarism. Their reactions evidence the short stories’ progression throughout Vonnegut’s literary career: Prince epitomizes previous Vonnegutian characters’ praise, Monica presents the rational response and Vonnegut’s own mockery, and Zoltan shows the story contains substance, to be copied and regarded as more advanced than a student’s response to an assignment.

Foucault addresses this potential disconnect between the writer and work. He writes, “It is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself” (Foucault 3). Vonnegut includes these short stories because he enjoys their content. Though he credits Trout with authorship, they are Vonnegut’s works and add uniqueness to his novels: these short stories motivate the narrator and considerably influence the plot. Also, they showcase Vonnegut at his core, analyzing social issues through a science fiction disguise. Foucault adds, “Another notion which has hindered us from taking full measure of the author’s disappearance, blurring and

concealing the moment of this effacement and subtly preserving the author's existence, is the notion of writing" (Foucault 3). Vonnegut consistently including these stories prevents totally distancing himself from the works. Though his early novels do not openly assert his authorship of these short stories, they still function as Vonnegut's writings and establish an inherent puppeteer position. Vonnegut's style does not "...situate his recent absence" (Foucault 3) because his narrators do not claim ownership over the stories, nor does Vonnegut state his role as editor in several prologues. Foucault writes,

The notion of writing, as currently employed, is concerned with neither the act of writing nor the indication – be it a symptom or a sign – of a meaning that someone might have wanted to express. We try, with great effort, to imagine the general condition of each text, the condition of both the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds. (Foucault 3)

Foucault addresses the novel's content directly: the short stories matter in the novel more than Vonnegut's rationale for these short stories. Though Vonnegut's absence does allow directly addressing the stories' purposes, their random inclusion in *Timequake* stresses their stylistic role as paramount. Trout's stories reinforce his status throughout Vonnegut's works, provide odd interjections in *Timequake's* disjointed structure, and pay homage to a dying literary medium. These concepts dispute Vonnegut's supposed absence – each time the plot digresses with a short story, Vonnegut's hand is apparent.

Barthes addresses the author's absence thoroughly, writing, "The absence of the author...is not only a historical fact or an act of writing: it utterly transforms the modern text (or – what is the same thing – the text is henceforth written and read so that in it, on every level, the author absents himself)" (Barthes 4). Through creating Trout, Vonnegut proves this comment: creating an alter ego and describing his narrative and short stories

distances Vonnegut's identity from the work. Reading through Trout's adventures in *Timequake* distracts the reader from Vonnegut's narrative voice. The fictional components frequently overshadow Vonnegut's nonfictional descriptions and involvement, thereby solidifying Trout as the novel's main focus. However, Trout frequently makes bold statements that highlight his mouthpiece status. Trout explains, "Wonder why I tell people that my name is Vincent Van Gogh...The main thing about van Gogh and me... is that he painted pictures that astonished him with their importance...I write stories that astonish me, even though nobody else thinks they're worth a damn" (*Timequake* 105). This comment clearly describes Vonnegut's perspective: his works combine sarcasm with sincerity that masks their importance. Vonnegut, through Trout, expresses awareness of his conflicted style. Therefore, despite creating works that seem to depend on their crude humor and their fantastic settings and plot developments, Vonnegut still revels in his creations, because their core is important to him.

Vonnegut purposefully references Trout as a real individual frequently in the novel, further highlighting his alter ego's conflicted role. He writes, "...to quote the old science fiction writer Kilgore Trout, 'being alive is a crock of shit'" (*Timequake* 3). Throughout the novel, these quotations appear alongside Vonnegut's witty societal criticisms or as Trout observes the absurd *Timequake* effects. These judgments, despite attributing them to Trout, mainly present Vonnegut's own opinions; however, Vonnegut maintains this disguise throughout the novel to build Trout's character and further establish his critical role. Also, these comments posit Trout as potentially real because

they address Vonnegut's reality rather than solely the fictional elements. Therefore, Trout surpasses his mouthpiece role and establishes himself as Vonnegut's contemporary.

Foucault discusses a name's signification and the assumptions that accompany certain attributions. He writes, "Obviously, one cannot turn a proper name into a pure and simple reference. It has other than indicative functions: more than an indication, a gesture, a finger pointed at someone, it is the equivalent of a description" (Foucault 4). Trout's name offers several definitions. Throughout Vonnegut's work, Trout is referenced as an unknown, possibly crazed, science fiction writer. However, this limited perspective changes. Trout's real and fictional status is blurred – his perspectives address reality, thereby emphasizing his name as more than just associated with a fictional character.

Trout's prolific literary career proves his name's power. Vonnegut explains, "Can you believe it? Kilgore Trout...not only wrote a play after he got home from our war, which was World War Two, but he copyrighted it. I have just retrieved it from the memory banks of the Library of Congress, and it is entitled *The Wrinkled Old Family Reunion*" (*Timequake* 177). Vonnegut creates two perspectives for Trout's works: they cannot be redistributed as another author's works, and their Library of Congress location stresses their importance – Trout's works sit alongside documents crucial to America's birth, including the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Also, Vonnegut and Trout were soldiers together, expressing their relationship as more than just an author and character. Foucault writes, "the proper name and the author's name are situated between the two poles of description and designation: they must have a certain link with

what they name, but one that is neither entirely in the mode of designation nor in that of description: it must be a specific link” (Foucault 4).

Trout’s role as a writer of science fiction appears throughout Vonnegut’s works: Vonnegut’s narrators discuss Trout’s merits and praise him for his critical writings. However, without these works consistently appearing in Vonnegut’s writing, Trout would exist as just another fictional character. Therefore, his works’ reappearance and his role as a protagonist in *Timequake* stress his character overcoming his limited science fiction writer persona. *Timequake* presents a more thorough Trout: Vonnegut references his adages, while Trout’s humbled role is secondary, and he lectures an entire clambake containing real and fictional people. Therefore, Trout’s name may initially designate him as Vonnegut’s alter ego, but describing his character surpasses that association. Trout’s character links Vonnegut with his fictional works, provides a transition between the fictional and real elements in *Timequake*, and cements his role as crucial to this novel’s success.

Timequake builds upon Vonnegut’s fictional and nonfictional character previously used in *Breakfast of Champions*. This strengthens the novel because Vonnegut can describe *Timequake One*’s fictional elements and analyze their importance to the current work. Reflecting on his writing shows Vonnegut engaging with his text, rather than distancing himself after it is created. Also, Vonnegut’s commentary is crucial to *Timequake*; though Trout’s role provides the novel a fictional backbone, this novel succeeds because it combines both fictional and real elements. Barthes explains, “...instead of putting his life into his novel, as we say so often, he makes his very life into a work for which his own book was in a sense the model” (Barthes 3). Barthes’ concept

stresses the novel's importance: the work contains many different elements; therefore, searching for the author's literary involvement should be secondary. This tactic invites the reader to delve into Vonnegut's authorial identity while reading the novel, rather than solely search for his common motifs and limit the novel's literary power. For example, Vonnegut writes,

I forgot what I was doing on the afternoon of February 13th, 2001, when the timequake struck. It couldn't have been much. I sure as heck wasn't writing another book. I was seventy-eight, for heaven's sakes! My daughter Lily was eighteen! Old Kilgore Trout was writing, though. Seated at his cot at the shelter, where everybody thought his name was Vincent Van Gogh... (*Timequake* 86)

Vonnegut juxtaposes Trout's writing with his own disinterest in authorship to highlight his authorial transformation in this novel: his character is not limited by its authorial role. He can act as a fictional character, experience the timequake and laugh at his seniority. These various responses show Vonnegut absent from a strictly authorial role adding to the novel's power rather than restricting its potential.

Despite Vonnegut stating he forgets what he was doing prior to the timequake, several pages later he describes it: "I, too, went from déjà vu to unlimited opportunities in a series of actions that were continuous. An outside observer might have said I exercised free will the instant it became available" (*Timequake* 112). Vonnegut remembering his actions further emphasizes Barthes' perspective: this novel's stream-of-consciousness style shows Vonnegut conversing with the reader rather than writing pure fiction. Though many prior novels contain narrators explaining their story to the reader, this novel shies away from that motif because Vonnegut is not solely recounting the past.

Frequently, he writes in the present tense, further differentiating this novel from past works. He writes, "I correct my pages with pen or pencil. I have come into

Manhattan on business. I telephone a woman who has been doing retyping for years and years now. She doesn't have a computer, either. Maybe I should can her" (*Timequake* 214). This anecdote seems to be happening currently. Potentially, Vonnegut switches to this tense to emphasize its nonfictional status; however, it also depicts Vonnegut outside his authorial role. He analyzes his motivations during writing, and then describes his actions after creating several pages. He continues, "I say I have a few more pages for her to type. She says, 'Good.' I will have to mail them to her, since she doesn't have a fax. Again: Maybe I should can her" (*Timequake* 215). This odd scene challenges the restrictive role Barthes attributes to the author. Describing his process focuses the reader on Vonnegut's whole identity, rather than limiting insight to his authorial identity.

He adds, "I am still on the third floor of our brownstone in the city, and we don't have an elevator. So down the stairs I go with my pages, *clumpity, clumpity, clumpity*" (*Timequake* 215). This imagery does not add much to the novel's odd plot, yet its inclusion shows Vonnegut presenting his reality unedited. Barthes describes a counterpoint to Vonnegut's method: "The author is never anything more than the man who writes, just as I is no more than the man who says I, language knows a 'subject' not a 'person,' and this subject, void outside of the very utterance which defines it, suffices to make language 'work,' that is, to exhaust it" (Barthes 3). Barthes contends Vonnegut's authorial role completes his identity rather than exists as a portion of his *Timequake* character. However, Vonnegut challenges this perspective because his character maneuvers between fiction and reality, engaging with Trout directly and experiencing the timequake or quirkily describing his writing process.

Vonnegut comments on his dual role several times in *Timequake* when including fictional portions from *Timequake One*. He writes, “In *Timequake One*, I had Trout discard his “The Sisters B-36” in a lidless wire trash receptacle chained to a fire hydrant in front of the American Academy of Arts and Letters...” (*Timequake* 33). This minute detail, despite acknowledging Vonnegut’s creator role, is unimportant when read as a plot development. However, Vonnegut continues, “There really is an American Academy of Arts and Letters. Its palatial headquarters are where I placed them in *Timequake One*. There really is a fire hydrant out front” (*Timequake* 33). Including real landmarks in his fiction surpasses referencing reality: it depicts a concept that Foucault addresses “...all discourses endowed with the author function possess this plurality of self” (Foucault 9). Throughout the novel, Vonnegut shows the reader his many selves: describing his control over characters; offering his perspectives on society; and explaining his *Timequake* experience. Also, he portrays his interactions with Trout directly, ignoring his creator role and acting as a brother or associate. These varied personas occur seamlessly: Vonnegut does not differentiate between these roles, but rather keeps creating new scenes or fabricating punch lines to follow his criticisms.

Foucault explains further,

In the first case, the “I” refers to an individual without an equivalent who, in a determined place and time, completed a certain task; in the second, the “I” indicates an instance and a level of demonstration which any individual could perform provided that he accepted the same system of symbols... [in] a third self; one that speaks to tell the work’s meaning, the obstacles encountered, the results obtained, and the remaining problems. (Foucault 9)

Vonnegut adheres to these various attributes. He completes *Timequake* using portions of *Timequake One*, notably Trout’s odd adventures and short stories, and adds different real-life descriptions or his pointed criticism and jokes. Second, the novel contains these

literary symbols: the plotline may be scattered, but juxtaposing real and fictional elements solidifies the structure and highlights the novel as another Vonnegutian work. Third, the reader does discover Vonnegut's identity because he explains the novel's overall purpose clearly, whether through his own voice and real surroundings or through the fictional components and Trout's various monologues. These multiple selves account for Vonnegut's duality as author and character: he can describe his control over his characters while still joining the novel's eclectic cast and listening to Trout's clambake speech. Therefore, Vonnegut's authorship is another facet rather than a restrictive force.

Trout and Vonnegut's interactions fill the novel, yet never does either character point out their unique relationship; rather, Vonnegut references Trout's works, praises Trout's monologues, and discusses his alter ego's adventures. Barthes explains this role: "The Author is supposed to feed the book – that is, he pre-exists, thinks, suffers, lives for it, he maintains his work the same relation of antecedence a father maintains with his child" (Barthes 4). Vonnegut consistently bolsters Trout's character, whether at the clambake directly or mentioning his short stories' importance. For example, Vonnegut says, "I was there [the clambake] with several fictitious persons from the book, including Kilgore Trout. I was privileged to hear the old, long-out-of-print science fiction writer describe for us, and then demonstrate, the special place of Earthlings in the cosmic scheme of things" (*Timequake* xvii). Vonnegut's authorial role affords him this control: he can personally praise Trout or have his characters compliment his alter ego. Without Trout, *Timequake* would be an assorted collection of commentary and odd depictions of Vonnegut's reality. Therefore, Vonnegut places Trout as the prominent role to maintain

the novel's fictional aspects while still including his own perspectives to complete its unique style.

Vonnegut continuously highlights their shared persona. Vonnegut says, "Trout might have said, it can be said of me as well, that he created *caricatures* rather than characters. His animus against so-called *mainstream literature*, moreover, wasn't peculiar to him" (*Timequake* 72). Vonnegut aligns himself with Trout: their science fiction writing style, their character use, and their literary rebelliousness. Therefore, Vonnegut's praise for Trout can be interpreted as solidifying his belief in his own works. Also, praising Trout builds his character: the clambake scene posits Trout as a prolific and insightful author; therefore, Vonnegut is another lucky clambake attendant rather than the novel's author. When Vonnegut explains, "... I myself was a character in *Timequake One*, making a cameo appearance at a clambake on the beach at the writer's retreat Xanadu in the summer of 2001..." (*Timequake* xvi), he stresses his fictional role because he was there in the original novel. His status is split in both novels, thereby emphasizing his authorial and fictional roles, rather than positioning him as merely the puppeteer.

Barthes discusses this new role, adjusting the expectation that an author only exists as the creator rather than growing with his work. He writes,

... the modern writer...is born simultaneously with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, he is in no way the subject of which his book is the predicate; there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is eternally written here and now. (Barthes 4)

Barthes highlights Vonnegut's goal: to develop with his works rather than limit himself to the creator. *Timequake* epitomizes this accomplishment. *Timequake One* was discarded because it did not showcase Vonnegut's transformation; however, combining both fictional and nonfictional stories allows Vonnegut to express his societal criticism and

exert his authorial identity while still seamlessly discussing Trout's peculiar persona. These are Vonnegutian elements, codified in his final novel.

AND SO IT ENDS...

Throughout Vonnegut's literary career, his novels show his style strengthening. He adds more sardonic criticisms, limits using his science fiction guise, and eventually, he renders his commentary directly rather than mediated through other characters or his alter ego. Also, his fictional role becomes meshed with his authorial role. He describes controlling his characters, motivating Trout's quirky antics, but he also writes the following passage from his own perspective, thus directly describing his own writing process: "Only at this very moment in 1996, as I am about to write the next sentence... the next sentence..." (*Timequake* 211). This becomes a common motif – Vonnegut tells the reader what he is currently doing, without hiding behind his authorial role. Therefore, Vonnegut engages and develops alongside his work rather than writing and disappearing.

Timequake's strength is its unique style. Vonnegut can praise his alter ego—"His indestructible self-respect is what I loved most about Kilgore Trout" (*Timequake* 211)—in one sentence and then follow this phrase with reality: "I also loved my war buddy Bernard V. O'Hare" (*Timequake* 211). Juxtaposing fiction with reality emphasizes his authorial role as consistent rather than absent. The reader can interpret the various fictional scenes without Vonnegut: their inference is a powerful agent for the novel's

growth and prevents an author's status from limiting the literature's potential. However, Vonnegut's status never dissipates because his odd descriptions of his own life alongside his fictional experiences in *Timequake* cement his existence. Therefore, Vonnegut's engagement with his literature is continuous and not harmful: he empowers the novel through his conversations with Trout and other fictional characters at the clambake, and his voice adds hilarity and criticism necessary for *Timequake*'s success.

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