
Existential Anomie: An Analytical Study of Kurt Vonnegut's *Hocus Pocus* (1990) & *Time Quake* (1997)

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Kurt Vonnegut's *Hocus Pocus* (1990) & *Time Quake* (1997), can be labelled as a metafictional narrative in which apocalyptic tension as well as problematic of ethnic dedoxification, become a firmament of an existential credo across which the reader is made to witness an apocalyptic dismantling of time, identity and the tribulatory meanderings, of the human self. In both works of the Kurt Vonnegut he portrays with ruthless clinical efficiency the aftermath of an ethnic apocalyptic dislocation, as a corollary to a technoscape of existential tribulation. In *Hocus Pocus* as well as in *Time Quake* the existential anomie becomes or the apocalypse of parody reflecting in typical postmodernist fashion the element of "text/image border tensions"¹ and the relationship between a dedoxified self and the thematic interplay of "Decentring, contextualizing and Historicizing"², the apocalypse in order to highlight a demonic human world in which the images of the "nightmare and the scapegoat"³ of "bondage and pain and confusion"⁴ thrive and totally dominate existential tension.

In order to study the manner in which Kurt Vonnegut attempts to explore the apocalyptic tension in order to express his disappointment, anguish as well as concern over the depredations, the perversities and the brutalities which present day man practices and thereby constructs a living-hell for himself. The methodological approach adopted in analysing the works, included in this paper, is largely sociological, focussing upon the presentation of society and culture, including the apocalyptic strain as a part of the author's novelistic vision. The concept existential anomie that becomes the part of this paper comes from term existentialism which is a form of philosophical inquiry that explores the issue of human existence. Existentialist philosophers explore questions related to the meaning, purpose, and value of human existence. Common concepts in existentialist thought include existential crisis, dread, and anxiety in the face of an absurd world. Whereby anomie is a social condition defined by an uprooting or breakdown of any moral values, standards or guidance for individuals to follow; which leads to people disrespecting of their social values,^{[5]. [6] [7]} Anomie is believed to possibly evolve from conflict of belief systems,⁸ and causes breakdown of social bonds between an individual and the community (both economic and primary socialization)⁹. An example is alienation in a person that can progress into a dysfunctional inability to integrate within normative situations of their social world such as finding a job, achieving success in relationships, etc.

The term, commonly understood to mean *normlessness*, is believed to have been popularized by French sociologist Émile Durkheim in his influential book *Suicide* (1897). Émile Durkheim suggested that Protestants exhibited a greater degree of anomie than Catholics.¹⁰

However; Durkheim first introduced the concept of anomie in his (1893) work *The Division of Labour in Society*. Durkheim never used the term *normlessness*¹¹ rather, he described *anomie* as

"derangement", and "an insatiable will."¹² Durkheim used the term "the malady of the infinite" because desire without limit can never be fulfilled; it only becomes more intense.¹³ Most sociologists associate the term with Durkheim, who used the concept to speak of the ways in which an individual's actions are matched, or integrated, with a system of social norms and practices ... anomie is a mismatch, not simply because of the absence of norms. Thus, a society with too much rigidity and little individual discretion could also produce a kind of anomie.¹⁴ Durkheim's use of *anomie* was in regards to the phenomenon of industrialization—mass-regimentation that could not adapt due to its own inertia. More specifically, its resistance to change causes disruptive cycles of collective behaviour (e.g. economics) due to the necessity of a prolonged build-up of sufficient force or momentum to overcome the inertia. Later in 1897, in his studies of suicide, Durkheim said if the individual isolates himself; it is because the ties uniting him with others are slackened or broken, because society is not sufficiently integrated at the points where he is in contact with it. These gaps between one and another individual consciousness, estranging them from each other, are authentic results of the weakening of the social fabric.¹⁵

In 1938, Robert K. Merton linked *anomie* with *deviance*, arguing that the discontinuity between culture and structure have the dysfunctional consequence of leading to deviance within society. He described 5 types of deviance in terms of the acceptance or rejection of social goals and the institutionalized means of achieving them.¹⁶ As an older variant, the (1913) **Webster's Dictionary** reports use of the word *anomie* as meaning "disregard or violation of the law."¹⁷ However, *anomie* as a social disorder is not to be confused with anarchy: proponents of anarchism claim that anarchy does not necessarily lead to anomie and that hierarchical command actually increases lawlessness. Some anarcho-primitivists argue that complex societies, particularly industrial and post-industrial societies, directly cause conditions such as anomie by depriving the individual of self-determination and a relatively small reference group to relate to, such as the band, clan or tribe, which, of-course Kurt Vonnegut defines in his every works.

Kurt Vonnegut becomes one such writer with whom the description of the American self in the form of his fictional protagonists assumes a totally revised meaning regarding "the notion of identity"¹⁸. Like most of his contemporaries, especially Thomas Pynchon, William Burroughs, Jerzy Kosinski and John Hawkes, Kurt Vonnegut essentially came to believe that, civilization made all men culprits and the American hero had to experience a cyclic pattern of "death and rebirth": the human self as a kind of an antidote to the encroachment of a perverted, debased and diseased society upon the individual self. Almost in every novel Vonnegut wrote, he went on to illustrate in a chronic fashion the struggle of the fictional hero in search of an identity, some kind of an affirmation and most important of all, the meaning and purpose of life. Almost all the novelistic heroes of Kurt Vonnegut nourish an obsessive concern about determining and finding out the nature of human existence in a seemingly absurd, meaningless, ironic and mechanical Universe. At present, Vonnegut has already attained a position of eminence and excellence among American writers of contemporary times. It has been often remarked that Kurt Vonnegut remains and continues to be a happy pessimist and one of America's most thoughtful and

entertaining writers. His genius for satire and humour and his ability to synthesize various scintillas from the past, the present, and even the future, make them collide at a common point of intersection, thereby producing fantastic narratives resplendent with remarkable characters, scenes and episodes.

Running into financial difficulty and exhausted his parental fortune, even mortgaging their house and other property, as a young boy Kurt Vonnegut consequently attended Shortridge High School in Indianapolis as a school boy “he edited the daily newspaper, *The Echo*.”¹⁹ After undergoing some kind of a University education and writing columns for newspapers he got himself enlisted in the American army infantry soldier, during World War II. Unfortunately the Germans captured him as prisoners of War during the famous Battle of Bulge and lodged in the German City of Dresden in an underground meat-locker, a slaughter-house. At this very time, Allied bomber fire-bombed the beautiful City of Dresden and Vonnegut along with other prisoners escaped certain death because of being lodged in the underground slaughter-house locker. When he came out of the meat-locker, Vonnegut witnessed with his own eyes the total destruction of Dresden and how this once beautiful city had turned into a lunar-landscape in a jiffy. This horrible Dresden experience virtually lacerated Vonnegut’s mind and soul and he went on wrestling with it agonizingly till he wrote one of his most famous novel *Slaughterhouse- Five* in (1969). There is hardly any novel of Vonnegut in which War does not become one of the main themes in combination with the apocalyptic use of weapons of mass destruction.

The apocalyptic strain runs like a red thread through the core of every Vonnegut novel, so much so that he gets even labelled as an apocalypticist, a fantasist of fire and ice.

It becomes quite obvious that Kurt Vonnegut’s burst of creativity has so far spanned a course of nearly 50 years and critical evaluations and interpretations of his works have spanned a kaleidoscopic course from adulation to denigration. For example, while talking about *Breakfast of Champions*, Nora Sayre says that Vonnegut is a “pessimist, a magician of misery and farce”²⁰. Such comments are simply given as a reaction to the brutally frank and harsh manner in which Vonnegut depicts the reality of contemporary human society. A majority of the critical estimates regarding Vonnegut’s works overlooks the fact that basically he is a humanist whose primary concern remains the betterment and welfare of mankind, especially in the foreseeable future. It’s because of this very reason that as a committed satirist with the future of humanity as his sole concern, that Vonnegut infuses post-catastrophic scenarios in some of his novels simply to warn man, that he is treading a path which may ultimately lead to self-annihilation. The fictional Universe that Vonnegut creates in his novels has been described as “a hostile and ridiculous one...”²¹, so much so that “the humanist in Vonnegut is often defeated by the pessimist”²². Certain critical opinions go even a step further and talk about a kind of a depression, a cynicism which is supposed to encapsulate the mind of the author himself. For example, Robert Towers estimates Vonnegut’s novelistic stance in these words:

I find it hard to resist the impression
that Vonnegut’s work is permeated by a
sense of futility and self-contempt. The
incessant fooling around, the half baked

qualities of his extraterrestrial fantasies, the dismissive attitude toward his characters and his own ideas ... suggest to me an underlying depression so pervasive that the very feat of writing is like a soft-shoe dance upon the laid of his own coffin.”²⁴

These words don't exactly convey the sonum-bonum of Vonnegut's essence and his priorities as a writer whose only mantra is to lay bare the cardinal sins contemporary man is committing against himself and his own future. Such lop-sided and extremist estimates like the one given by Towers only illustrate the grossly blatant misinterpretation of Vonnegut's novels and his very stance as a committed writer with a stereoscopic vision. Detractors of Vonnegut's works have often failed to grasp the quintessential messages in his novels in this context Jean E. Kennard remarks: “Vonnegut's fables do not have morals ... His novels gradually unmake themselves.”²⁵ The words that the novels “unmake themselves” sound far-fetched in context of the fact that the perfect role for any writer becomes, “to craft one's existence into a life of fiction, to have one's life become the writing itself, and vice-versa.”²⁶ This exactly what Vonnegut has done in his latest work *Time Quake* (1997) and all those critics who detonate their prejudiced and arbitrary views regarding Vonnegut's sensibility as a writer, do great injustice to themselves as well as to innumerable Vonnegut fans and admirers across the globe? It won't be an exaggeration to say that what Kurt Vonnegut has really kept on doing right since his first novel *Player Piano* (1952) to the latest one *Time Quake* (1997), is and continues to be to record the graph of social change and the transformation human society and cultural has undergone in the second half of the twentieth century. Than the final book a collection of essays *A Man Without a Country* (2005), that became a bestseller. Vonnegut's biographer Gregory Summer said, “a reflection of an aging man facing mortality and testimony to an embattled faith in the resilience of human awareness and agency.”²⁷

The main cause that has upset some Vonnegut critics and even some readers is the unusually frank and almost brutal manner in which the novels have continued to depict the stark fact that “The madness in Vonnegut's cosmos goes beyond the clinical illness. To maintain an integral self in this chaotic world is schizophrenia writ large.”²⁸ In other words what is implied here is that the root cause of existential confusion, agony and pain in a demonic human world makes it extremely difficult for an individual to maintain the integrity and the identity of the self in a meaningful manner. Such feelings and impressions become more pronounced in the novels from *Mother Night* (1961) onwards, becoming more prominent in *Cat's Cradle* (1963) and *Slaughterhouse-five* (1969). For example, the value of Bokononism in *Cat's Cradle* lies in its power to work out a kind of a comic catharsis to the meaningless finitude of mankind when the sayings of Bokonon reflect a recognition of what is finite and what it means to suffer from the loss of the self in an anarchic and scientifically mad-driven world. With the publication of *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), the disappointment and disillusionment became more striking giving the fact that since the writing of *Slaughterhouse-five* (1969), Vonnegut certainly was,

“building on the years of self-imposed retrospective study.”²⁹ After *Breakfast of Champions*, the novels which followed like *Galapagos* (1985), *Bluebeard* (1987), and *Hocus Pocus* (1990), made it clear that Vonnegut was now accelerating and postmodernist fashion exhibiting an infallible and dexterous mastery in the use of words and figures which could only be explained in terms of self-reflexivity. What is exactly connotes is the welding of the self on two planes, the authorial and the fictional, in order to illustrate the fact that the conscious and the committed individual in Vonnegut was simply exercising its prerogatives, choices and rebellious manner. It is the nonconformist and the rebel, the *alazonic* essence in Vonnegut which Doris Lessing expresses, especially the *alazon* figures which the heroes of Vonnegut become in his novels: “The strength of Kurt Vonnegut Jr., this deliberate and self-conscious heir, derives from his refusal to succumb to ... feeling of helplessness.”³⁰ The subtlety the depth, and the incisiveness every conscience reader discerns in any Vonnegut novel, has also been critically acclaimed as no main achievement. May be its because of the fact that there is hardly any novel in which Vonnegut does not probe, examine and question the existential status, the identity and the choices and preferences of a human individual in any given society, particularly amidst Urban settings. The spread of urbanization itself constitutes a lethal weapon and one of the main instruments with which twentieth century man became the victim of dehumanization, consumerism, and above all the total erosion of humanistic values. All these traits get reflected in Vonnegut’s razor-sharp delineation of the so-called scientific, industrial and sociological progress and development. The idea of “progress” becomes an ironic symbol for absurdity and alienation in an apparently mechanical and absurd universe. Karen and Charles Wood comment upon the same kind of depth and intensity in Vonnegut’s novels, when they say, “The absurd alienated nature of the universe is dealt within each novel, always with same new depth of perception...”³¹. Positive critical acclaim of Kurt Vonnegut’s novels at times rises to great heights and perhaps justifiably as well. It has been acknowledged about the author that as a modern and postmodern American novelist he is “the most distinctive voice in recent American fictions...”³². Some critical admirers of Vonnegut have gone a step further and put him on the same high pedestal as Ernest Hemmingway, emphasizing the importance of love and human relations, “... both stress love and human relationship as meaningful answer to the human condition.”³³ More than anybody else, it is the giant among contemporary American critics, Ihab Hassan who very correctly says: “A dark comedian even more than a satirist, Vonnegut expresses his rage, guilt and compassion, his sense of being alive in a world of death, in frightening dystopias.”³⁴ Ihab Hassan’s observation becomes quite pertinent in light of what the reader witnesses in such novels as *Player Piano*, *Cat’s Cradle*, *Breakfast of Champions*, *Galapagos*, *Bluebeard*, *Hocus Pocus*, and *Time Quake*. In all these works Vonnegut hardly controls his anger and displeasure over the agony, the pain, the confusion and the misery of humans living in a hellish world which only fosters death and destruction, violence and mayhem. It’s really a miracle that how humans continue to exist in such worlds and that’s why the distilled essence of all these well known novels of the author gets labelled as comic apocalypse or the apocalypse of despair. Whatever may be the cause of resentment on part of the writer, nobody can deny the fact that in every novel Vonnegut has written, right from *Player Piano* (1952) to

Time Quake (1997), the viscous distillation of chaos, anarchy, and nonsense, thanks to the madness and the irrationality which twentieth century man heaps upon himself and the world he lives in. The crystalline and transparent genius of Kurt Vonnegut has even prompted his admirers to compare him with one of the greatest comics and witty satirists in American fiction, Mark Twain. In this context Christopher Lehmann-Haupt says: "...the clarity and simplicity of phrase, the perfect sense of timing, the funny incongruity and shrewd sense of idiom."³⁵ The "funny incongruity and shrewd sense of idiom", can in fact be seen in almost every work of Vonnegut especially in some of the later works like *Breakfast of Champion*, *Galapagos*, *Bluebeard*, and *Hocus Pocus*. As a master-player of language and the linguistic idiom, Vonnegut in almost every novel of his, has succeeded without fail to play and juggle with words, images, patterns of thought and structures of emotions. Finally, it is in the role of a concerned humanist whose main worry always remained and continues to be the welfare of mankind especially in a futuristic sense, that Kurt Vonnegut has been acknowledged as a positive and revealing writer, a humanist and a conveyer of wisdom. That is why it has been well said that the writer in Vonnegut, "desires to promote a better world in which people are kinder to one another than they are presently."³⁶ There is no doubt about the fact that, as already pointed out, the cumulative crux of the fictional worlds in the novels filters down to one single fact: the only panacea which can retrieve man from the brink of disaster is the practice of love, compassion, brotherhood, and unity, among humans in the world of mankind at present. For a prolific and committed writer like Kurt Vonnegut, this is the only cardinal message which sounds loud and clear and rings like an alarm-bell across the pages of his works.

In view of all the critical studies done on the work of Kurt Vonnegut as a novelist, a brief survey of which has been given in the preceding pages, the present study seeks to examine two well known primary works of the author: *Hocus Pocus* (1990) and *Time Quake* (1997).

The typical social in Kurt Vonnegut's character is depicted through his work *Hocus Pocus* where he in his very opening lines declares his conduct:

‘While there is a lower
Class I am in it. While there
Is a criminal element I am
of it. While there is a soul
in prison I am not free.

Hocus Pocus (1990), is one of the latest Postmodernist works of Kurt Vonnegut, who now has attained the status of one of the best living American writers. *Hocus Pocus*, as the very title suggests is pure Vonnegut stuff and the entire novel bears the stamp of the author's peculiar and innovatory technique of narrative, plot construction and characterization. The novel got published in 1990 and the fictional present of the book is the year 2001 thereby making the setting conformed to the near future. According to *New York Times Book Review*, :

“*Hocus Pocus* is the most topical, realistic

Vonnegut novel to date, and shows the
struggle of an artist a little impatient with
allegory and more than a little impatient with
his own country.”

The central protagonist of *Hocus Pocus* is Eugene Debs Hartke and according to Vonnegut himself who wrote EDITOR’S NOTE:

The author of this book did not have
access to writing paper of uniform size and
quality. He wrote in a library housing some
eight hundred thousand volumes of interest
to no one else. Most had never been read
and probably never would be read, so there
was nothing to stop him from tearing out
their blank endpapers for stationery. This he
did not do. Why he did not do this is not
known. Whatever the reason, he wrote this
book in pencil on everything from brown
wrapping paper to the backs of business
cards. The unconventional lines separating
passages within chapter indicate where one
scrap ended and the next began. The shorter
the passage, the smaller the scrap.³⁹

Eugene Debs Hartke writes about his own life in the year 2001 and by taking recourse to frequent flashback and reviewing, Hartke manages to present to the reader a typical Postmodernist conglomerate of a narrative containing bit and interesting, and charm the mind of the reader with an unfailing power and appeal. In the beginning of the narratives Hartke says:

MY NAME IS Eugene Debs Hartke,
and I was born in 1940. I was named at
the behest of my maternal grandfather,

Benjamin Wills, who was a Socialist and
 an Atheist, and nothing but a groundkeeper
 at Butler University, in Indianapolis,
 Indiana, in honor of Eugene Debs of Terre
 Haute, Indiana. Debs was a Socialist and a
 Pacifist and a Labor Organizer who ran
 Several times for the Presidency of the
 United States of America, and got more
 Votes than has any other candidate
 Nominated by a third party in the history of
 this country.
 Debs died in 1926, when I was a
 Negative 14 years of age.
 The year is 2001 now.
 If all and gone the way a lot of
 People thought it would, Jesus Christ would
 Have been among us again, and the
 American flag would have been planted on
 Venus and Mars.
 No such luck⁴⁰

The above words make it quite clear that right from the beginning of the narrative we came across the typical Vonnegut irony and satire regarding the American nation, especially the author's refrain regarding the erosion of the American Dream and everything that would made the Americans proud of themselves and their Country.

Interestingly enough, the EDITOR'S NOTE, also conveys the information that Debs Hartke wrote *Hocus Pocus* as a book when he was in charge of a library and developed the urge to write on bits and scrapes of papers. This eccentric way of writing, created a dichotomy between Hartke's idea of what constituted a book and what scribbling words on scrap would mean. Here is what the Editor's Note says about all this:

One can speculate that the author
 fishing through trash for anything to write
 ... by their disreputable appearance,

would read them as a book. He in fact
says here and there, with increasing
confidence as he nears the end, that
what he is doing is writing a book.⁴¹

Every time Debs Hartke goes on talking about his involvement with various things related to the vicissitudes of human existence especially war, it becomes quite apparent that though the persona of Hartke, Vonnegut makes his motives clear as a satirist with a typical Postmodernist stylistic ambience. The author's ironic nuances "are as complex as the emotion he wished to evoke, as varies by the forms with which he works."⁴² The role of Debs Hartke in itself constitutes a stratagem by means of which the author succeeds in conveying the panorama of "Passivity ... a widespread social attitude: the feeling that life is a drift over which one has a little control."⁴³

It is very obvious that from his early life the pattern of existence for Eugene Debs Hartke itself became a kind of living which one can look upon as a life "without ideological delusions; ... the hovering sickness of soul, the despairing contentment, the prosperous malaise."⁴⁴ Hartke Debs's continuous refrain about war, the hurt and ennui, gets chronically manifested whenever the hero talks about the Vietnam War. It was a mere quirk of fate that Debs become a soldier in the American Army to fight at the Vietnam front:

I never wanted to be a professional
soldier, although I turned out to be a good
... daily paper there in preparation for a
Career as a journalist.(H.P,2)

The entire Vietnam War, ultimately came to signify colossal waste of time, energy, resource, and human lives virtually for nothing. That's why, most of the American intellectuals, creative writers, and aestheticians, looked upon American participation in the Vietnam War as a tremendous act of folly, stupidity, and the illogicality of Military bureaucracy. Perhaps Vonnegut, at time of writing *Hocus Pocus*, did have Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* in mind.

Vonnegut's heterogeneous or rather collage technique of juxtaposing various incidences and experiences associated with the hero, make *Hocus Pocus* an impressive revelation on absurdity and comic anarchy. Debs Hartke's interpolating in bits and pieces from Vietnam War, some interesting and revelatory pieces of information about his mother-in-law's lunacy and the threat perceptive of his wife's lunacy that would transfer to his own kids although unknowingly, still, related to the erosion and instability of human psyche in a society and a culture which have nothing redeeming and only contributing to the proliferation of de-culture. Stark instance of deculture gone berserk and thereby dismantling the very fabric and the essence of human existence.

It seems that whatever Debs mentions about his married life and other related things what the reader gets is a repetitive and increasingly disturbing picture of a truth which : “Constitutes an intellectual attack upon the atomized passive and indifferent mass culture... the falsity and meretriciousness of this (contemporary) culture expressed through ironic detachment, characterized by a contemplative indifference...”⁴⁵. Debs Hartke mentions an incident connected with his marriage to Margaret and his brother-in-law- Jack’s attitude, where he recollects Margaret’s mental state at time of their marriage:

He said he had to laugh like hell
When I married his sister Margaret. He said
Margaret and I shouldn’t take offence at
that. He said he had to laugh like hell when
anybody got married, ... as loony as wanting
to bomb North Vietnam back to the Stone Age,
or bombing anyplace back to the Stone Age.(H P39)

The label of black-humorist which got attached to Kurt Vonnegut’s style of writing got justified by the types of description and scenarios, as quoted above. Yet, Vonnegut all along kept denying it and is simply doing, as illustrated in his account of his brother-in-law Jack’s attitude at time of his marriage to Margaret and his mother-in-law’s obsession with dancing. The reference to bombing North Vietnam “back to Stone Age”, are for matter bombing “any place back to the Stone Age”, become clearly reflective of an “apocalyptic conception of human life ... the sinister human world, ... inscrutable, ruthless, melancholy, and within insatiable will, ... ”⁴⁶

Erraticism, unpredictability, and eccentricity as embodies in Debs’ account of his wife, brother-in-law, and mother-in-law, instances of meaningless, idiotic and even destructive thought process of humans in a demonic society about his own grandfather and recollection of derogatory remarks about the Jews, have already becomes hallmarks of present day man’s thinking and attitude. His participation in the Vietnam War, can be termed as the irony, the idiocy, the stupidity and the madness of Military adventurism, Modern man’s grandiose obsession with a ‘heroism’ of war-fare can be discerned in these words about his role in the Vietnam War as a ‘proud’ American:

In Vietnam though, I really was the
Mastermind. ... I was a genius of lethal
hocus pocus ! ... ‘Men, I want you to
listen, and to listen good!’

And they did, they did. (H P,126)

Hocus Pocus ends as a novel typically Vonnegut style where Debs, who was born in the

year 1940 offers a brain-teaser to the reader on a challenge to calculate the year of his death, the number he would like to be engraved on his tomb stone, the kind of puzzle signifies as well as justifies the very title of the novel *Hocus Pocus* as an exercise in unmitigated irony and absurdity as in the words of Northrop Frye which seems most appropriate, "The comic hero will get his triumph whether what he has done is sensible or silly, honest or rascally."⁴⁶

Time Quake (1997), the latest work of Kurt Vonnegut as is in Atlanta Journal- Constitution says, "Part autobiography, part meditation, part satire...Vonnegut is at his best"⁴⁷, it also can be defined as a brilliant and innovative compendium, an arresting remix of some of the author's earlier works and some new personages, especially from his own family, including himself. The structural and narrative technology employed in *Time Quake* makes it a heady mix of fiction, biography and autobiography and thereby Vonnegut becomes a true practitioner of the Postmodernist essence. Metafictional self-reflexivity coupled with detotalizing-totalization⁴⁸ constitute the very epicentre of this essence and *Time Quake* as a hybrid work incorporating Vonnegut's imaginative brilliance in fusing together certain important details from some of his earlier novels, in which he succeeds in theorizing, modelling, limiting, decentring, contextualizing, and historicizing the character, occurrences incorporated in some of the earlier novels, besides making the narrative ostensible as well as relevant "by locating it in larger discursive contexts."⁴⁹ It is because of this, that *Time Quake* can also be explained as a book in which Vonnegut makes himself indispensable, a committed author who under no circumstances will accept the "dehumanizing of politics, the blunting of conscience and the glibness of the late – 20th Century Western World."⁵⁰

Time Quake is a highly provocative and challenging piece of literary production in which the reader is made to savour an interesting relationship between the author's life and his imagination. In this context, when the entire narrative in *Time Quake* is viewed, any intelligent reader can easily discern that Vonnegut's mind is simply racing on a winged existential chariot with the main weapons as humour, honesty and purpose, generosity of spirit and above all, enough courage to enjoy the art of living as well as existing. Perhaps it's because of this very reason the *Time Quake* becomes a kind of climax to Vonnegut's priorities in depicting the turbulence, the anarchy and the fragmentation of contemporary human culture and civilization.

The exercise of rewinding time like a tape recorder cassette in itself becomes an interesting concept vis-à-vis the absurdity of human actions in a dehumanized world of madness, illogicality, irrationality. That's why in the very first chapter the author seems to be at the end of his tether, totally disgusted and fed-up with the brutality and the animalism of modern man's actions, so much so that given a choice, Vonnegut even would not desire his own family members who are already dead to come back to life and relive their lives. Says the author, as a prelude to the unusual narrative matrix employed in *Time Quake*:

Call me Junior. My six grown kids
do. Three are adopted nephew, three are

my own. They call me junior behind my
back. They think I don't know that.

... Two important women in my
life, my mother and my sister, Alice, or Allie,
in Heaven now, hated life and said so. Allie
would cry out, "I give up! I give up!"...
"I have never wanted any released friend of
Mine resorted to life since I reached manhood." (TQ 1,2)

The reference to Mark Twain becomes commensurate with Vonnegut's own idea of having done enough, the realization which dawns in his mind on his seventy-four birthday. The idea that earthlings found being alive as "embarrassing or much worse", reminds the reader about the often repeated concept in Vonnegut's novels that man's existence in a demonic human world reflects nothing redeeming or positive about it. Given a chance in Heaven, no human individual would like to repeat his life in this world and like Allie, the author's only sister, would like to utter the words, "I give up! I give up!".

Short of sounding apocalyptic to the core, the expressed disgust and disillusionment about worldly life and living conveys "a particular typology of culture and imagination."⁵¹ The eccentricities and the imaginative wandering of the author appear as quite relevant when viewed and studied by humans in an apostatic and tribulatory culture and society becomes the main cause of the degeneration and downfall of mankind.

Vonnegut's plain disgust with modern man's potential to destroy his own civilization with a kind of an itinerant demonic itch craving for devastation can be found in the reference to the creator of the Hydrogen Bomb for a totalitarian state, the Soviet Union, and his paediatrician wife, becomes a perfect symbol of ironic juxtaposition, the perfidious indifference and callousness that even a top scientist can display while all the time being only concerned with how 'great' his work was proceeding, the work of dismantling and destroying human civilization and bringing apocalypse on mankind. The fact that a totalitarian nation like Soviet Union, in the fashion of George Orwell's *Big Brother* (1984) employed and used its top scientists to enhance the stockpile of destructive weapons of mass annihilation, and dispensed with them once they became "useless". In *Time Quake* incidences which brings apocalyptic strain like the Chernobyl, Ukraine disaster in the Soviet Union, a well known incident, that was caused by the leakage of a nuclear plant thereby causing immense damage to the lives of many innocent citizens thereafter Vonnegut's favourite science fiction writer, Kilgore Trout, who appears in many of his novels and acts as the alter-ego of the author himself, posed again and again threat to human civilization at the hands of destructive scientific inventions.

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