Chapter-IV

Expansion of Major Themes
in Vonnegut's Later Novels
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The portrayal of human panorama in Vonnegut’s novels suggests an escape from the trap of determinism—sociological or psychological, exhibiting an attitude which characterizes Bellow’s, Malamud’s or Updike’s projection of human predicament through a new vision. Vonnegut’s major themes such as the nature of truth, the paradoxical contrast between illusion and reality, and the nature of man, all come together in his perception of the need for the creation of a reinvented universe, a perspective from which my study is based.

In the sequel to my study of the themes of Edenic Myth and Psychic schizophrenia in Vonnegut’s early novels I wish to examine and explore how these themes add to the richness and density of meaning in Vonnegut’s later novels. Among his later novels I have confined my study to Slapstick (1976), Jailbird (1979) and Galapagos (1985). My study will reflect upon the broader significance of these two major themes.
In his eighth novel, *Slapstick*, Vonnegut claims that the book is about "desolated cities and spiritual cannibalism, and incest and loneliness and lovelessness and death, and so on" (18-19). Indeed, the novel is about these terrible things. Undoubtedly, it highlights the dominant themes of loneliness and alienation. The subtleties and nuances of feeling and emotion of the characters in the novel distinctively show the progression in his art of fiction. It may be stated that *Slapstick* heralds the emergence of a new and more optimistic attitude of the author, an attitude that is more pronounced in his next novel *Jailbird*.

It is important to note here that in the early novels from *Player Piano* to *Breakfast of Champion*, we have not seen a Vonnegut protagonist who tries to take "significant action". But in his later novel *Slapstick* and then again in *Jailbird*, Vonnegut starts exploring what man can do to alleviate evil. In fact, both the novels provide the examples of dark humor and at the same time they attempt to provide answers to the miseries of life. It is significant that *Slapstick* excludes an affirmative assurance, a tone that drives not so much from its subject matter as from its author's attitude.
These observations are quite valid and important, and I wish to focus on Vonnegut’s intelligent treatment of mythic material in *Slapstick, Jailbird* and *Galapagos*. In *Slapstick*, perhaps more than any of his other novels, the myth of Eden and fall from innocence figure very prominently, where as *Jailbird* is primarily about the recapturing of innocence as reflected in the eschatological Sermon on the Mount.

Indeed, these novels thematically concern themselves with the question of innocence in a decidedly fallen world. Throughout the opening chapters of *Slapstick* the narrator, Dr. Wilbur Daffodil Swain, repeatedly states his own conception of happiness. His conception becomes the standard against which he measures the incidents in the novel. Wilbur has spent the first fifteen years of his life in the company of his dizygotic twin sister, Eliza. Wilbur has never ceased to recall, even on the eve of his hundredth birthday, the joy they knew together. “In Eliza’s and my case,” he writes “happiness was being perpetually in each other’s company, having plenty of servants and good food, living in a peaceful, book-filled mansion on an asteroid.
covered with apple trees, and growing up as specialized halves of a single brain” (49-50).

Here I intend to show how Vonnegut uses the concept of “nation of two” or “golden age” in his novels. Vonnegut’s reworking of the Eden myth in the novel concerns a small society of happy misfits excluded from conventional social organizations. Wilbur and Eliza recall in their own way Howard and Helga Campbell from *Mother Night* and Billy Pilgrim and Mantana Wildhack from *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in so far as all of these individuals strive after a happy “nation of two” where they can enjoy peace and happiness, and where they can escape the rigid demands of sometimes hostile, sometimes indifferent society at large.

It is significant that Wilbur and Eliza experience in their youth something like the lost happy time of a Golden age. There is a condition of separateness imposed upon them at the beginning of their lives by their unhappy parents. Their parents are horrorstruck over the monstrous they have produced, “neanderthloids”, as Wilbur refers to himself and his sister. Because of their physical deformities, Wilbur
and Eliza are considered to be hopeless idiots. Their keen reasoning ability and wisdom are demonstrated by the fact that they know how fortunate they are, that they are being allowed to lead privileged lives, and that, in order to preserve that way of life, they must hide their intelligence from the world.

Here I wish to illustrate how Vonnegut allows his characters to retreat in their hide-outs to protect their identity. The moral taboo of which Blackford speaks is precisely a revelation; and they resist transgression by cultivating idiocy, refusing to speak coherently in public, drooling and rolling their eyes, eating library paste, and generally making a show of their abject dependency upon their superiors.

For their privileged parents, life has become hell since the birth of the twins, Wilbur and Eliza. However, for the twins their secluded mansion in Galen, Vermont is their “delightful asteroid covered with apple trees” (35). This secluded “mansion in Galen” is explicitly likened to “paradise” (30, 71), a mythic connection that Vonnegut presents through much of the first half of the novel.
The setting of both the Eden myth and the happy part of the twins' lives is rural—specifically a secluded place covered with fruit trees. Both stories project what amounts to a rural ideal, a pastoral vision of happiness.

Late in *Slapstick*, Wilbur continually recalls the happy retreat in Galen and tries to recapture it, by persisting in his belief in the agricultural ideal and opposing this belief to the world's materialistic ideals. The other connection is between Eden and Galen theme.

Finally I intend to show how Vonnegut's use of loss of knowledge is linked to the loss of Eden in Genesis. The loss of Eden in Genesis is linked casually to a fruit tree called the tree of knowledge, of good and evil. Knowledge itself is an ambiguous symbol in the myth, for it is both an attribute of God, a share in which he has passed along to this intelligent creatures, and an cursed acquisition, the cost of which is the loss of bliss and immortality and innocence.
In *Slapstick*, Vonnegut treats the idea of the loss of bliss and innocence by using some interesting permutations of the mythic connections with knowledge, pride and the loss of innocence. It may be argued that Wilbur and Eliza, like Adam and Eve, are driven out their Eden-like retreat because they acquire the knowledge of good and evil. Their archangel, Michael is the psychologist Dr. Cordelia Swain Cordiner, who destroys the paradise of the nation of two.

Here I like to present a comparison of Adam and Eve with the central characters of the novel. Like the innocent Adam and Eve, Wilbur and Eliza in *Slapstick* possess a remarkable wealth of knowledge, including a linguistic gift. This knowledge though not directly inspired at birth, is the product of natural genius.

Moreover, there is the twin's complementary intellectual relationship. Wilbur is the specialist in the mechanics of reading and writing; Eliza specializes in juxtaposing ideas and performing great intuitive leaps. Each without the other is a mental dullard, but together they can accomplish the impossible—reading and memorizing every single book published in an Indo-European language before the
First World War, writing a detailed criticism of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, accounting for the mysterious construction of the pyramids and arches of Stonehenge by their theory on the periodic fluctuations of gravity, and devising a Utopian Scheme for uniting all Americans in small artificially defined familial groupings.

It is significant that like Adam and Eve’s Fall, Wilbur and Eliza’s transgression of the singular moral taboo, self-revelation, have many ramifications and dire consequences that affect the lives of many. Hence the good of every one depends upon their continued dependency, which turns out to be a form of altruism and which stands in marked contrast to Adam and Eve’s self-reliant free will and the pride that allows them to transgress the divine commandment.

The relationship between the mythic situation and the one Vonnegut constructs here is not entirely ironic. In reality, altruism moves Wilbur and Eliza to continue self-reliance but their pride informs their loss of paradise to some extent.
After witnessing their mother's suffering over the pitiable condition of her children and hearing her that she hates them, Wilbur and Eliza decide to solve their mother's problem—not out of love and affection, but as an intellectual response to her suffering. Having decided that they painted a big sign on a bed sheet and hung it on the wall, so it would be the first thing they saw when they woke up. It read as:

DEAR MATER AND PATER: WE CAN NEVER BE PRETTY BUT WE CAN BE AS SMART OR AS DUMB AS THE WORLD REALLY WANTS US TO BE. (70)

A new life begins for all of us today. As you can see and hear, Wilbur and I are no longer idiots. A miracle has taken place over-night. Our parents' dreams have come true. We are healed. (72)

With your cooperation ... we will make this mansion famous for intelligence as it has been infamous for idiocy in days as gone by. Let the fences come down. (74)
It may be observed that through these disappointing assertions Vonnegut creates for us a dual vision of his characters: in this case, a comic vision and simultaneously a tragic one. As in Genesis, knowledge is seen as a liability in Slapstick; and Wilbur and Eliza’s boastful claim that their mansion will become famous for intelligence turns out be as false as Adam and Eve’s misguided belief that knowledge of good and evil would make them gods. In fact, ignorance, or at least the appearance of it, is one of the ideals in the novel. This paradox mirrors comically the same relationship of ignorance and happiness found in Genesis.

On a deeper and more personal level, Slapstick is very different from its predecessors. It is not really concerned with forging any sort of cogent Utopia, serious fictional projections which encourage readers to experience vicariously a culture that represents a complex alternative to their own culture.

Slapstick represents a new and more optimistic direction in Vonnegut’s fiction after the bleak visions of Slaughterhouse-Five.
Most of the chapters highlight the suggestion of ‘Fall’, which is hardly an optimistic subject.

I have emphasized the theme of loss linked to the conventional myth of loss, which has been my focus throughout this study. In this respect, *Slapstick* looks forward to its fictional successors in two ways: as noted earlier, it resembles *Jailbird*, which is also concerned with the possibility of taking action to improve the lot of humanity, however futile that action may appear to be.

In *Jailbird*, the mythic vision is not altogether different from those of its predecessors in so far as it is a novel about “pursuing innocence”, albeit a type of innocence that differs from the pristine moral state described in *Genesis*. But first, I like to consider here a reference to Adam and Eve in *Jailbird*, and it is the most significant reference. It occurs when the narrator, Walter Starbuck, describes an incident that happened while he was a student at Harvard, where he was involved with various communist causes. One day in 1935, the union organizer Kenneth Whistler with his friend and political soul
mate, Mary Kathleen O'Looney, is fired up “with the prospect of hearing and perhaps even touching a genuine saint” (202).

So fired up were they, in fact, that they decide to cement their other associations by making love for the first time. In that intimate act, Walter admits later in life, politics and love and even religion were not intellectually compartmentalized, as they usually are in one’s mind, but emotionally intermingled, as they might be in the minds of the “committed” young.

In recounting the incident years later, Walter asks rhetorically, “How better to present ourselves to [Whistler] or to any holy person, I suppose, than as Adam and Eve—smelling strongly of apple juice?” (203-204)

In Jailbird the theme of loss of innocence is blended with allusion and fantasy. This allusion is meant to suggest that both Walter and Mary Kathleen’s youthful innocence is equated with the native innocence of Adam and Eve, and their guilt, the strong smell of apple juice recalling the moments immediately following Adam and
Eve's fatal transgression. According to exegetical tradition, the mythic pair is said to have made lustful love for the first time. Presumably, they too smell strongly of apple juice.

Following this scene the divine judgement and expulsion comes from Eden into a hostile world of physical and intellectual pain, of laborious toil and existential despair, of slavery to the forces of time and nature. Likewise, Vonnegut’s Adam here undergoes judgement and expulsion from his paradise, Harvard University. His sin is his involvement in radical politics. The judgement and expulsion come at the hands of Walter Starbuck’s friend and benefactor, the multimillionaire Alexander Hamilton Mc Cone, who had been supporting Walter’s stay in this intellectual Eden. He had instructed him in the privilege that had been conferred upon the lad from a poor family. He had repeatedly told him things like “America could be paradise if only all high posts in government were filled by Harvard men”. (49)

Despite his being cut off so abruptly from his benefactor, Walter finds that his expulsion from the promised American paradise
is not really as bad as he had expected. After all, his tuition at Harvard is paid up until the end of that year, when he would graduate and go on to become a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and then secure a decent job in Franklin Roosevelt’s Department of Agriculture. Being a communist, a “Sinner” against prevailing Capitalist beliefs, he soon realizes his position.

There is an interesting myth—related symbol that, I think, ties together Walter’s pursuit of personal happiness and the failure of his hopes for world peace and prosperity, a symbol that is related to ideas presented in Slapstick and Mother Night.

Despite Ruth Starbuck’s pessimism, she does manage to find some happiness after her marriage to Walter. The locus of that happiness is both internal – the establishment of a “nation of two” – and external – a little bungalow in Chevy Chase, Maryland. That house appealed to Ruth for two reasons: because it had a mantelpiece, the perfect resting place for her wood carving of the praying hands by Albrecht Durer; and because it had a flowering crab apple tree that shaded the walkway to the doorstep. The Durer wood carving and the
The Edenic world of Wilbur and Eliza in *Slapstick* is characterized by the apple trees that surround their retreat. Assuming that Vonnegut uses the apple as a symbol of *Genesis* here, the question to be asked is, which aspect is he trying to evoke—Edenic innocence or the Fall? In fact, both these levels of interpretation are implicit.

If we apply the apple tree allusively to Walter and Ruth's happy home, it becomes a symbol of Edenic happiness in the sort of limited sphere that Paul Proteus or Howard Campbell or Billy Pilgrim tries to construct for him, voluntarily or otherwise.

Yet, Vonnegut’s suggestive meaning that particular tree bears crab apples—a less perfect, eye-pleasing, and appetizing fruit than other forms of the same species takes us in the other direction. That is why the fruit might be seen as a ‘fallen’ form, and as such, it serves as a reminder of the ugliness they have known in the world that lies
beyond the walkway. In these terms, Walter and Ruth become Adam and Eve after the fall, trying to find happiness in each other to guard against the encroachment of the hard world without.

Comparing these two mythic visions, I must admit that the view we get of the innocent ‘nation of two’ is fleeting and that of the grim fallen world is long.

Indeed, it is a world in which the eternal optimist is forced to become a Jailbird, suggesting not only Walter’s literal imprisonment but, more importantly, his social bondage as well. He is caught in a society that is contemptuous of his belief in reform, a society that, ignoring external definitions of justice, uses precedent as a means of asserting righteousness.

Thus, Vonnegut has placed his protagonist here squarely in the fallen world. But interestingly, he does not take him all the way backward mythically to a smaller, more controllable sphere of influence. Rather he takes Walter forward towards the new “Eden” promised by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount—an Eden not where
native righteousness prevails but which is the final and lasting reward for persistent innocence.

In reality, Vonnegut goes out of his way to draw a figurative parallel between divine rewards for innocence as promised in the Sermon on the Mount, and the economic rewards that Mary Kathleen is in a position to confer. When Walter is arrested on suspicion of having stolen some clarinet parts, she sends to him one of the most intelligent lawyers in New York, Roy M. Cohn; and she does this, by "exercising her cosmic powers as Mrs. Jack Graham" (228). Later we learn that her principal business agent and the president of RAM JAC, Arpad Leen, regard her with a special kind of loyalty:

He loved and feared his idea of Mrs. Graham and the way Emil Larkin loved and feared his idea of Jesus Christ. He was Luckier than Larkin in his worship, of course, since the invisible superior being over him called him up and wrote him letters and told him what to do.

He actually said one time, "working for Mrs. Graham has been a religious experience for me. I was a drift, no matter how much money I was making. My life had no purpose until I became president of RAMJAC and placed myself at her back and call".
All happiness is religious, I have to think sometimes
(237—238).

The point of Vonnegut's figuratively equating theology and economics in this way is to bring us back to the mythic subtext he subtly employs throughout Jailbird, that is, the Sermon on the Mount. We see here the rewards for innocence, not as Christ's promised end but the rewards realized in this life. Vonnegut's serious intent is to affirm that goodness, justice altruism and love are of paramount importance in life.

The Christian concept of judgement day does not appeal to Vonnegut, but Christian mercy and compassion do; and he uses this novel to affirm these values.

In Jailbird Vonnegut takes us forward mythically, away from the old and lost Eden and towards the new Eden promised by the new biblical law. Here he gives us, however bleak its ending may appear to be, one of the most optimistic novels in the canon—a novel that attempts at goodness, at social and economic reform, at internal
renovation and revised external priorities, and at mutual salvation which is inherently valuable. Ultimately, hopes lies in attempts such as this.

In his last novel Galapagos, lies the brilliant and deft fusion of future orientation of science fiction and myth. It is this unique fusion of narrative materials that I intend to consider here. In Galapagos, Vonnegut addresses the problems of human greed and economic rapacity, irresponsible technological development, the unholy alliance of science, politics, and the military. The story that Leon Trout tells is bidirectional moving into the distant future. He speaks of the future where smaller, reformed brains will force humanity to reform and move into the mythic past towards the innocence.

It is significant that the narrator states ‘A Second Noah’s Ark’ (5), associating his story with a mythic account about guilt, innocence and reformation, both natural and divine. Vonnegut expresses in Galapagos, the same kind of grief and remorse over the messes of humanity in our time that God does in the biblical account. The most awesome of human endowment is the brain, which is capable of all
manner of practical and conceptual inventions. The inventions from symphonies to sewers and from micro surgery to myths, Vonnegut chooses his locus of regeneration the very site where Darwin began to formulate his famous theory of the origin of species. He relies heavily upon the mythic allusion in his description of the shape of things to come.

Indeed, both of these viewpoints are represented in the names he gave to the vessel that conducts the survivors to the island, The Bahia de Darwin and, as he alternatively titles his story, the “Second Noah’s Ark”. Hence, we find this inventive scheme of the union of science and myth that is an innovation in Vonnegut’s fiction. At the scientific level, nature’s million-year task of re-creating and morally reforming humanity has a perfectly plausible outcome in Darwinian terms. It involves, in Darwin’s words, “the preservation of favourable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious”, a process he names “Natural Selection” or “the Survival of the Fittest”. The mythical level is concerned with how this state of radical “innocence” was achieved with the movement from myth to reality.
In reality, *Galapagos* is about the pursuit of *Genesis*. It is a mythic movement from the corrupt world to something like the Edenic state. In this particular account, Vonnegut allusively employs two stories from Genesis—first the story of Noah and the imperfect world he founded. The second is the story of prelapsarian Eden.

It is significant to note that the character that is associated with both Noah and Adam is Adolf Von Kleist. He is the alcoholic and inept Captain of Bahia de Darwin. Mythically, Vonnegut makes his captain a man who enjoys strong drink (208), as does the post Flood Noah (*Genesis* 9: 20-21). On their futile journey Von Kleist is asked by Mary Hepburn whether there were any islands nearby and he responds, ‘Mount Ararat’ (251), the place where Noah’s ark came to rest after the Flood (*Genesis* 8:4). The Flood itself is figured both in their aimless sailing. It symbolizes dissolution, the incursion of chaos into the ordered universe, and the return of the waters of chaos over the world before its creation (*Genesis* 1:1-2). The survivors of this devastation in the myth and in the novel provide the gene pool out of which the new humanity will be formed. For Von Kleist and his crew
their Mount Ararat is named Santa Rosalia or, as the narrator calls it “the Cradle of all humankind” (143).

Adhering further to the reverse mythic chronology, Vonnegut stops alluding to the Noah’s story once he gets characters like Santa Rosalia. Instead, all the allusions now turn toward the story of Eden. Vonnegut points out that those responsible for the formation of the “cohesive human family” (273) become the Adam and Eve of the new humanity. The role of Eve falls to the six kanka—bono girls with Von Kleist as their unwilting Adam. In symbolic term, Mary Hepburn represents the matriarchal counterpart to the patriarchal God of Genesis. Like God the Father, she represents the maternal overseer of creation on Santa Rosalia. Vonnegut aptly fuses science and theology early in the novel:

With the help of Mary Hepburn, [Adolof Von Kleist] would become a latter—day Adam, so to speak. The biology teacher from Ilium, however, since she had ceased ovulating, would not, could not, become his Eve. So she had to be more like a god instead (49).
It may be stated that Vonnegut’s choice of allusions is far from casual. Captain Von Kleist’s final act represents the last step in the reverse mythic plot. By casting away the “Apple of Knowledge”, the New Adam Captures for his colony that is symbolically akin to the Edenic life—namely, innocence through ignorance. Vonnegut chooses this place as his ‘Nature’s Eden’, because he discovers here something he has sought long in his fictional explorations—peace, innocence and permanence.

It may be concluded that in many ways Vonnegut’s own awareness of evil—technological, political, economical, and social and his cravings for goodness prompt him to project such myth-based, past-oriented, idyllic dreams in his fiction. In Galapagos, Vonnegut whishes can be described as future—oriented.

II

The principle of dynamic tension informs not only the content and structure of Vonnegut’s novels, but it also informs the existential relationship between him and his transcendent protagonists. With the invention of his schizophrenic manner, he created the technical
perspective needed to explore the distracting and consuming cloud in the post-modern society.

I intend to deal here with his schizophrenic dilemma in *Slapstick* and *Jailbird*. It is likely that his attempts to work out in fictional form the schizophrenic dilemma mentioned in these two above novels required the purge: the summoning up of deeply repressed childhood experiences of war in *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969).

In *Slapstick* and *Jailbird* the protagonist literally ascends into the family's mausoleum in a virtualized attempt to raise and face haunting parental ghosts. The ghost of immediate concern in *Slapstick* is Vonnegut's sister Alice, who had recently died among strangers in New Jersey of cancer at the age of forty-one. Her death is projected into the novel in the form of Wilbur Swain's twin sister Eliza, killed in a bizarre accident, an avalanche, that leaves the protagonist in a fit of depression and drug addiction that lasts for thirty years.
Vonnegut uses his twins, their identity and alienation to portray the enormous intimacy he obviously felt for his sister, and his subsequent grief and despair at her loss. Vonnegut uses the symbolic fusion of male and female sensibilities to portray the painful alienation of an entire society, made whole again by that concentrated brain power that inspires Wilbur and Eliza to dream up numerous improvements for their world.

The tragic alienation experienced by Wilbur and Eliza comes at the hands of parents described as saddened, worn-out father and mother who babbled of love, peace, wars, evil and desperation. Their parents are obsessively materialistic. They view intelligence as a liability in their world of power and appearances, They are so stupefied and humiliated by the ugliness of their strange neanderthaloid children, fossil-looking human beings “with massive brow—ridges, sloping foreheads, and steam—shovel jaws” (29), that they entomb them in a spooky old family mansion on an isolated mountain top in Vermont.
Visiting the twins once a year on their birthdays, proffering affection with "bitter sweet dread" (61), the parents are the true grotesques of this piece. By the age of fifteen, Wilber observes that he and his sister are more than unloved. "I am awed," he says, "yet again by the perfect lulu of a secret that was concealed from Eliza and me so long: that our parents wished we would hurry up and die...that they were all but strangled and paralyzed by the wish that their own children would die" (65).

Functioning as an intimate unity, thinking and feeling as a single, androgynous whole, Wilbur declares, "Thus did we give birth to a single genius, who died as quickly as we were parted, which was reborn the moment we got together again" (50).

Vonnegut has reflected how physical separation leads to degeneration of self. As Wilbur and Eliza are forced to separate, this separation not only destroys the harmony and wholeness of their single healthy mind; it is a separation so complete that Wilbur must be reminded over the years of his sister's existence somewhere in a
world very different from his. With the rupture of their collective soul, both brother and sister resume their former role as idiots.

The rest of Wilbur’s disaster filled story suggests that this is the bleakest, most demoralized world of novels, those Vonnegut is accused of writing. The agony of personal suffering that Wilbur undergoes has its larger social counterpart in the ominous external collapse of his society; microcosm and macrocosm are poisoned with lovelessness and death.

The death of Eliza leaves Wilbur “swooning with sorrow and loathing and guilt” (121), inducing years of self-destructive forms of withdrawal in which he hallucinates, pretends to talk to his dead sister, drugs himself with pills, and finally considers suicide thinking to join his sister in the afterlife.

To retain faith in his utopian dreams, and to fight off “Tourette’s Diseases”, he pops tiny green pills which he says accounted for his unflagging courtesy and optimism (161).
Save for Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, each of Vonnegut's earlier heroes has shown potential as a healer of self and then healer of others. But Wilbur demonstrates the greatest potential yet to recreate himself through art. At the age fifty, he says, "I found the hospitality of my mind to fantasy pleasantly increased" (145). The bridge, the faith that has eluded previous heroes, but which now produces Wilbur's equilibrium, is the discovery of art and life alike as open-ended existential structures.

Wilbur learns to creatively manipulate such structures by combining harmonious minds (237) thus answering the challenge of the universe which Wilbur hears saying to him, "I await your instructions. You can be anything you want to be. I will be anything you want me to be" (96). Wilbur's narrative itself was experienced first as a day dream, and then transformed into the story of this novel.

*Slapstick* bears out Patricia Waugh's observation that the paranoia that permeates the metafictional writing of the sixties and seventies gradually transforms to more positive forms of fantasy—
fabulatory extravanganzas and magic realism. The potentially creative paranoia of Paul Proteus gives way to renewal and celebration.

The two forms of fantasizing – Paul’s and Wilbur’s are contrasted through the impressive social vision of extended families and dynamite bouquet represented by Wilbur’s delusional visit with a Chinese of the size of his thumb. The latter is induced by the trauma of Wilbur’s separation from his sister and news of her death, by withdrawal from reality through ever-increasing dosages of tri-benzo-deportamil. “Cooked to the ears” (145), Wilbur imagines the tiny Chinese man has brought him greetings from his sister.

Indicating that this is a dangerous hallucinatory retreat from fear and guilt, Wilbur notes that “going to China” became a euphemism for committing suicide (145). Wilbur’s Chinese fantasy is suicidal because it encourages Wilbur to relinquish control of his thoughts and actions to those in higher authority. Like his mother’s idiotic image of Heaven as a lemonade paradise, I emphasize this fantasy subverts Wilbur’s quest for wholeness and autonomy. Wilbur, like Vonnegut, has learned to resolved personal and social
fragmentation by creating fantasies that encourage communal bonding rather than narcissistic withdrawal.

In the closing pages of the novel, Vonnegut embodies his optimistic faith that human beings can be anything they want to be in a final act of gender—joining, Wilbur's mating at a time when he has thrown off his addition to drugs, which eventually produces a grand daughter named "melody". Judging from the end of Slapstick, it appears that Vonnegut has survived what he called the spiritual crossroads of his career—a battle with personal despair. Indeed, with the help of his work as therapy and the inspiration of his sister-muse, he has learned to create for himself and for us that "human harmony" who's absence, as with Wilbur, may nearly have driven him crazy.

In his next novel Jailbird, the Great Depression for Walter Starbuck actually describes a lifetime of personal and public degradation. It includes childhood alienation, the trauma of war, and successive public humiliations involving his role in the Mc Carthy hearings, the political machinations of Watergate, and his relationship with a monstrous capitalistic conglomerate called RAMJAC. The
theme of madness or insanity has been persistently maintained in all his novels.

I shall depict this continuity of schizophrenic dilemma in Walter, the central protagonist in Jailbird. Walter’s Job like trials mark him one of Vonnegut’s most tormented protagonists—a man so battered and depressed he confesses, “I wasn’t sure I wanted to live anymore” (111). Tending at times to the defeatism and moral evasion of Billy Pilgrim, Walter echoes Billy’s fatalistic lament, “So it goes”, announcing repeatedly that “It’s all right” (48). Thus it strikes a deep note of pathos. Billly escapes into self imprisoning fantasies of Tralfamadore. Walter twice lands in asylum—jails really, but both have padded cells designed for maniacs.

The mood of Walter’s story is so subdued that we might indeed mistake him for another Billy Pilgrim rather than the regenerated Wilbur Swain. The fact is that how Billy and Walter differ in their approach to pain and despair constitutes the essential difference between Vonnegut’s heroes before and after spiritual transfiguration. Billy retreats permanently into a schizophrenic shell
whereas Walter bears his suffering nobly, resisting that defeatist voice which counsels him to make his mind “as blank as possible”(8).

In contrasting the gentle humanity of Sacco and Vanzetti with the murderous temper that kills them, Vonnegut distinguishes sanity from insanity as never before. Society applauds the vicious executioners, but throws the idealistic socialist and union leader, Power Hapgood, into a lunatic asylum for picketing the execution and protesting unfair labor practices. The portrayal of such perversion continues Vonnegut’s indictment of America’s crimes of injustice and violence against those who are without political power or great wealth—“crimes for money and power sakes”. (xxxvii)

The portrait of Vonnegut’s own father in the Preface to Jailbird beats a striking resemblance to the fictional fathers of Jailbird and Slapstick. The loss of material wealth leaves Vonnegut’s father in full retreat from life, with “only unfriendly things to say”. (xii)

Vonnegut’s remarks about his mother – who “surrendered and vanished” into a spiritual void, then vanished completely (xi)—
explain the intriguing non presence of Walter’s mother in his narrative. Her absence is eerie, the most immediate and deep-rooted source of Walter’s loneliness and emotional instability. One of the classic symptoms of simple schizophrenia is the “gradual withdrawal of interest and a progressive decline of responsible behavior with absence of commitment to a definite way life.

The negligence and indifference of both the parents has cast a deep impact on Vonnegut’s early childhood which gets reflected in his protagonists. This is discussed here. While wistful about his sad and broken father, Vonnegut is disgusted with a mother so generally inept she could “not cook a breakfast or sew a button” (xiii), so addicted to wealth that its loss meant she simply “declined to go on living, since she could no longer be...one of the richest women in town”. (xi).

Thus originates the abysmal air of defeat, the legacy of failure and guilt which Vonnegut says became his—now Walter’s—life’s companion. While Walter does not share Vonnegut’s experience as a combat veteran, he has been scarred by memories of war as one who lived the terrors of the trenches and gas chambers. Walter sees the
wreckage of war first-hand in 1945, arranging for the Nuremberg trials as civilian employee of the Defense Department. His wife-to-be, whom he meets in Nuremberg, had emerged from a concentration camp “an asexual stick”, trusting no one and uninterested in life. (21).

The psychological effect is as wearing as literal warfare on Walter. He pictures himself dead on a beach with a fascist bullet between his eyes (15); he sees himself a corpse in the mud on a battlefield (79); and a friend dreams of Walter with a rifle on a beach somewhere, dead in the water (156, 157).

Though he is not a literal survivor of Dresden, Walter inherits its psychic aftermath. Fire is part of his becoming a skid-row drunk and of being doused with gasoline and set a fire. In the subbasement of his executive office building, he hears sounds overhead similar to those heard by Billy Pilgrim from his “underground meat locker” (12). The fact is, Walter confesses, nothing else in life was nearly as obsessive with him as “war, war, war” (28). This repetition is the echo and recho of the horrors of war and its consequences.
Walters's post-war retreat with Ruth in their little bungalow in Chevy chase, Maryland bears a superficial resemblance to the "nation of two" formed by Howard Campbell and Helga North in *Mother Night*. Like Campbell, Walter deludes himself that the pursuit of personal salvation exempts him from involvement in political madness raging around him.

When Walter is jailed as a Watergate conspirator, for acquiescing in hiding illegal campaign contributions, and emerges five years later more despondent and self-deprecating than ever. His self-respect is so shattered he calls himself "a piece of garbage" (2). He is dead broke – one hundred and twenty – six thousand dollars in debt to lawyers for "a futile defense" (30). His wife has died of congestive heart failure, and his son no longer speaks to him, blaming his mother's death on Walter. "Woozy with disgrace" (119), "strangling on shame" (118), Walter appears close to schizophrenic. He is petrified of future. He feels neutered and disembodied. He hears alien voices speak cynically of love and he sees his fate as that of a man "in the bottom of a well" (30). "I entered a period of catatonia
again,” he says, “staring straight ahead at nothing, and every so often clapping my old hands three times” (81).

Walter sees his condition reflected in the ominous schizophrenic imagery—fragmentation, disembodiment, isolation, and death by fire or drowning of a story told by a fellow jail mate.

The final loss of self is when Walter loses his sanity when he is subjected to public humiliation on the streets of New York City when he is accosted by a pitiful and seemingly deranged shopping bag lady. He is absurdly, wrongly, arrested for theft of clarinet parts from the American Harp Company, placed in a padded cell in the basement of a police station, and left without food, water or toilet facilities. He sobs, defecates in a corner, and screams a fatalistic poem from his grammar school days “Do not care if I do die, do die, and do die! (189). It is this final blow to Walter’s self-respect that causes him to reflect; “Sacco and Vanzetti never lost their dignity—never cracked up. Walter Starbuck finally did”. (182).
It is observed that Walter learns to deal with schizophrenic suffering directly from the three women he describes as “more virtuous, braver about life, and closer to the secrets of the universe” than he could ever be.

The prominence of the creative force as female in *Slapstick* and *Jailbird* is an attempt by Vonnegut to atone for what Walter calls the publication of some of the most scurrilous books about women ever written.

Both Wilbur and Walter’s autobiographies are cast in the forms of dreams, realities reformed and humanized through the creative imagination. Walter refers to the world of his narrative as “a game our dreams remade” (230), and his story is a “dream of a jailbird” (192), “my dream” (194), in which “anything was possible” (191). As an artist of positive suggestions, as well as an artist of suffering, Walter demonstrates new creative potency through the playful, self-conscious potency through the playful, self-conscious manipulation of illusion and reality.
The story’s index mixes real and imaginary names, a clue to the symbolic value of Walter’s title as Doctor of Mixology. Walter acknowledges that most of the speeches in his story are fuzzy reconstruction, but that he himself was not at all uncomfortable with the lies. “I was pure phlogiston”, he says “an imaginary element of long ago” (95).

His last novel Galapagos is an autobiographical drama. As its title suggests, the setting of Galapagos is that of Darwin’s monumental work The Origin of Species. The narrator’s ghost, who has survived from the year 1986 to the year One Million A.D, tells of suicidal mistakes nations used to make during his lifetime. Vonnegut points out the end of life begins with the introduction of an irreversible disease in which creatures invisible to the naked eye try to eat up all the eggs in human ovaries. It suggests that nature’s directions in the year 1986 have been anything but felicitations.

Vonnegut aptly states that fleeing for their lives on a ship called Bahia de Darwin—the ‘new Noah’s Ark’ (215), the future progenitors of the human race come together. In one of the most sardonic
moments in Vonnegut’s fiction, sixty-one year old Mary Hepburn assures the future species by impregnating six native Kanka-bano women with sperm taken from the captain (265). The kanka-bono women are described as ‘apolitical’ because they are happy to have anybody for dinner. Machinery, symbolized by the twin computers Gorbuki and Mandarax, has created an age of pathological personalities with no more ability to feel or care about the future than highly accurate clocks. All aboard the Bahia de Darwin bear the scars of pathologically unloving parents. All have perverted the instinct to love and creativity to masochistic activities. All are potential schizophrenics—people who respond passionately to all sorts of things which are not really going on.

The narrator in Galapagos believes that the evolutionary process is inevitably structured and directed by the forces of natural selection which he is helpless to influence. The narrator speaks several time of the inexorable ticking of the clock work of the universe. He sees people as parts in the grand mechanistic design of the cosmos. Vonnegut has made significant references to clocks and computers in the novel. It is an apathy bred by the belief that people
are machines or machine parts in irreversible mechanistic systems of control. The narrator is a ghost, who was decapitated by a sheet of steel while working as welder inside the Bahia de Darwin.

In reality, Vonnegut’s headless, paranoid narrator has experienced a past as brutalized as that of the author’s other war-scarred, father-persecuted heroes. He is a traumatized veteran of Vietnam. He has unshakable memories of participating in a military massacre in which he personally shot an old woman. It was an episode “which made me envy mines, hand grenades and burning villages, people sneaking up on him to kill him, which at the war’s end had left him guilt-ridden, sexless, and finally hospitalized for nervous exhaustion” (293).

Vonnegut points out the protagonist’s “oedipal war”. It continues even from the grave. The father seeks revenge for his displacement by the rebellious son and Leon fantasizes another womblike paradise in his tormented search for “perfect happiness” (108). He projects his obsessive longing for the contentment and safety of his own pre-birth in the form of planetary regression into
prehistoric life forms. One fantasy is as deadly as the other, a schizophrenic, hallucinatory retreat from humanism that retards awareness, conscience, choice and creativity and that ironically exacerbates aggression.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that the protagonist's portrayal of his mother as a positive force coincides with Vonnegut’s association of the female with creativity in all his novels. The mother’s optimism informs Leon that mechanistic structures—ticks of the clock such as his father’s pessimism, lovelessness, and apathy, the stock piling of weapons of destruction, evolution, are all imaginative constructs open to revision. Leon realizes that it is we who are responsible for our creation. Leon chooses to haunt the earth for a million years to pay in full what he calls his debt to society, doing what he has to do whether anybody notices or not.