Chapter-V

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In his introduction to Between Time and Timbuktu, Vonnegut has stated: “I want to be a character in all of my works”. Vonnegut is not only a character in his novels, but also, in dramatic terms, the producer and director as well. His authorial intrusions provide the framework for the entire novel, and also punctuate the work throughout, reminding us that Vonnegut plays his dramatic role as an author and narrator.

Like his contemporaries, Bellow, Malamud and Updike, Vonnegut too starts with the victim hero in his early novels like Player Piano, The Sirens of Titan and Mother Night. His heroes become the survivors in his later novels like God Bless You, Mr. Rose Water and Slaughterhouse-Five, via the apprentice hero in Cat’s Cradle. It is significant to note that Vonnegut’s fictional career from Player Piano to Slaughterhouse-Five is characterized by an anxiety to create a hero who would be able to withstand the pressures of modern life without breaking into pieces.
It is pertinent to note that the typical Vonnegut protagonist’s are “mortal men”. His characters frequently talk and act as though they were prisoners. Cells, small rooms, fences and prisons abound in Vonnegut’s novels. These suggest the air of confinement in his novels. Most of the protagonists feel their full share of anxiety, neurosis, nostalgia and entrapment. Some, like Malachi Constant are distinguished by their resistance to adversity, injustice and meaningless, while others like Billy Pilgrim remain passive victims. Several of his protagonists, notably Eliot Rose Water and Billy Pilgrim are portrayed with explicitly Christ-like characteristics. The resemblances to Christ-figure may be traced in all of them. These resemblances in the protagonists appear when they come to love, and show compassion for their fellow men.

The characters that people his first novel Player Piano and indeed all his novels embody and reflect the ideas and values which come under close scrutiny in his works. The setting of Player Piano is the city of Ilium, New York, after the ‘Second Industrial Revolution’. In this world, machines have replaced the workers. The novel centers on the world of Paul Proteus, the protagonist of Player Piano. Paul
Proteus is the young manager of the Ilium Works. He is the ultimate company man in the grey-flannel suit. He lives with his perfect-hostess wife Anita in a suburban "utopia" where all manual chores are taken care of mechanically. It is a suburb for white-collar workers which are separated by a river from the Homestead. It is a place for the socially rejected, the self-employed, and the Reconstruction and the Reclamation Corps. Paul feels dissatisfied because machines have made humans almost obsolete. He tries desperately to reassert the value of human love and compassion in a world that lauds the ruthless- machine like, single-minded precision of his rival, Shepard. It soon becomes apparent that Paul finds it necessary to visit Thomas Edition's old laboratory in order to receive a "vote of confidence from the past...where the past admitted how humble and shoddy it had been, where one could look from the old to the new and see that mankind really had come a long way"(6).

Vonnegut aptly points out how Paul loses the feelings of reassurance when he observes the utterly inhumane fashion in which his plant's mechanical sweeper disposes of his cat. Vonnegut carefully describes the cat's antipathy for the machine. When the machine
mangled the cat and spewed it high in the air, the animal "dropped to the asphalt-dead smoking, but outside" (12). It is only by dying that the cat is able to escape the scientific community's electronically guarded compound. Paul faces the same problem as the cat. He feels unhappy living in a machine-dominated society and is compelled to leave this society. He finally decides to leave because of his job "wasn't getting anybody anywhere. Because it was getting everybody nowhere" (247).

It is significant to note the relationship between Paul and his wife Anita. By the skillful use of metaphors Vonnegut indicates that Paul and his wife Anita have already become two automations. It is the failure of love to provide a secure centre for human relationships in the modern world. "Anita had the mechanics of marriage down pat, even to the subtlest conventions. If her approach was disturbingly rational, systematic, she was thorough enough to turn out a credible counterfeit of warmth. Paul could only suspect that her feelings were shallow. (16) The key words here are mechanics, rational, and counterfeit. Paul thinks Anita to be calculating, precise and cold as a machine.
Moreover, Vonnegut provides another example of Paul’s divided loyalties. He describes the young manager’s desire to drive occasionally across the river to that part of Ilium that engineers never visited. Paul symbolically rejects the values of his own society when he removes his engineer’s coat for an old leather one. He tells an old friend Ed Finnerty, the iconoclast that a psychiatrist would label such an action as a “swat at my old man, who never went anywhere without a Homburg and a double-breasted suit” (72). This world is presented to the reader as a dystopia or a utopia. It is a rigidly structured, deterministic, and mechanical world in which heroes and messiahs have been replaced by machines, freedom and happiness by efficiency and organization.

Vonnegut profusely uses the technique of satire and nostalgia. It is a condemnation of the machine’s tyranny over man with a desire to return to a world in which man may live naturally. Paul Proteus learns that man has surrounded himself with machines because he wants them. He reaches the point where he no longer wants that part of his social self identified with management to exist. He watches it die: “He felt oddly disembodied, an insubstantial wisp, nothingness, a
man who declined to be any more” (117-118). Paul is capable of such a change since his name Proteus suggests the ability to assume different forms, and Vonnegut has rightly remarked that the myth of Proteus is of paramount importance to a post-modern writer.

The role of Vonnegut’s characters is varied and impressive. They tend to be brittle, fallible, fragile, and weak “losers” more than “winners”. They evoke both irony and pity. The characters include Ed Finnerty, the ‘unsavory’, ‘socially destructive’ and alcoholic engineer who is the book’s nominal ‘hero’. Paul shares with him the illusion of mysteries. He influences Paul to drop out of the Organization and join in the rebel “Ghost Shirt Society”, a revolutionary group that likens modern man’s situation to that of the Indians when the white men began to impose their views upon them since “Indian ways in a white man’s world were irrelevant” (250). Paul wants to believe that the “Ghost Shirt Society” is a positive force for changing an America dominated by machines. It is he who is “the piano player” who embodies the image contrary to the book’s title. It is he who improvises savagely on the piano. Other important characters include James Lasher, anthropologist and Chaplain to the “Reecks and
Wrecks", Dr. Ewing Halyard who loses his Ph.D degree, his social standing and his job because it was granted by a computer error. His next character is the Shah of Bratpur who fulfils the function of "the visitor from another planet". It is he who brings ironic perspective of a "primitive society" to bear on American culture. He sees Americans as prisoners, citizens and soldiers as slaves, democracy as communism, and whose language has no word for "the average man". Vonnegut uses the device of the outside observer common in 18th and 19th century fiction to enable us to see more clearly beneath the surface of our own society.

It is significant that in an answer to dehumanization Paul nobly declares that the 'main business of humanity is to do a good job of being human beings...not to serve as appendages to machines, institutions and systems' (273). One of the telling ironies in Player Piano is that Paul nobly declares that a completely rational, unemotional, heartless government seems to dehumanize him.

It may be concluded that in Player Piano, the destruction of the world has been followed by the reconstruction of society. In science fiction terms holocaust has been followed by dystopia and with the
inevitability of change comes nostalgia. Similarly, Vonnegut has portrayed Malachi Constant the protagonist as a victim of science in *The Sirens of Titan*, and Joseph Campbell as a victim of war in *Mother Night*.

It is significant that in *The Sirens of Titan*, Vonnegut considers the possibility that man is merely a machine whose destiny is controlled by other machines. This novel is Vonnegut’s most complex one. It functions simultaneously as a parody of “hard core” pulp science fiction. It is a description of the mythic journey of a modern-day hero. *The Sirens of Titan* revolves around Winston Niles Rumfoord and Malachi Constant. Rumfoord is a millionaire member of the Eastern establishment that is responsible for a “tenth of America’s presidents, a quarter of explorers, a third of its Eastern seaboard governors, a half of its fulltime ornithologists... (26). Vonnegut confesses that Rumfoord is a portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt and that Roosevelt is “the key figure of the book”. Rumfoord runs his spaceship into a chrono synclastic infundibulum. He and his dog are transformed into wave phenomena. The result of this collision is that both dog and master are scattered both temporally
and spatially throughout the solar system. Rumfoord concocts a plot to bring peace and harmony to Earth with the unwilling aid of a jaded play boy named Malachi Constant.

Vonnegut presents Malachi Constant as a literary figure. He is the profligate who abandons all the physical pleasures of the world and becomes a holy man searching for truth. He begins as a multimillionaire playboy who becomes jaded by too many women and too much alcohol. Malachi functions as Jonah figure in the novel. Malachi's name means "faithful messenger". He visits the Rumfoord estate to receive his message in disguise of Mr. Johan Rocoley. The name of Jonah is an appropriate choice for Constant since Rumfoord manipulates him into a spaceship named "The Whale". Rumfoord informs him that, despite any efforts to escape his fate, he would eventually mate with Mrs. Rumfoord and travel to Mars, to Mercury and finally to Titan.

It may be pointed that of all the characters in the novel, it is Rumfoord who is most intriguing. He is described by the narrator as having 'un-neurotic courage', 'style' and 'gallantry'. He keeps
Malachi on Mercury for three years while taunting him with messages from the harmoniums. He takes away the “freedom” and memory of his Martian army by implanting antennas in their skulls. He creates the suicide army which is destroyed by men on earth, filling them with “shame, horror, and repentance. He also creates the Church of God, the utterly indifferent, which obliterates the idea of luck being “the land of God”.

It may be stated that in the world of Vonnegut’s fiction, even Shamans and gurus are suspect. He satirizes organized religion in the form of Reverend Bobby Denton and the Love Crusaders. They commit the unpardonable crime of emphasizing man’s flaws and weaknesses rather than his goodness and strengths. Vonnegut refers to people as whores for money, alcoholics, cynics and who dream of greener pastures without being willing to work for them.

Indeed, in many ways the characters in The Sirens of Titan have their parallels with the characters in Player Piano. The central character (Paul and Malachi) simple-mindedly struggle to make sense of their world. They become more aware and more human, though
still manipulated and used by the observer from “Outer Space”. The observer from “Outer Space” sees the action more clearly and honestly than those who are involved in it (Salo and the Shah). There is the perceptive participant who tries to create a new religion to solve man’s problems (Rumfoord and Lasher) and the plastic-hostess female figure who at brief moments show any humanity (Beatrice and Anita).

Mother Night is the first novel in which Vonnegut uses the first-person narration. The novel is written in the form of the confessions of Howard W. Campbell, Jr. The protagonist Campbell is a greater victim of war than Paul Proteus and Malachi Constant because he is caught into a more intriguing situation than his two predecessors. This victimization does not come as a result of any personal dissatisfaction as in the case of Paul Proteus, nor does it come as a consequence of any romantic attraction for the unattainable Sirens on a far off planet as in the case of Malachi Constant. Campbell’s victimization is caused by the invasion of an overwhelming phenomenon in his private romantic world.
It is significant to note that Campbell is not only the narrator of *Mother Night*, but also a playwright. He is an artist who uses his imagination to construct a more pleasant world. Campbell is the first of a series of Vonnegut characters who ponder the role of the artist in the modern world. He is an artist affected by the war, the impending danger of the war insecurity. He tries to avoid it by creating an imaginary world around him. Campbell’s confessions of his sins against his own conscience and against humanity as recorded by him constitute the subject matter of the novel.

In reality, the story is that of “The confessions of Howard W. Campbell Jr.” He is in a prison in Israel. He is about to be hanged for war crimes. He recounts scenes from his boyhood, including moving to Germany with his father. His father worked for G.E, and spent all his time and imagination on his job. There Campbell became a playwright, married to a beautiful German actress, and eventually was recruited as an American intelligence agent. He was asked by Major Frank Wirtanen to become publicly pro-Nazi, and allow his virulently anti-Semitic and anti-American propaganda speeches to be vehicles for coded messages to the Allies in the form of coughs, pauses, and
burps. Wirtanen chooses Campbell by appealing to his romantic nature. He tells him he is needed because he admires “pure hearts and heroes”, loves good and hates evil, and believes in “romance”. Thus Campbell becomes a schizophrenic, a Nazi and an American spy. The complexity and richness of his character is amazingly original.

It may also be stated that World War II was doubly traumatic for Vonnegut. He was not only captured in the Battle of the Bulge, he was also forced to listen to the fire bombing of Dresden. He was also disturbed while fighting against many of his relatives and his parent’s friends.

Incidentally, late in the war, with Germany falling to the Allies, Campbell surrenders to the American soldier Bernard B. O’Hare, a pathological hater who is the character nearest to being a villain in the novel. He is saved from being tried for war crimes by Wirtanen. He goes to America and lives a purgatorial hiding in Greenwich Village. He is eventually discovered, befriended and unmasked by a Russian spy George Kraft, and by a Jewish doctor and his mother who were prisoners at Auschwitz. His covers blown, his ‘Blue Fairy
Godmother' Wirtanen appears again telling him that Kraft and Resi are Russian spies who plan to kidnap him and take him to Moscow. Thus he helps him to escape. Campbell returns to his room, where he is confronted by and breaks the arm of O'Hare. He asks to be turned over to the Israeli agents. But external grace is irrelevant to the self-convicted. Campbell finds the prospect of freedom "nauseating".

At the conclusion of the novel, Campbell, the protagonist is no longer capable of love, even self-love. Resi Noth describes him as "so used up that he can not love any more". There is nothing left of him but curiosity and a pair of eyes (173). Campbell strips himself of everything that is human. What is left is merely a caricature of his crime. His final decision to commit suicide illustrates his curious detachment. The physical act of hanging himself cuts him adrift from the roles that gave meaning to his life. He is a patriot without a country. He is a man who lived for love, who is no longer capable of loving and a dramatist who can no longer write. The essentially tragic nature of Campbell's end suggest that man in contending with his own self and the world often finds himself reduced to the status of a victim.
In the next phase of his fictional career, Vonnegut's attitude towards man undergoes a complete change. He comes to believe that man still retains his capability to overcome the challenge of technological materialism in postwar American society. In his subsequent novels *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Slapsticks*, *Jailbird* and *Galapagos*, Vonnegut's protagonist shows a deeper awareness of the nature of modern human existence. The character adopts new attitudes or assumes new postures in order to cope with the de-humanizing conditions of the modern world. The hero recreates himself into new moulds as required by the nature of his dilemmas. He transcends his problems to avoid a direct confrontation with his crises.

It is significant that for the first time Vonnegut appears in one of his own novels. He juxtaposes and merges the fantasies of his own life in a book which seems almost to summarize and conclude the sequence of his early novels. Vonnegut's dominant presence in chapters 1 to 10 of the novel reminds its readers that *Slaughterhouse Five* is a book about writing and is now being written. Occasional references to himself in other chapters establish both the presence of
his own narrative voice and the means by which he displaces his story into fantasy. The relation between himself and his central fictional character, Billy Pilgrim is shown not to be simply autobiographical. Billy Pilgrim’s story is not Kurt Vonnegut’s, but rather the story of his imagination. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the actual address of a prisoner of war. It is a novel about a novelist who has been unable to erase the memory of his wartime experience and the Dresden fire storm. Vonnegut creates a character called Billy Pilgrim whose progress entails the wartime’s experiences which Vonnegut remembers. Vonnegut’s characterizations in *Slaughterhouse-Five* are one-dimensional. He says himself that there are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations. Most of the people in it are so sick and so much the list less playthings of enormous forces. For Vonnegut war in general and the destruction of Dresden in particular work as metaphors of the human situation in the modern world. There is a power struggle in which the participating parties flout human values openly and slaughter human beings senselessly to achieve their political ends. It induces in Vonnegut a dismal feeling of futility which he finally exercises by objectifying his traumatic war experiences in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.
The narrative of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is in the form of flashes in the mind of the protagonist moving back and forth in time and space. The narrator oscillates between the author and the protagonist. This enables the author to reflect over his intensely personal experiences with full objectivity. Billy pilgrim, the protagonist’s spiritual salvation through his cosmic vision of life constitutes the subject matter of the novel. Like Eliot Rosewater in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, Billy discovers a different way of life governed by a different set of values. Billy adopts the Tralfamadorean principles to cure his spiritual chaos. Billy travels back and forth in time and space and acquires an overview of life, a memory of the past and future, a vision that enables him to live in this world and yet transcend it at the some time”. Billy swings through the full arc of his life, passing into death, which was light, and then into life again, going backwards until he was in pre-birth, which was red light and bubbling sounds. And then he sung into life again and stopped.

It may be aptly stated that Vonnegut highlights Billy’s resource- fulness to survive the inhuman monstrosities by presenting a contrasting character, Roland Weary, who cannot transcend the harsh
actualities of his temporal existence and dies as a victim. Billy’s travel in time and space is not an ordinary play of imagination but a deep, concentration of mind whereby Billy breaks through the temporal into the timeless, and through the finite into the infinite. He suffers a nervous breakdown after his return from the war. In the veteran’s hospital, his neighboring inmate, Eliot Rosewater, introduces Billy to Kilgore Trout’s science fiction. It leads him to the discovery of Tralfamadore an imaginary planet which Billy visits in a flying saucer.

In reality, Billy’s visit to Tralfamadore gives him the cosmic view of the realities of human life on the earth. On Tralfamadore Billy learns to live in the fourth dimension. Tralfamadorians tell Billy that man has no freedom of action. He has to do exactly what he does. Therefore, he has no free will. They introduce him further to the true nature of time, and the irrelevance of death. Billy’s time-travel becomes more meaningful only after he discovers Tralfamadore and knows about the Tralfamadorian doctrine of life.
Billy experiences the cruel tyranny of the God of this Universe. He learns to hate life in this Universe. The meaning of the gruesome crucifix—"Christ died horribly"—is clear: A Father subjects his Son to a horrible death and rendered Him pitiful. Through a cruel sink or swim method Billy’s father used to teach Billy how to survive in life giving water is a grotesque rite of baptism. The only "ghostly" light points to the person responsible for his terror: "His father had taken out his pocket watch. The watch had a radium dial" (p. 77). It was traumatic to experience at first hand the depraved and insensitive cruelty of a living god who should protect, comfort, and guide.

In conclusion it may be stated that Billy Pilgrim is a professional optometrist. He spends his life on earth prescribing corrective lenses for people suffering from defects of vision. Like most of Vonnegut’s main characters he wants to communicate his new vision to correct the whole erroneous Western view of time. He explains to every one the meaninglessness of individual death. He does indeed manage to take part in a radio programme to promulgate his message.
Vonnegut’s next novel Slapstick opens with a confession that this novel is as close as he will ever come to writing an autobiography. Vonnegut reveals his disenchantment with the lack of supportive culture in America, particularly the disenfranchisement brought about by the breaking down of regionalism. Once his family lost its identity as German-American in the Indianapolis area, Vonnegut says, “We did not belong anywhere in particular any more. We were interchangeable parts in the American machine”. He admits, ‘the mind I was given daydreamed the story in this book. It is about desolated cities and spiritual cannibalism, incest, loneliness, lovelessness and death’ and so on. It depicts me and my beautiful sister as monster and so on. This is natural, since “I dreamed it on the way to a funeral” (17). Vonnegut has called it Slapstick because it is a grotesque, situational experience. It is like the Slapstick comedy based on the Bokononist “fundamental joke” that although Laurel and Hardy “did their best with every test”, and “never failed to bargain in good faith with their destinies”. They constantly made mistakes and failed because “they were not really very good at life” (as his sister Alice said about herself).
It is significant to note that at the center of *Slapstick* is Alice Vonnegut, Vonnegut’s sister who died of cancer at forty only two days after her husband had been killed in a train accident. Vonnegut confesses in his first chapter that he has always written for her. She is the secret of any artistic unity his fiction possesses. Vonnegut reveals that she had been his audience throughout his career. “She was the secret of my technique”. It is a fitting tribute to her brother and sister in *Slapstick*. They are able to form a secret harmonious world completely ignorant of the ugliness of the real world.

It may be stated that Vonnegut’s fictional autobiography professes to narrate the story of Dr. Wilbur Daffodil-II Swain, the Protagonist. In the novel he is portrayed as the President of the United States. He is hundred years old and lives in the ruins of the Empire State Building. Swain lives with his sixteen year old grand daughter, Melody Oriole-2 von Peterswald, and her lover, Isadore Raspberry-19 Cohen.

Moreover, Swain tells the story of himself and his twin sister Eliza. They were born “neanderthaloids”. They were burdened with
massive brow-ridges, sloping foreheads, and “steam-shovel jaws”. They were physical grotesque, at nine years old two meters tall and with acute intelligences when they were within ten feet of one another. Wilbur was the intellect and Eliza the intuition. They were truncated when separated, yet “born with the capacity and the determination to be utterly happy with all the roles of idiots to please their nurses. In the privacy of their secret world Wilbur taught himself French, German, Italian, Latin and Greek by the time he was seven.

In reality, Eliza could not read or write, but she possessed an uncanny intuitive ability which, when combined with Wilbur’s knowledge made them creative geniuses. They were specialized halves of a single brain. As Howard W. Campbell, Jr. and his wife Helga created a “world of two” in *Mother Night* and found the outside world irrelevant, similarly Eliza and Wilbur functioned as one individual and were completely happy until they became fifteen. Unfortunately their secret world was destroyed with their confession of their pretended idiocy. Wilbur and Eliza were separated. Wilbur went to school while his sister was confined in a hospital and was labeled mentally retarded.
Vonnegut has aptly reaffirmed their telepathic “nation of two”. They were reunited both physically and spiritually in a frenzied orgy that lasted five days. After their second forced separation, they were able to communicate again only after Eliza’s death through an electronic device. Swain not only became the pediatrician, but eventually the President of the United States whose platform was “Lonesome No More”. Vonnegut closes the novel by revealing not only the final meeting between brother and sister but their revelation that life after death is boring. Vonnegut concludes the novel with a brief description of how Melody Oriole-2 von Peterswald, Swain’s teenage grand daughter, manages to cross the wilderness in order to live with him. Significantly, the familial ideal is essentially artificial, since the consanguineous relations—the mother and father are not part of the circle. Vonnegut briefly reflects the siblings enjoying a “family”—themselves and their servants. This circle is virtually perfect.

In Slapstick, Wilbur Swain dies while recounting his trip to see the king of Michigan and his subsequent birth day party. The owner of a thousand candle sticks without a single candle, Swain is delighted
when presented with a gift of a thousand candies. Lonely and without his sister, Swain has been as incomplete as his candle sticks without candles. He dies with a sense of harmony and oneness with all creation.

It is typical of Vonnegut to temper his vision of familial utopia by setting his next novel Jailbird against an imagined collapse of American civilization. Jailbird is a reflection on twentieth—century American political and economic history. The recurrent theme of the novel is expressed by the judge who summons Starbuck and gives him a dressing down for his folly in giving the reactionary Right ammunition to use against “pity and brains”.

The central figure in Jailbird is a fully new creation styled in the mode of America’s Watergate Scandal era. Walter Starbuck is a character whose fate is to end a career of idealistic government service as an unwitting accomplice among all the President’s men. He has just been released from jail after serving a Watergate related sentence.
It may be stated that early in the novel Starbuck thinks of his wife Ruth, a concentration camp survivor who “believed...that all human beings were evil by nature, whether tormentors or victims, or idle standers-by. They could only create meaningless tragedies, she said, since they were not nearly intelligent enough to accomplish all the good they meant to do. We were a disease, she said, which had evolved on one tiny under in the universe, but could spread and spread” (23). Late in the novel Starbuck reflects bitterly on the absurdity of human aspirations in the face of an indifferent universe. “We are here for no purpose, unless we can invent one. Of that I am sure”. No matter what he had done with his life, he thinks, “the human condition in an exploding universe would not have been altered one iota”. (236). Vonnegut lets Starbuck articulate the cruel truths about politics, economics, and the cosmic void. Vonnegut resists final pessimism. Like Starbuck in his better moments, Vonnegut remains committed to the ideals enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount. Vonnegut defines anarchists as “persons who believe with all their hearts that governments are enemies of their own people” (175).
It may be concluded by stating that Starbuck invokes the most hopeful of New Testament texts early on, along with a composite myth of labor exploited, expressed, and resistant. Thus, he too invokes Sacco and Vanzetti throughout, from the epigraph (xxxix) to the closing passages. He elevates these anarchists’ martyrs and their fellow—traveller an actual criminal named Celestino Madeiros to Christ-figures of the left. Jailbird tries to reconstruct practically everything from capitalism to Christianity. Though Jailbird ends with the RAMJAC family subverted, the novels liberal passion delivers it from negativism.

In his last novel Galapagos, Vonnegut takes his readers into the Darwinian Renaissance a million years hence. In Galapagos the author argues that the freakishly large human brain, an evolutionary mistake, causes an immense variety of afflictions. It threatens the future of the human race as well as other species and the planet itself.

Significantly, Vonnegut identifies the characters in Galapagos as psychological victims. Vonnegut describes them as natural experiments. The con man is described as “Nature’s experiment with
purposeless greed and the Japanese woman is described as ‘Nature’s experiment with depression” (82). The words “greed” and “depression” suggest moral and psychological qualities. They are subordinate to “Nature”. Vonnegut achieves the coherence of *Galapagos* by subjecting all characters and events to the impersonal force of evolution.

The novel’s protagonist and a ghost of Leon Trout is the captain of the *Bahia de Darwin*. He agonizes over the ultimate cosmic emptiness: “The Captain looked up at the stars, and his big brain told him that his planet was insignificant speck of dust in the cosmos, and that he was a germ on that speck, and that nothing could matter less than what became of him. That was what those big brains used to do with their excess capacity: blather on like that” (197).

Vonnegut aptly justifies his presentation of characters in the context of evolution. The characters that are fit to survive do not even begin the “Nature Cruise of the Country”. The business tycoon and the computer genius are first to be eliminated. The businessman with his raging ego and blind daughter has marred the essential work of
reproduction. The inventor of new computers has attempted to substitute machines for human intelligence. Nature has its revenge when the computer is eaten by a great white shark. The machine with its codified information and inappropriate quotations is a reminder of the useless wisdom that comes from an oversized brain.

The next most intelligent character is James Wait. He is the con man who has married seventeen different widows in order to take over their property and break their hearts. It is natural for Wait to be the next to die, and appropriate that the cause should be a heart attack.

It may be pointed out that Vonnegut’s main character, the captain is a successful comic figure who seldom knows where he is or what he is doing. His sheer incompetence proves to be the decisive factor in securing a future for the human species. The character responsible for the artificial insemination is the widowed science teacher. She is the only figure in the novel that knows and understands the evidence for Darwin’s theories. It is appropriate that her students have nicknamed her ‘Mother Nature Personified’. In a novel about evolution the most important character second to the main character
should be "Mother Nature". The science teacher represents the force of life that evolves in keeping with natural selection. Thus she passes on the captain’s sperm to the fertile characters on the island.

In conclusion, it may be summed up that the ghostly narrator of *Galapagos* does have the ability to move back and forth in time because he enjoys the hindsight of so many centuries. He transcends his mortal self when he becomes the invisible eyes and ears of the narrative. The most important scene for understanding the significance of the narrator is when he has a conversation with his dead father. Kilgore Trout chides his son for lingering on earth as a headless spirit. He encourages him to move on at once to the afterlife. The cynical advice from Kilgore Trout gives his son a chance to explain why he wants to remain on earth, a while longer:

I had chosen to be a ghost because the job carried with it, as a fringe benefit, license to read minds, to learn the truth of people’s pasts, to see through walls, to be many places all at once, to see through walls, to be many places all at once, to learn in depth how this or that situation had come to be structured as it was, and to have access to all human knowledge (253):

The son Leon Trout resists his father’s deep rooted cynicism. He does not want to join his father in the after life because he decided
years ago that his father was a failure. He would like to meet the spirit of his mother whose favorite words are used as the novel’s epigraph: “In spite of everything, I still believe people are really good at heart”. Leon Trotsky Trout is a true combination of his father and mother. The narrator of Galapagos tells the story of evolution from a human point of view that is wise beyond its years, high spirited, and doomed.