CHAPTER - VI
CONCLUSION

As a discourse, postmodernism in its theoretical formation has been constituted in a critique of the foundational assumptions of Enlightened modernity. Such a critique has nullified any transcendental view of the world and held suspect claims of objective truth and authoritative version of the 'real'. With an altered notion of the 'real' postmodern literary representation has followed practices of fragmentation and playful self-reflexivity in underlining a shift in thought and interpretation. The theoretical debate that informs the changing concept of 'reality' has become central to contemporary fictional narratives. Such narratives have explored the contours of alternative realities and have exploded the myth of the objective reality. As McHale maintains: "nowadays every thing in our culture tends to deny reality and promote unreality."¹ It appears that 'unreality of reality' is not only an imaginative construct instead is the very condition of our lives today.

Postmodernist fiction underlines the fact that neither imitation nor mirroring is the possible relation between the fictional world and reality. Back As a new genre it writes home implying that it represents a universe, not the universe in that it can describe about any universe. "In other words, to “do” ontology in this perspective is not necessarily to seek some grounding for our universe; it might just as appropriately involve describing other universes, including a “possible” or even “impossible” universes – not least of all the other universe, or heterocôsm, of fiction."² Taking an antirealist stance, Postmodernist fiction posits its representational ethos in a conceptual frame that is posthumanist. It
interrogates the postulates of the realist fiction that attempts to represent a world in which value has no distinct ontological status, and in which human meaning is perceived to reside in the unending and indissoluble tension between self and society.  

As discussed in the previous chapters, it is clear that the genre of postmodernist fiction performs on the principle that story-telling cannot be eliminated, but it becomes playful and ironic, as if the text itself had lost control in relation to the mirror where life is decided by a kind of technical absurdity, where the characters have no other substance than their fictitious personalities since they exist as verbal beings. The novelists discussed in this dissertation illustrate the fact that reality is but a fraudulent verbal network. As history and the subject are the two faces of an immense force, the postmodernist novelists mock at the official discourse and official images of historical events. The subject himself, that is to say the protagonists of these novels, seem to be searching for a missing coherence in their lives and actions. Thus the crucial question raised by the postmodern fiction is the question of representation, since the line between the real and imaginary has been erased. “In a world where the referential element itself is denounced as a mere electronic image, the question of historical truth, of historical credibility, but also the question of the stability of the real, as well as the psychic depth of the subject, are no longer valid.”  

Emerging out of such a ferment that dismisses old certitudes about character, plot and events and embraces “uncertainty” as the central principle of representation, the fictions of William Burrough, Thomas
Pynchon, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. indeed inaugurate in America the tradition of the untraditional postmodern fiction. William Burroughs writes in *Naked Lunch*: "The word cannot be expressed, it can perhaps be indicated by mosaic of juxtapositions, like objects abandoned in a hotel room, defined by negatives and absence." Such a perception has shaped his work in that he has incorporated the incongruous and even the incompatible as opposed to the type of fiction based on metaphoric and symbolic representation of reality. Burroughs attempts to subvert the practice of coherence and logic in a narrative strategy that verges upon Schizophrenia. Language in Burroughs’ narrative takes the form of antilanguage. Antilanguage is developed through systematic transformation of the standard language and its world view. It creates in effect an “anti-world-view”, a counter-reality of its own. In addition to the narrative devices employed, the reader is solicited to be part of the ‘unreal’ – the hypodiegetic worlds. Among the devices that involves the reader is the device of the missing end-frame: dropping down to an embedded narrative level that breaks down hierarchies and creates an illusion of the real that – dream like or nightmarish.

For Burroughs, the text itself is never innocent. The literary discourse and the words which make that discourse dialectically follow a process of semantization that reduces stories to a semantic series. What Burroughs seeks to achieve in his writing is a new form of chatharsis — not in the Aristotelian sense – creating a linguistic illusion. Thus the importance of his work rests in manipulating language, distorting and fragmenting the syntax, and pulverizing the logic of linearity of language and discourse.
Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is one of the paradigmatic texts of postmodernist writing. The novel narrativizes the absurd and the arbitrary in which the fictional machine seems to turn in a void, but not without grinning with black humour. At the end of the novel, for the reader there is no real message, no order, no resolution, no moral statement, but only a projected delirium, that is captured in the illogic of language. Like Pynchon's earlier works *Gravity's Rainbow* is not constrained by the limits of modernism, for he freely exploits the artistic possibility of plurality of worlds. He breaks through the dead end of modernist solipscism by shifting from a modernist poetics of epistemology to a postmodernist poetics of ontology.

One of the devices that Pynchon employs in *Gravity's Rainbow* is the cinematic effect. As McIlwraith maintains, cinematic discourse can be interpreted as a series of metaphors for textual strategies; but it can also be read as the sign of a narrative level interposed between the text and the 'real'. From one transition from a bedroom scene to a conversation over breakfast, 'bridge music' is specified; elsewhere the narrative acquires a voice-over parodying that of an old-fashioned travelogue. In other words, the extended cinematic trope while being applied to the text becomes its 'tenor' and 'vehicle', while metaphors substitute for the language of novelistic narration and description. This reading is clearly justified in *Gravity's Rainbow* where the presence of the interposed level of the film is revealed on the last page. Such a strategy has substituted the *absent* -- literal 'privileged moment' with a metaphorical analogue for that moment. Thus Pynchon develops internal tropes that subverts the *form* and coherence of the literal world of the novel.
One of the constituent thematic dimensions of the postmodernist fiction from America is to mock at the official version of historical events. Most of the writers seem to be revising their position and their views in relation to the historical events they themselves participated. *Slaughterhouse Five* is the most obvious example in which the protagonist (Vonnegut himself) returns to the place where he participated in the war, but not to remember how it was, not to relive what he did, but to rethink and revise his vision of that moment. The author attempts following the genre of science fiction to liberate his characters from the prison-house of the fiction. Using the autobiographical material, Vonnegut is creating worlds on thresholds – real people travelling to worlds of fantasy and transworld identities. Billy could recognize himself at Dresden and also else where, he is the protagonist and also the author: “That was I, that was me. That was the author of this book.”

The narrative thus creates multiple worlds of awareness and collapses those awareness into a world of linguistic sludge. Vonnegut follows the catalogue structure in disengaging the stratum of words from the stratum of worlds. From the ontological point of view catalogues are paradoxical. On the one hand, they can appear to assert full presence of a world and on the other hand, its negation in creating alternative worlds. The facts and realities which defy explanation are brought into the same frame with fictions beyond verification.

The present study, among other things, has attempted to capture the consequence of the postmodernist fiction in America in that it has explored the various formulations and strategies that Burroughs, Pynchon
and Vonnegut have employed in their works. What accounts for the success or failure of these novelists under discussion is their attempts in redefining not only the changing concept of reality, but fictionalizing the same.

The ‘unreality of reality’ that the postmodernist fiction uses as a central trope hinges on a provisional supposition: “a technique that requires suspension of belief as well as disbelief.” Thus the postmodernist fiction reasons with the theories of “possible worlds” thereby relativises our understanding of the real. It abandons the secure structures of logic and reasoning in a playful self-reflexivity where nothing is ‘true’ or ‘false’, every thing is possible and changeable. In interrogating the three fundamental modalities of classical logic necessity, possibility and impossibility postmodernist fiction refigures necessity and possibility not as universal norms, but as a provisional, individual requirements. ‘Probability’ becomes the defining term for postmodernist discursive articulation. Theoretically the postmodernist fiction excludes logical impossibility from the propositions that constitute worlds and thereby create possible worlds, that obey the law of the excluded middle. In fact, Burroughs, Pynchon and Vonnegut refuse to accept full-fledged, self-sustaining worlds and propose that possible worlds are there, for they are made possible in the beliefs, imaginations and convictions of those who create it.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Ibid., p. 27.


6. McHale argues that the cinematic discourse pervades the style and imagery of Gravity's Rainbow from the beginning to the end. He also informs us that such techniques are also used in other postmodernist fictions such as Rushdie's Midnights Children and Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo.


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