

**Tribhuvan University**

**Narrative Intertextuality and Self-Reflexivity in Kurt Vonnegut's *Timequake***

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Letter of Recommendation

Amardeep Poudel has completed his thesis entitled "Narrative Intertextuality and Self-Reflexivity in Kurt Vonnegut's *Timequake*" under my supervision and guidance. I, hereby, recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Narrative Intertextuality and Self-Reflexivity in Kurt Vonnegut's *Timequake*" by Amardeep Poudel, submitted to the Department of English, Tribhuvan University has been approved by the undersigned members of Research Committee.

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### Abstract

*This thesis studies how Kurt Vonnegut's Timequake makes experimentation with theory of time making a departure from linear flow of time in plot development and thus reflecting the writer's self by bringing historical, social and literary references. . He uses the black humor to harshly attack the vanities of late capitalist system, the disaster upon ecologies, war, social injustices as well as inequalities. He shows the suspension of free will in the present humans by showing the shrinking of the universe. Along with this, he presents the world using narrative intertextuality to show writer's insufficiency of language to explain the present world and which also serves as evidences to strengthen the thesis.*

Key words: Narrative intertextuality, self-reflexivity, black humor, humanism, critique of meta-narratives, auto-biography

### Narrative Intertextuality and Self-Reflexivity in Vonnegut's *Timequake*

Kurt Vonnegut, an American humanist and postmodernist novelist, in his semi-autobiographical fiction *Timequake* (1997), uses the postmodernist literary devices of self-reflexivity and narrative intertextuality. The novel was written few decades after the humiliating defeat of U.S. with Vietnam during 60s and even during the Gulf war. And the United States of America was arguing for so-called democracy and peace after killing innocent civilians in Gulf war, producing and selling gun powders and nuclear weapons. Through Kilgore Trout, as a spokesperson of the writer, Vonnegut weaves a strong story of Timequake, how the universe gets a crisis as it stops expanding for a decade. The universe shrinks back to February 17, 1991 from February 13, 2001 and in this period there is the loss of consciousness and free will of humans. Though the Timequake ends but people are still gripped by boredom and depression. The one who remains unaffected is Kilgore Trout, who helps revive others from the effects of Timequake.

Several social and familial events with ideologies of U.S. in particular and West in general, are depicted. This research studies how the writer reflects his self in the novel and brings intertextual references. Along with this, there are other features of postmodern literature depicted in this fiction like meta-fiction, humor, and irony. This study focuses on why the writer employs narrative intertextuality and self-reflexivity in the shed of postmodernism. The writer raises many issues in this novel. Vonnegut severely critiques the grand narratives of the West. To be specific, it vehemently attacks the narratives like; war as business, marriage as business, and west as store-house of philosophies and so on. Similarly, it also satirizes the American values and beliefs that are considered to be grand. This fiction deploys the ethos of postmodern literary trends especially narrative intertextual connections to history,

literature and society and authorial intentions in the text to supplement evidences to his claim that the western narratives are to be critiqued. At that time, when there was an apocalyptic view on the world of moral decadences and schizophrenic human conditions, Vonnegut published this novel responding to those disasters of the time. With the use of those techniques, the writer powerfully presents a condition of the apocalyptic disasters in the morally evacuated world. This text makes a departure from realistic trends of writing in terms of the narrative, plot structure and thematic issues that were prioritized in the previous trends of writings.

While going through the narrative of this fiction, several issues and events struck upon my mind. I wonder why the writer repetitively attacks American ideologies like war, religion, and other philosophies. Why does the writer allude to history, myth and literature? Why does the writer make a comparison between self-criticism and social criticism? Along with this, he also brings familial and societal events and through the prominent character Kilgore Trout as his alter-ego, the writer copes up with the rising disasters and social problems. And these issues are explored through the lenses of postmodernism in this research.

In this novel, which is often termed as a self-conscious memoir, Vonnegut laments the decline of moral values, pays attention to the rise of technologies and its evils, as well as critiques commodified American cultures. This story shows how one suffers from the crisis of confidence and is under cosmic determinism which neglects the free will of modern humans. Vonnegut makes the meta-fictional references, alludes to myth, history, literature as well as societal and familial events. He reflects upon the hurdles he faced to publish this text as, Twain, Mary Shelley and history of Second World War, Vietnam war, civil war and more. Great idealistic constructs like war as biz, marriage, American dreams and other social systems have been harshly

critiqued. By presenting an allegory of modern life, Vonnegut critiques social inequalities, ecological disasters, wars, social systems, and present human conditions resulted by late capitalism. The writer refers to the myth of Pandora, myth of Genesis and also literary references like the works of Shakespeare, Hemmingway, Hawthorne and even other grand narratives and in order to raise the level of American consciousness and spread humanistic voice. Thus, the writer intends to critique the grand narratives of America, raises the level of consciousness and spread the humanistic voices.

Several issues are raised in analysis of *Timequake* by various critics. Arnold Edelstein in his article focuses on how Vonnegut plays generally with the theme of life, death and war in most of his works. He writes:

In short, Billy's fantasy provides him with a hard won escape from the horrors of death- both the violent death of Dresden and the natural death he faces in the future and from the moral responsibility of having to do something about war, his meaningless existence, the generation gap, ghetto riots, cripple, who wore magazine rackets and so on. (133)

Moreover, his fictions play with the themes of death, life and war, and *Timequake* also cannot be far from this. He presents the lamentations of the old age, the Germans' lost sense of self and respect in American societies during and after the Second World War. Likewise, Edelstein claims Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* "juxtaposes satirical glances at suburban life in America during the Fifties and Sixties, the horrors of death and war especially fire-bombing of Dresden . . ." (128) and we see "the treatment can be totally whimsical at times" (128). Vonnegut makes a clear presentation of the horrors of the war.

Jerome Klinkowitz claims "Mr. Lundquist shows how closely Vonnegut



knows our world, structuring his fictions like the jokes of Depression Era comedian, pacing his narrative in stride with the montage of television and speaking with the familiar tone of favorite uncle . . . grew out of the shattered optimism” (674). The novel also depicts the harsh times of American Depression Era, which lasted nearly for a decade. Robert Morace opines “Vonnegut spent his life as a writer to give voice to the sentiments behind his memories of an ideal America” (122). He raises this voice to give a sense of hope in the world full of despair and disaster. Loree Rackstraw further claims “Vonnegut can introduce a message of energizing hope after a life time of misanthropic worry in his fiction” (41) and at the same time gives citizens “an awareness of their careless disregard of the true potential of human uniqueness and ideals” (42). With reference of Pandora’s myth Vonnegut attempts to supply an “energizing element” (41), a hope in world where hope has lost, free will has been suspended. After the free will got kicked again, what Kilgore Trout, an alter-ego of Vonnegut calls “Post-Timequake Apathy or PTA” the people in western hemisphere suddenly were in their own disastrous results.

In this fiction, Kurt Vonnegut focuses on implications of time theory and free will versus determinism. Temporal distortion is deployed in Vonnegut’s fictions for the purpose of irony. To Ramen Sharma and Pretty Chaudhary “Distortions in time are central features in many of Kurt Vonnegut’s non-linear novels” (196) and this is the case in *Timequake*. And there are other literary devices that Vonnegut attempts to depict serious issues of American societies. Peter C. Kunze and Robert T. Tally Jr. write “He felt that things in the U.S. and in the world continuing to worsen” (8) and portrays “the general ineffectiveness of arts within the decadent of American civilization, he chronicled in his fiction” (9). And these issues are presented through black humor. At the same time, he has politics behind these poetics. “Vonnegut

employed humor to foster such kindness in his work, building community among his characters, but, more importantly building one between his relation and himself” (11). Philip E. Kaveny claims “his works create categories and establish historicity and continuity with other literary traditions” (303). The historicity of time is powerfully presented in this fiction by reflecting his self and other narratives.

Similarly, he attacks the politics of his time which has affected the social systems. The politics of his time has been harsh, the terroristic issues further intensified, the hostilities rose among west and non-west. At the time, when politics was worsening, Vonnegut is said to have attacked politics as Wade Nelson explicitly argues “Like the world in Kurt Vonnegut’s prescient 1997 novel, the world of education in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century seems to have been struck by Timequake in which we are all destined to repeat our lives on automatic pilot until the Timequake is over and free-will returns” (384). And also questions “are we now an automatic pilot, destined to proceed thoughtlessly along a predestined path” (386)? Thus, the writer Vonnegut seems to connect this novel to many domains of the society. This is what we call intertextuality in the language of literature. Graham Allen views that the literary or non-literary texts lack any kind of independent meanings. For him, the act of reading plunges us into a network of textual relations, which is called intertextual. In this sense, he argues intertextuality “foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life . . . since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art” (5). This is what clarifies the notion of Intertextuality and there are also so many intertextual relations.

Another critic Donald E. Morse argues Vonnegut has become a “spokesperson of conscience speaking out against show biz war: racism, amoral

profiteering, drug abuse, meaningless work, and public, corporate and private abuses of power” (395). The social systems have been attacked in this novel. Furthermore Morse focuses on that “at the same time he has consistently advocated investigating in the future of the planet, practicing individual decency, recognizing the necessity of establishing a viable human community” (395). The text appears as writer’s attempt to establish a world of equality and justice critiquing the postmodern world. Even the postmodernist theorist Jean Francois Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* argues “postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives” (xxiv). This is all what we see in this novel; the writer’s critique on grand philosophies and ideologies of the West like war as business, marriage as business, West as centre of philosophies, sanity, humanity and so on. These narrative are woven in the West thinking that can be always beneficial to make money and business and remain in the central power through this narratives. Thus, the objective truth and continuous narratives will no more remain in the postmodern period. Rachel Mccopin writes “Vonnegut, as Tally argues, both embraced and criticized postmodern American culture with its tendencies towards meaninglessness and nihilism while resurrection a modern sensibility of hope” (317). But he fails to talk about the writer’s reflection of self in the novel.

But, another critic Kathryn Hume talks about writer’s reflection of self in the novel. To Karl Kao “self-reflexivity is by no means exclusively postmodern . . . a meta-fictional self-consciousness” (59). In this article, Kao claims self-reflexivity has been a much discussed topic in a recent critical discourse, particularly related to postmodern narrative fiction. Similar to Kao, Kathryn Hume opines:

In Vonnegut’s case, moreover, the heavy reliance on projections make his book usually interdependent. The artistic and personal problems he takes up in

one story are directly affected by those who did or didn't solve in the previous story . . . To make better sense, we must start by acknowledging his use of self-projections. (178)

And Kilgore Trout, the next prominent character's "fortunes and adventures are major expressions of Vonnegut's inner vicissitudes and developments" (188). The critic talks about the self-reflexivity of the writer in the novel and it is apparent throughout the novel. But he fails to talk about the politics of writer behind reflecting his self in the novel and why so many petty narratives. The claim of one critic is countered by next critic. Some take him as making a humanistic voice but some simply take him as comedian of Depression era. Kurt Vonnegut depicts modern inhumane and cruel world, and presents the suspension of free will of humans as humans are guided by cosmic determinism rather than economic and social determinism. Thus, it is a remedy suggested to pervasive horrors, human existence and illness attacking the grand narratives of the west like west as store house of philosophies, American dreams, war and marriage as business. He presents the United States of America (U.S.A) as a country which has terrible impacts of late capitalism, and fertile space for absurdity and loneliness.

The review of the existing scholars shows that Vonnegut's *Timequake* is yet to be studied from the perspective of self-consciousness and narrative intertextuality in this novel by Vonnegut. They also seem failure to raise an issue of the writer's politics of raising the level of consciousness in American audiences and the voice of humanism through self-reflexivity and intertextuality. This thesis employs Linda Hutcheon's idea of metanarratives(social elitism) and representation of subject and concept of intertextuality and metanarratives as discussed by Julia Kristeva and Jean Francois Lyotard. Kristeva argues that the texts cannot be complete in themselves as

they need ideas and information from others regarding history, literature, politics etc. Along with intertextuality and self-reflexivity, the black humor and irony are also theoretical tools that are used for investigation of the text *Timequake* by Vonnegut.

By highlighting absurdity and loneliness after *Timequake*, Kurt Vonnegut counters the established trends of writing, late capitalism and commodified and corporate American culture. Most of the works of Vonnegut are focused on seeking for a universal remedy to human ills and human existence of the time. He proposes the potential remedies to the incomprehensible horrors that have been plaguing our societies. Trout's stories are also seen to be awaring against the dangers and wrongdoings of our societies.

In the preface of the novel, Vonnegut brings the references of Ernest Hemingway's story *The Old Man and the Sea* where the old fisherman from Cuba go to fishing but fails to catch fish for 84 days. But finally he gets a marlin, hangs it in side of boat and shark bites off all the flesh of fish and what remains is compared to this text *Timequake*, which is a product of struggle for 10 years. Vonnegut writes "Merde! I had spent nearly a decade on that ungrateful fish if you will. It wasn't even fit for shark chum" (10). The sharks have been compared with those critics who do not like his previous novels. "My great big fish, which stunk so, was entitled *Timequake*" (10). Though this text has been produced nearly after the period of 10 years the successful previous novel, but he still has a hope that it can play prominent roles for awaring his readers and raising the level of knowledge. So, it is writer's politics in representing his self and making orientations to the history, literature and myth.

Vonnegut witnessed terrible events in his life: at the age of 22, he got captured as POWs in Dresden, escaped from near deaths and encountered several horrific

scenes of Second World War. The same year his mother committed suicide. Also he experienced the death of his father. His sister died of cancer and her husband from train accident. In this sense, he later published *Timequake* to explain his sufferings as Donald E. Morse argues “after such an experience, perhaps not even a Timequake would be much of a shock” (324). Personal life of writer and his suffering has been highlighted in this article but fails to make a macroscopic analysis. It is the self reflection of the writer in this novel. Being the postmodern literary text, this also displays several features of postmodernist works. It is also meta-fictional text because it is also about the consciousness of writer’s self.

Vonnegut draws the issues related to familial and societal events, traditional values and small town America which are common themes in his novels. He describes his family members like his children, father, mother and other social events. All these sort of events related to his family members arise a kind of sympathy to him on the part of the readers. The pessimist world had depressed him and to get free from the alienation and isolation, he takes writing as a source to heal his wound caused by the death of his parents. “My father Kurt Senior, an Indianapolis architect who had a cancer, and whose wife had committed suicide some 15 years earlier, was arrested for running a red light in his hometown” (13). For this he still laments on being alive. “being alive is a crock of shit” (14). It shows lamentation on the part of writer towards his life that has brought pessimism, isolation and loneliness. These are the features of the post modernist writing which shows the effects of depressions. Moreover, his fictions play with the themes of death, life and war, and *Timequake* also cannot be far from this. He presents the lamentations of the old age, the Germans’ lost sense of self and respect in American societies during and after the Second World War. Being an American soldier and POW, he even experienced the horrors of death and tragedies

resulted by the Second World War.

The writer's presentation of death is not simply literal presentations of horrors of the war but it works to warn the readers and politicians of present society to be aware of the tragedies that could result at any time. By the help of his alter-ego Kilgore Trout, he depicts his tragic conditions and through this it is the representations of the rest of the world that might sink in such tragedies. He seriously presents the loneliness of himself after the death of his parents. Though, his father was an architect, but his mother ran a red light in his hometown. This is the result of mother's suicide as presented by the writer through his alter-ego. She was compelled to run a red light despite having her husband working as an architect. This novel is, thus Vonnegut's critical looking back to his personal history and even making memory of family and friends both factual and fictional who has come to make differences in his life. It is not only writer's reflection of fate of family members but the fate of America in general who experienced the Great Depression Era and wars. "I had been satisfied with his first account. Trout was the one who wanted me to hear much more. My innocent question earlier had triggered memories of his ghastly childhood in Northampton" (40). This shows how the writer wants to reflect upon his family members through this novel. Many of the anecdotes in this novel are related to his death of loved ones, his family and his own feelings

Vonnegut has made a subtle criticism and sharp depiction of modern society in most of his writings. By presenting his familial events like of parents; father suffering from severe depression and mother dying by taking overdose of sleeping pills. Vonnegut's family suffered from severe economic depression resulted by effects of the First World War. Their household was said to be dissimilar always and also lost wealth. This is what Vonnegut presents.

Along with this many social and historical events are raised in this novel. The sufferings of the world wars, great economic depression, labor strike, Magna Carta, Emancipation Proclamation, Declaration of Independence, and Lincoln's assassination have been represented by the writer. This is no doubt a revisitation of the history by the writer and his desire to warn the Americans against the existing social problems. The great depression also strongly attacks the American sentiments and feelings towards the American dreams which resulted nothing but a failure. He writes "Nor were most of them enraptured by old-fashioned art practices. They needed the jobs, no matter how pointless the job might be, and were so reminiscent of people during the Great Depression of 1930s who celebrated when they got any kind of work at all (42). The writer brings the reference of the economic depression which also affected the family of Vonneguts. The above lines focus on idea that it is the economic depression that severely affected the American social systems. Again he writes " I wouldn't have missed the Great Depression or my part in World War Two for anything. Trout asserted at the clambake that our war would live forever . . . " (26). The title of novel itself is depicting a loss of freewill of people and the depression also made the loss of individuality in the people. This is an impact of the war upon the American economy that got down the limits.

Likewise, the excessive focus was on so called American dream that engulfed the mind of the people and psychology got so fragmented when the dream was unable to be fulfilled. In this sense, a character called John Dillinger is presented by the writer to show how the people are forced to engage in criminal activities to get so called American dream. Dillinger was the bank robber of the 1930s. Next character like him is Robin Hood. Vonnegut writes "One is the story of Robin Hood. As ill-educated as John Dillinger was, that was surely his inspiration: a reputable blueprint



for what a real man might do with life” (32). The people started involving in anti-social activities theft, robbery to get money for running their lives with prosperity. As Dillinger was shot to death for involving in such activities but such activities started growing day by day. People even thought that the crime can be only way to get successful life. But they were never aware of the effects and hazards that could be brought upon them.

Vonnegut has clearly described the event of Timequake. It is how the world suffered from when there was the suspension of free will, crisis in self-confidence, socio-economic determinism replaced by cosmic determinism. The universe for some reason stops expanding for a decade. The people then noticed that they were one decade back from the present date. Vonnegut writes “It was the world that had suffered the nervous system. I was just having fun in a nightmare, arguing with an imaginary editor about the advertising budget, and about who should play whom in the movie, and personal appearances on TV shows and so on, perfectly harmless funny stuff (43). The above lines highlight the effects of Timequake. From the year 2001, February 13<sup>th</sup> New York the universe shrunk to 1991, February 17<sup>th</sup> California. There was a nervous breakdown. It is the reflection of the writer’s self through his alter ego. Kilgore Trout. The term “imaginary” in the above lines focuses the fictional mode of the novel though it can also be linked to an autobiography. Free will of the people was suspended. The mechanical vehicles drove without any human interventions like cars, trucks, airliners and any other mechanical transportation. They moved on autopilot expectations. They could not know what could happen in the future. This could be termed as cosmic determinism because they were affected neither by socio-economic factors nor psychological factors. But, trouble soon started with the end in zapping in the universe. But the positive is that free will comes back to

everyone in the planet.

Vonnegut is also advocating for German-American individuality and identity. Being descendent of Germans, Vonnegut described how the Americans of German originality were deprived of their identity. To depict so called sense of patriotism, he even involved in American soldier and even fought in the Second World War in Germany and was held as Prisoner of war. Vonneguts attempted to be true Americans. So, his father suffered from depression and mother died of overdosing sleeping pills. They had no sense of universality in America. "German Americans in Indianapolis lack universality. They have never been sympathetically, or even villainously, stereotyped in movies or books or plays"(94). This clearly depicts that the German-Americans have lost their sense of individuality and identity. They have to struggle a lot for their identity in America. By presenting his family events and social events of America, Vonnegut reflects upon all Germans to be aware of the lost sense of individuality. This is the writer's purpose behind making it self-reflexive.

Vonnegut has made mythical, historical, sociological and literary orientations in this novel. He brings the name of many prominent writers and their texts, the Old Testament, the Holocaust, myths of Prometheus and Pandora, his own previous texts, romantic and renaissance texts as well. So, this is narrative Intertextuality. Snyder claims that reading implies the voice of author of the text but the voice does not primarily own the text and there are different layers of voices. Readers read texts within multiple voices, and the claim of voices imbedded in the texts. Snyder writes "It is said that intertextuality is not a feature of a particular genre is characteristic of all texts. Intertextuality, the hearing of voices, the seeing of pictures, the memory of experiences situations, the feeling of emotions, the smelling of scents, the tasting and the experience" (429). So, this text is also a "tissue of signs, endless

imitation, infinitely postponed” (1132) as termed by Roland Barthes. It is not the feature of single text in the present time. But no text remains free from being connected to other texts. The idea or concept that we see, hear, memorize, smell, memorize and feel from one literary work can be transformed to next work. Vonnegut has also brought references from different literary texts to make this text a complete text. No text can be complete in itself. Without making orientations to the history, literature and society, no texts can be produced.

Like above said, Vonnegut’s *Timequake* has also many literary and historical orientations. References from many texts have been brought throughout the novel. In the preface of the novel, Vonnegut brings the reference of Ernest Hemmingway’s story and clarifies the hurdles he faced to publish this novel. He also presents the attitudes of the people towards his novel in the past as well as present. The peoples’ responses are presented in the preface of the novel, how the people respond and how they perceive the works of Vonnegut. In the novel, the writer makes intertextual connections. He mentions:

Now I find myself maundering about parts of plays hardly anybody knows or cares about anymore, such as the graveyard scene in *Our Town*, or the poker game in Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, or what Willy Loman’s wife said after that tragically ordinary, clumsily gallant American committed suicide in Arthur’s *Death of Salesman*.(25)

Vonnegut highlights the failure of American dream in the novel. He compares all the American people to the protagonist of the novel, *Death of Salesman*. Even the American people are like Willy Loman, who has a blind faith in American Dream. They think the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness can be achieved through the blind run towards American dream. This is also called narrative Intertextuality because

there is a literary orientation. This orientation makes a powerful humanistic approach in this novel because it is a kind of message upon the readers because they can learn a good message from the quotation of the novel *Death of Salesman*.

Similarly the writer also quotes from the works of William Shakespeare, the greatest English dramatist. There is a great lesson to the readers about our lives we are living. This is also a philosophy about our life in this novel because we can get lesson from the play *As You Like I*. In act 2, scene 7, Jaques, one of the characters, says to Duke Senior about the philosophy of life despite his experiences that are depressing. Still he focuses that life of humans is a stage and we are here just to perform our roles. And this is also quoted to the novel of Vonnegut that makes intertextuality. This philosophy about life has been said by Kilgore Trout, the writer's alter-ego to writer himself. "And he said, 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.'" (33). The writer was a self-educated man but he has great knowledge about life's philosophy which is clear in his presentations of the work. He, therefore prefers to raise the level of consciousness in the readers.

Life is not only for so called achievement of American dreams but also an opportunity to live. We are here with our designated roles to perform. So, the writer is giving a message to humanity that we should stick upon our roles and responsibilities. Though he makes a pessimistic view upon his life but still he is strong upon his obligation as a writer. He means to forward a message to his readers about his understanding of life. By connecting his novel to the works of Shakespeare, he meditates upon the philosophy of life. One of most fascinating texts is *Slaughter House-Five*. Vonnegut has also mentioned that he has published this novel *Timequake* after a decade he published his previous novel.

Similarly, Vonnegut has brought the reference of myths in his text *Timequake*.

In this novel, he connects his experiences of life to the myths of Pandora, Prometheus, Archangel Gabriel and myth of Genesis. This is also an Intertextuality because he adapts ideas from the works of the past especially to the myths that has been shaping the ways of lives of the contemporary people. This is also like the tissue of quotations from other texts. In the text, he connotes upon the philosophy of the lives of the people, how the human beings were evolved to the present form. The conflict between Satans and Gods can be compared to the conflicts between the parts of brain.

Vonnegut writes:

Gods created the heaven and the earth, the old, long out-of-print science fiction writer went on. And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. Satan could have done this herself, but she thought it was stupid, action for the sake of action. What was the point? She didn't say anything at first. (27)

He means to focus on the direction the modern civilization is taking. Through the help of his alter-ego, he means to change the direction people are taking. The modern civilization can be crashed if it cannot take the right direction. So, he wants to correct the path by focusing through the sentiments of myth of genesis. "Satan had a serpent give Eve the apple"(27). Like Satan there are many stimulating factors that have ruined the humanity and their relationship. It is also an advocacy for the sense of humanism and welfare of humanity. So, myth here works as a bridge to spread the humanistic voices.

Even Vonnegut connects this text to the Old Testament of the Bible. In this sense, it is alluded to myth of Archangel Gabriel in old testament of the Bible.

Vonnegut through his spokesperson called Kilgore Trout, he delivers a message to the

contemporary people. Gabriel served as a messenger to the god in Jewish mythology. Then he compares his spokesperson Trout to himself who can spread humanistic voice to the present society. He even compares his uncle Alex to politically conservative Archangel Gabriel. "After World War, Uncle Alex became as politically conservative as the Archangel Gabriel" (84). His uncle encouraged him to read the texts of high socialist writers like George Bernard Shaw, Norman Thomas, Eugene Debs and John Dos Passos. It was after the time when the American sentiments had been harshly broken due to loss of Vietnam War. It also made unnecessary interference upon the Gulf countries. It was still advocating for capitalistic sort of economy. Even it was the time regarded as "The End of History" i.e. the end of socialism in the then U.S.S.R.

As previously mentioned, this text has been connected to the myth of Prometheus and Pandora. In *Frankenstein*, the text by English writer Mary Shelly, the central character has been compared to the modern Prometheus. Like Prometheus, Frankenstein the central character plays a risk upon his life by making an innovation going against the existing rules and norms. Vonnegut writes, "In that book, the scientist Frankenstein puts a bunch of body parts from different corpses together in the shape of a man" (116). He further writes "Prometheus in Greek mythology makes the first human beings from mud. He steals fire from Heaven and gives it to them so that they can be warm and cook, and not, one would hope, so we could incinerate all the little yellow bastards in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which are in Japan (116). The victory of U.S. upon Japan has always been celebrated marking anniversaries over anniversaries every year. He wants to attack upon the sentiments of the US government about the glorification of war. It is not the time to enjoy the victory of war but to attack upon the so-called sentiments that always valorize the war. The

Japan has always been looked inferior and down evaluated in the American history. It is the time to make change upon the US governmental policy to observe other nations.

The next mythical connection is of Pandora. In the English literature, there is a famous literary myth of Pandora, who is thought to have brought sufferings and diseases to the world because of her curiosity to the box given by King Zeus to seduce Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus. The present situation has resulted a despair and pessimism. The postmodern literary trends of writing deal with such type of despair and pessimism in the modern humans. The hope has been lost in the contemporary humans. One has made depression and frustration their friends as none has been out of such alienation and depression. The only hope that has to be in human has also been lost in the present time. Vonnegut argues “Every evil to which human flesh is heir came out of it. The last thing to come out of the box was *hope*. It flew away”(120). This is a serious metaphor for the presentation of present human beings. The hope has been lost in the present human beings. So, the Timequake has been an inciting factor to reduce hope and free will in humans. The social and economic determinism has been replaced by cosmic determinism. The shrinking of universe has resulted loss of hope which has been reflected through the writer’s presentation in the test of zapping of the universe.

Likewise, Vonnegut connects his novel to the Holocaust where millions of Jewish people were killed. Also he makes connection to his own previous texts. This is also an orientation to holocaust literature. For this, he brings an anecdote to present the identity crisis of German Americans and how Germans are viewed in American societies. The patriotic feelings of German-Americans towards America have always been charged with negative comment and regarded a fake patriotism. So, the German-Americans should express their patriotism by engaging themselves in the war as

American soldiers. Vonnegut writes:

When I took a job in Boston as advertising copywriter, because I was broke, an account executive asked me what kind of name Vonnegut was. I said, "German." He said, "Germans killed six million of my cousins." You want to know why I don't have AIDS, why I'm not HIV-positive like so many other people? I don't fuck around. It's simple as that. (36)

The anecdote presents the sufferings the German-Americans have to face in America. Though this anecdote sounds simple but this is serious depiction of German-Americans in contemporary American societies. This is also a connection to holocaust literature. The Germans have been viewed as murderers of millions of Jewish people. This also clearly speaks the American attitudes to the German people. Being the German descendent in America, he always advocated for the renewal of identities of Germans in crowd of America. This anecdote clearly speaks the writer's depiction of his love and true feelings towards Germans.

Next reference is of the Second World War. In this book, Vonnegut's involvement in the war as American soldier has been strongly portrayed which makes a connection to the war. He also talks about the possibility of the third world war. In his previous novel *Slaughter-House-Five*, Vonnegut presents how he was captured as prisoner of the war and stayed in the slaughter house. The war has been metaphorically compared to the slaughter house where lot of innocent loses their lives. Vonnegut writes:

I myself was captured intact during the battle. Germany, in order to conserve its resources, has stopped making its own Bingo games. Because of that, and because the grownups in the bunker have been so busy during the rise of Hitler, and now his fall, the Goebbels kids are the only ones who know how



the game is played. They learn from a neighbor kid, whose family owned a prewar Bingo set. (49)

Vonnegut clarifies his involvement in the Second World War. The Bingo game has been compared to a war. The bunkers during the war have been so busy. It shows the massive involvement of the people during the war. Time and again, he brings the reference of the wars to make a satire upon the contemporary American policy of valorizing war. Goebbels, the then Hitlerian propagandist minister has intensified the Second World War. And the kids in the literal sense, refers to those war-mongers of the present American society. Even Vonnegut brings the reference of Vietnam War to justify how the war has been the source of devastation and destruction of American societies and sentiments.

Kurt Vonnegut has critiqued the grand narratives of the American societies. He has continuously shown incredulity towards the grand narratives of American culture. Thus, in this sense this is demystification and deconstruction of the grand narratives of America. Lyotard argues that postmodernism suspects grand narratives and ideologies of the west. The established systems and ideologies cannot work further now and it is the time to have suspicion upon those grand ideologies. The so-called sanity of the west has been attacked by the writer. The war has been functioning as a business. The more war can be waged, the more the capital can be added in American economy. This mentality worked. The war materials like planes, gun-powders, bombs, missiles etc. can be sold. Even the presence of god or religion has been attacked in this novel. Likewise, the marriage system of America has been attacked by the writer. The marriage has been regarded as a kind of business.

The several constructed stories of America have been attacked by the writer. This further helps to raise the level of consciousness in the readers. Vonnegut argues

that the so-called sanity of the west is to be attacked. Therefore, he comes forward to put suspicion upon those grand narratives of the west. He is critiquing the American established values and traditions in particular and the western in general. He links the fact to fiction to give impression upon the readers that the fiction could be factual and fact could be fictional. It strongly critiques the American policies even after its defeat in the world wars and Vietnam War. Linda Hutcheon gives clear analytical introduction of postmodernism. She raises how postmodernism is a high political challenge to the dominant ideologies of the western world. To her “the postmodern involves a paradoxical installing as well as subverting of conventions – including conventions of the representation of the subject” (14). It also investigates nature, limits and possibilities of art. Hutcheon writes that postmodernism desires to undercut elitism and breakdown the social barriers.

The sociological spheres of societies have always been encouraged to war orientations. Vonnegut writes “Imagine this: A great American university gives up football in the name of sanity. It turns its vacant stadium into a bomb factory. So much for sanity”(15). Though the writer urges the readers to imagine upon the event of how the football stadiums have been turned to the bomb factories, but it is also the fact that this has been encouraged by the American government. The social activities have been discouraged by the American government. The involvement in war has been regarded as sanity. So-called sanity of America has been criticized.

This is an encouragement of American government upon the people to run bomb factories. But the writer critiques the policy of the government that it is not a justifiable to run bomb factories rather the sports and education is to be prioritized. Even the people who makes bomb are respected as noble people. They are also awarded with noble prizes. Bomb manufactures are always encouraged in American

societies. “A man creates a hydrogen bomb for a paranoid Soviet Union, makes sure it will work, and then wins a Nobel Peace Prize” (15). Even the USSR encouraged people to make hydrogen bombs. And US also promoted such types of factories. The US government thinks that the more nuclear weapons are produced, the more security is guaranteed. But the writer critiques this opinion of promoting nuclear weapons. The US government thinks it only produces the sane and powerful citizens. So, the definition of sanity has been attacked by the writer.

Similarly, Vonnegut talks about the possibility of the third atomic bomb that was ordered to be dropped in Japan. He argues that the pilot who was assigned to drop bomb titled *Joy's Pride* in Yokohama in Japan would think himself and his mother as a celebrity. The mother would cross the limitation of happiness once she knows that her son has dropped bomb successfully in Yokohama. The attack on Japan has been celebrated in America. In the name of advocating peace and happiness, thousands of people have been murdered in the wars. America thinks itself as a profunder of peace and prosperity but still makes massive slaughtering of the people. Vonnegut writes “As the plane neared its target, the pilot mused out loud on the intercom that his mother, the obstetrics nurse, would be a celebrity back home after they did what they were about to do” (17). This highlights that the war has been valorized in the context of America.

The Americans are always encouraged to participate in the war thinking war is only solution to get peace, fame and prosperity. The above lines also clarify that one gets fame and popularity after the involvement in war and killing people. Killing people is regarded as a way to gain peace. It makes a clear image of how a soldier feels once he is about to drop bombs in foreign territories and how the parents feel once they know that their children are flying planes with bombs. It does not show fear

and love of parents towards their children instead they work as a motivator. Thus it is an attack upon the sentiments of America that valorize war and think war can be solution to any kinds of hurdles and burden that come on the way. It is an epic narrative of America to think war as business.

War has always been linked to business. The more wars can be waged the more profit can be gained. This sentiment has been working in US history since it became victorious and decisive after the Second World War. Vonnegut claims that the First World War resulted the Great Depression in 1930s. The American dreams started to be criticized thereafter. The failure of the dreams resulted depression, isolation and pessimism, which started to be noted down in literary works thereafter. Even Vonnegut highlights the results of Great Depression and the world wars. With the help of his spokesperson, Vonnegut presents how much the devastation and destruction the wars brought. Vonnegut asserts:

I wouldn't have missed the Great Depression or my part in World War Two for anything. Trout asserted at the clambake that our war would live forever in show biz, as other wars would not, because of the uniform of the Nazis . . . we are evidently preparing, he said, "to fight World War Three in the midst of an enormous Spanish omelet." (26)

Vonnegut clearly mentions that he would not miss his part in Great Depression and World War Two. This brings the intensity of writer's sufferings to the mind of the readers. The depression wounded his parents psychologically. Even his siblings also went through disasters that wounded the writer and made to produce this text. The text clarifies the shrinking of the universe which justifies the intensity of writer's sufferings. The lines further support the writer's claim of America as agent of war and profit-maker. The main plan is to gain profit and continue war which can uplift

economy of America and thus remaining as superpower always.

The war has been compared to a suicide by the writer in this novel. Vonnegut brings his imaginary work *Bunker Bingo Party* to make readers know well about the war that resulted in destruction and further claims that this war has been the suicide bomb of the western civilization. In this imaginary work, Vonnegut writes the setting of the work is “Adolf Hitler’s commodious bombproof bunker underneath the ruins of Berlin, Germany, at the end of World War Two in Europe” (49). He argues “In that story, Trout calls his war, and my war also “Western Civilization’s second unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide” (49). Definitely the war can be compared to the westerners’ attempt to commit suicide because in the name of profit and business they are destroying themselves. He compares the suicide of Hitler to Westerners’ suicide attempt. Hitler committed suicide because he was sure that he would get his downfall soon. Instead of going in his track he chose he preferred to die. He found death as a solution to his upcoming destruction from others. Therefore, he chose to die himself taking cyanide and shooting his head rather than getting killed. The Nazi forces surrendered to Allied forces after the death of Hitler. So, the present civilization should one day surrender to nuclear weapons. The humanity will split in the name of weapons. The North Korea and US have been competing for powerful storage of weapons but it brings downfall in humanity. The ultra-groups and nations should pay cost for this unless they raise voice for humanity and humanism. It can be applied to US in particular because America generally advocates for war in the name of peace and humanity. The writer tries to raise the voice of humanism in this novel. He critiques the malfunctions of the human civilization and wants them to drive in the right path. Thus, Vonnegut warns that the westerners should not repeat such types of wrongdoings in the history. If such doings get repeated in the history, then this works

as missile that destroys the human civilization.

Being American is like being man in America. To be American is like being man. One should be ready to give up any kind of prejudices before entering America. Being American is to serve America and going against American enemies. Vonnegut, the writer himself served as a soldier in America. His uncle Dan also praised him for serving in the US army. He brings an anecdote once he returned from the US armies. He writes “When I got home from my war, my uncle Dan clapped me on the back, and he bellowed, “You’re a *man* now”” (52). Serving in war and being real servant of US is like being real citizen. So called sanity and definition of US as citizen, has been critiqued by the writer. The then definition of being man was to engage in war victoriously and go according to national rules and policies. The writer was praised a lot for involving in the war. He was then only called man. So, the writer critiques this opinion of being sane and man. This is indirect promotion of war and business of American government. The jingoistic thoughts are raised in youths of America and are encouraged to involve in war. The response of Vonnegut’s uncle Dan to Vonnegut shows the impression of the American values upon the people. Though they are of German origins, but they cannot remain far from those policies of the United States.

Likewise, Vonnegut attacks on marriage system and religion of America which are always the grand narratives in the west. Jesus has been regarded as a creator of this universe but none knows where He is or how He is despite fake claims upon His presence. Religion has been an epic narration in the west since 2000 years. The people thoughts and psychologies have been guided by few powerful religious groups in the name of religion and god’s presence. They have ruled upon the peoples’ mind and set up their ideologies to large extent. Vonnegut writes “The creator of the universe has been to us unknowable so far” (54). This suggests the writer’s suspicion

to the existing religion of America. He brings his war buddy Bernard O'Hare who "lost his faith upon Roman Catholic during World War Two" (54). The faith upon religion gets in crisis once the war destroys everything and humans' expectations come wrong. The people started to question the existence of God after the two great wars which shattered the human sentiments and feelings. Skepticism, one of the postmodern literary features came in a dominant way after the rise of idea about atheism, which strongly rejects the presence of god. Thus the religion which has been regarded a master narrative has also been critiqued with help of his war buddy and character Bernard O'Hare. Marriage as a social system has also been critiqued by the writer. The book *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemmingway attacks on institution of marriage which has been referred by the writer. It indirectly hints that the marriage has always been regarded as a source of security and certainty. So, everyone deserves to settle down properly. And in the name of settling lives properly, people prefer wealth and possessions of others which has been critiqued.

Self-reflexivity is text's consciousness about the text itself. It is also called meta-fictional self-consciousness. It can also be linked to an autobiography. The reflection of writer's self in the literary work is self-reflexivity. There are many events mentioned by the writer where his self has been reflected time and again. This novel is also auto-biographical because the writer's self has been reflected in the novel. To Smith and Watson:

Autobiography, now the most commonly used term for such life-writing, thus described writing being produced at a particular historical juncture, the early modern period in the West with its concept of the self-interested individual intention assessing the status of the soul or the meaning of public achievement. By the eighteenth century notions of self-interest, self-

consciousness, and self-knowledge informed the figure of the “Enlightened individual” described by philosophers and social and political theorists. (2)

The text also is a production of self-interested individual intent. It is a mixture of fact and fiction. Vonnegut is reflecting his self through this novel. It presents the writer’s text consciousness. The writer highlights his expression of writer’s suffering and suspension of free-will, in a sense self-reflection. It also gains public achievement. The writer assesses the status of his soul and reflects upon the hurdles and sufferings faced during the publication of his novel.

Vonnegut laments for his old age, compares himself to Hemmingway, defines his then position, his marital life, his own stories and so on to reflect his conditions and even about the status of the text. He claims that the fisherman Hemmingway presents in his story *The Old man and the Sea* got lot of sufferings as he had to wait 84 days to get fish in sea. But “before he could get it to shore, though, sharks bit off all the meat on the skeleton” (10). Thus this text *Timequake* is also the result of hardships and struggles. The universe gets shrunk for 10 years and all the progress made already shifted to the past from 2001 to 1991. And several people critiqued his writings as they got dissatisfied with Vonnegut’s literary products. And the people are compared to sharks that attacked marlin captured by old man.

The lamentation upon the old age is seen in the writer. He regrets for being in this stage after the death of his parents and sister. He is pessimist in as sense, he compares his life to an old stuff which works none or has no value. He wants his readers to have pity upon him. “Enough! Fifty-five is a long time ago for me now. Have pity!” (10). He urges his readers to have pity on him because he is worried of the situation he is going through. The time he has passed is a long time for the writer because it always brought sufferings and pessimism despite few hope. In this sense,



there is reflection of the writer's self. It is how he presents his lamentation upon his growing age. He even describes about his marital life. He claims "I have been married twice, divorced once. Both my wives, Jane and now Jill, have said on occasion that I am much like Trout in that regard" (28). He reveals the private side of his life though there is fictional part in it. Vonnegut worked as the honorary president of the American Humanist Association. And his aim is to raise humanistic voice among his readers and wants awareness in his audiences. By raising the humanistic voices, the writer wants to raise the level of consciousness in the readers. It is sowing the seed of humanism. His narrative and literature has redemptive power that re-imagines the self and the world. He also claims that imagination and art are essential for the cultivation of meaning. Vonnegut is thus deconstructing the novel as aesthetic form and renovate human and by doing so he inaugurate new histories. *Timequake* means disturbance in flow of time in which universe shrunk for ten years and suffered a crisis in self-confidence. And the writer provides remedies to the disasters brought by *Timequake*.

In a nutshell, it becomes clear that Vonnegut makes self-reflection and orientations to the history, society and literature. Vonnegut draws the issues related to familial and societal events, traditional values and small town America which are common themes in his novels. He describes his family members like his children, father, mother and other social events. All these sort of events related to his family members arise a kind of sympathy to him on the part of the readers. The pessimist world had depressed him and to get free from the alienation and isolation, he takes writing as a source to heal his wound caused by the death of his parents. His powerful postmodern device, the black humor harshly attacks the vanities of late capitalist system, the disaster wrought upon ecologies, war, social injustices as well as inequalities attempts to sow a seed of humanism in modern inhumane and cruel

world, and raise the level of consciousness attacking the grand narratives of the west. He presents the U.S. as a country which has terrible impacts of late capitalism, and fertile space for absurdity and loneliness. The novel was written few decades after the humiliating defeat of U.S. with Vietnam during 60s and even during the gulf war. And the United States of America was arguing for so-called democracy and peace killing innocent civilians in Gulf war, producing and selling gun powders and nuclear weapons. Written in the late twentieth century, this novel makes experimentation with ontology of time reflecting the writer's self and thus making historical, social and literary orientations. By highlighting absurdity and loneliness after Timequake, Kurt Vonnegut counters the established trends of writing, late capitalism and commodified and corporate American culture.

Most of the works of Vonnegut are focused on seeking for a universal remedy to human ills and human existence of the time. He proposes the potential remedies to the incomprehensible horrors that have been plaguing our societies. And his aim is to raise humanistic voice among his readers and wants awareness in his audiences. By raising the humanistic voices, the writer wants to raise the level of consciousness in the readers. It is sowing the seed of humanism. His narrative and literature has redemptive power that re-imagines the self and the world. He also claims that imagination and art are essential for the cultivation of meaning. Vonnegut is thus deconstructing the novel as aesthetic form and renovate human and by doing so he inaugurate new histories.

Timequake means disturbance in flow of time in which universe shrunk for ten years which brought many evils in societies. The writer brings those intertextual references from different literary and non-literary fields to supplement evidences to his readers that the language of the present will not be sufficient to provide message.

Also the writer reflects upon his family and his own consciousness in the text. With the help of his alter-ego Kilgore Trout, Vonnegut depicts his attitude to the late capitalism and post war scenario especially in the west. Thus, doing so, the writer provides remedies to the disasters brought by Timequake. He believes that the legitimacy given to traditional science, philosophical discourses are meta-narratives, which have now become imperfect or neglected. It is countering of those epic narratives that have become invalid.

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