

**The Hero as a Deep-Diver: Existential Problematics in
Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* & Jerzy
Kosinski's *Pinball***

Dissertation

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Irfan Mohammad Malik

Under the supervision of

Prof A H Tak



Post-Graduate Department of English

University of Kashmir, Srinagar

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P. G Department of English
University of Kashmir, Srinagar
Hazratbal, Srinagar -190006.

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation titled “The Hero as a Deep-Diver: Existential Problematics in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* & Jerzy Kosinski’s *Pinball*” submitted by **Irfan Mohammad Malik** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy (M Phil) in English, is an independent and original piece of research work carried out under my supervision. This research work has not been submitted, in part or in full, to any University/ Institute for any degree. The candidate has fulfilled all the statutory requirements for the submission of this dissertation.

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Contents

Introduction

Chapter I

Postmodern American Fiction: Agony or Ecstasy

Chapter II

Breakfast of Champions: Life as a Tentative Tangling of Tendrils

Chapter III

Pinball: Quandary of Sex, Violence, and Disguise

Conclusion

Select Bibliography

Introduction

American novelists of the late nineteenth century and twentieth century have been quite adept at creating deep memorable characters. These novelists often used their protagonists for higher purposes, such as endeavouring to construct a critique of the times by placing the characters in opposition to their respective societies. As a result, in American novel, the hero often became an unassuming type of hero who courageously defied the conventional beliefs and ignorant assumptions of society. The American fictional hero is constantly confronted by an ugly challenging reality; that is society and its pressures of conformity. In American tradition society is never a neutral force; rather it is intrusively active force which encroaches on the lives of individuals. The hero can never ignore or neglect it. He is forced to fight against a suffocating society and repelling reality.

In American tradition, novelists have always taken the term “New World” with literal seriousness. America was perceived not as paradise regained, but as the original paradise, a world starting up again and a second chance for human race. This sense of beginning anew gave birth to a new type of hero who shook off the European baggage of the past and could be seen at the threshold of experience. The most remarkable characteristic of American hero was his innocence and was identified

most readily with, as R.W.B Lewis observes, Adam before the fall. Writers like Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, Cooper and Henry James created the identity of an initiatory protagonist who was “morally prior” (Lewis 1955: 128-29) to the world he inhabited. The first hero to take plunge into this world is James Fennimore Cooper’s Deerslayer. He is a self-reliant young man who seems to have sprung from nowhere. But, after Deerslayer, there begins the march of complex and sometimes tragic heroes of Hawthorne, Melville and Henry James etc. With the arrival of Hawthorne and Melville on the literary scene the American hero-quester moves into a darker universe. The Emersonian “single genuine self against the world” (Lewis 1955: 195) becomes the solitary self pitted against an alien, hostile indifferent world.

The evolution of American hero as Adam in the fiction of New World begins with Natty Bumpoo, the hero of Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*. From Natty Bumpoo to Robert Montgomery Bird’s Nathan Slaughter there is shift in character of hero in response to the new environment. Nathan is an innocent man of love transformed by a collision with evil. In American fiction Nathan Slaughter becomes the first figure of an outraged Adam, “hurled out of Eden by a visitation of the devil” (Lewis 1955: 109). In Nathaniel Hawthorne and after him in Melville the isolated hero, who is at war with the social norms, begins to

replace Adamic personality in the New World. Heroes of Hawthorne and Melville are complex and at times tragic figures; disillusioned and lost. In fact the whole range of the American novels from Cooper to Hemingway is a re-enactment of this lostness or the sense of isolation. Heroes like Hester, Ahab, Huck Finn or Santiago etc. may show heroic endurance, but they only enhance the tragic dimensions. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain created prototype of American fictional hero whose predicament is an archetypal one and has been shared by heroes till this day. Reality is viewed through the innocent but troubled eyes of boy-hero Huck Finn whose eyes are set on the frontier in which “the present and future have been merged into an organic presence of the past” (Rao 1979: 3). The boy-hero achieves his education in selfhood by fleeing from the school of civilization into the wilderness of innocence. Huck’s gesture of adolescent resistance symbolically represents “an affirmation of the dream of freedom and a limitless self-expansion as constituting the education of the American Adam” (Rao 1979: 3). Unlike Mark Twain, Henry James presents a different mode of education for his hero. The Jamesian hero is not a reluctant adolescent as Huck Finn. He is rather hospitable to the general chances of life; however a Jamesian hero mostly fails in his American mission.

Twentieth century American novel seems to have drifted not much from its original course. The conflict and tension have increased, characters have become more complex and the dimensions broadened. During and after the First World War a new cycle of literary growth and maturity came into existence in American tradition. By 1940s and 50s novelists like Hemingway, Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Farrell, Dos Passos, Steinbeck, Saul Bellow, Malamud and a host of others had established themselves as major literary talents in America. All these novelists follow and perpetuate the tradition rather than altering it. Like their predecessors, heroes of these novelists are also at odds with their respective social orders. For instance, heroes of Thomas Wolfe grapple with the society they inhabit and are defeated. Steinbeck hero laments the exploitation of a common man by a society controlled by rich, but at the same time he believes in the possibility of improving the social order. And heroes of Farrell are victims of a hopeless social order. These heroes share certain characteristics of the heroes of Melville, Cooper and Thoreau who dramatise the condition of an isolated individual on the outskirts of society.

The American hero is a rebel who struggles not only for survival, but also for improving the social institutions. In American fiction written

after the Second World War, the hero is plunged again and again into the disruptive rituals of the actual world. For example, in novels like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, J.D Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Adventures of Augie March* by Saul Bellow, the hero is willing to cope with as much of the world as is available to him, without ever completely submitting to the world's determining categories. Ellison's hero is a nameless Negro, Salinger's an unstable adolescent and Bellow's hero is an obliquely oriented Chicago Jew. What they have in common is the heritage of "moral priority" they inherit from their predecessors. Each of these heroes represent the potentialities of the classical American hero and behind these heroes stand their Adamic predecessors like Arthur Mervin, Pierre, Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer, Huck Finn and all others.

In the novels written after Second World War, the hero who once started his journey as an initiate ends as a rebel-victim, especially in the novels of Jewish American writers like Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud. Moreover, in contemporary American scenario the picture of innocent American Adam has been "frowned quite out of existence" (Lewis 1955: 195). He is an existential victim struggling hard to find his lost self in the whirlwind of mass society. Theorists of American fiction, like Ihab Hassan, believe that the heroes of Post-War fiction are anti-heroes. The term refers only to the quality of the hero's actions and not to

his passions which hero and anti-hero share alike. It is clear that these characters are peculiar kinds of heroes. They do not significantly change the prevailing social condition. In fact the primary characteristic of the hero is his awareness of himself and deep in his psyche “the hero creates the aboriginal self” (Hassan1961: 327). As long as it is possible to mediate between self and world, the anarchy in heroic soul remains passive and the hero appears as hero. However, once the possibility to mediate between self and world is over, surrender or recoil remains the only choice for the self. When the self bars its insatiable nature; the hero becomes anti-hero (Hassan 1961: 327-28).

In the aftermath of the World War II, American writers, particularly the novelists, portrayed their fictional personages as humans agonizingly wrestling with the unsettling and unpredictable ethos of mass society, a disjointed and fragmented society which no longer rendered itself to any certain description. The ethos of mass society created a new compulsion and novelists changed the contours of novel to cater to such a brand of society and culture. In fact, the Cold War era of 1950's and 1960's in the twentieth century had already alarmed the writers, especially poets and novelists that the technique of creativity had to be remoulded in order to cater to the totally altered socio-political and economic condition. This, according to Ihab Hassan, gave birth to “an

agnosticism of fictional forms” (Hassan 1961: 105) and the contemporary novelist assumed the role of a socio-cultural spokesman of his age and times forcing the novel to adopt new treatment in terms of plot, characterization, theme and imagery.

Younger novelists of America, profoundly shaken by the bombing of Hiroshima and the threat of human annihilation, found the conventional trend of novel writing inadequate for treating war’s nightmarish implications. Novelists like Saul Bellow, William S Burroughs, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, Jerzy Kosinski and John Hawks etc., weaved their fictional works as representations of a recreated image of the human identity, the human self; thereby illustrating a totally different protagonistic situation in their novelistic worlds. Post War American novelists presented their protagonists as existential explorers across the afflicting spectrum of *deculture* materialism and *dehumanisation*. The novelistic hero is portrayed as a contemporary Odysseus embarking on his own odyssey of self-discovery and identity.

Postmodern American novel, unlike its other versions, profoundly concerns itself with socio-cultural issues and the impact thereof on the contemporary self. Generally, in the postmodern novels the perennial problem of the American hero is the encroachment of society upon the

self and these novels, according to Ihab Hassan, exhibit alternative modes of existence as an antidote to the intrusion of the social ethos on the freedom of the self. In postmodern American novel, the fictional protagonists thus become contemporary counterparts of Sisyphean figures engaged in the tasks of attaining self-awareness, identity and sense of belonging. The contemporary American fictional hero, like his predecessors, is a man thoroughly at odds with the society he inhabits. However, the accumulative energy of such heroes becomes their energy of defeat and they eventually end up as rebel-victims, showing close resemblance with the Kafkaesque syndrome of existential problematic.

The patterns of fictional experience within the cosmos of any novel written during the closing decades of the twentieth century presented the novelistic hero as a “deep diver” searching for an alternative mode of existence across the turbulent waves of postmodern socio-cultural ethos. The hero finds himself misfit to the modes of behaviour that the mass society thrusts upon him:

The central fact about fiction in a mass society may be this: that as the modes of behaviour congeal into hard crust, the hero attempts to discover alternate modes of life on the levels beneath the frozen surface. The new hero is a diver, a subterranean and this account for the aesthetic distance which the formal resources of the novel put between him and the standardized realm of social behaviour.

(Hassan 1961: 107)

Hence the hero is forced to dive beneath the surface, thereby lacking some measure of definition as well as the basis to differentiate between what is illusive and what is real.

Postmodern American novelists are conscious of the fact that an average American is ironically living the American Dream which has now attained nightmarish proportions. Kurt Vonnegut, Jerzy Kosinski and a host of contemporary novelists attribute the menace of obsessive materialism to man's excessive and increasing dependence on technology. The creative response becomes one of pessimism and surrender. All the efforts to make some sense of the fractured reality prove to be futile thereby forcing the writer to resort to agnosticism of fictional forms that is, the novel no longer finds "in the vast spectacle of collective life a mirror to the pattern it seeks to create" (Hassan 1961: 105). Focus is more on the creation of new categories of form which finally rest on the values of a hero confronted by a world which is comprehensible in some specific areas of experience but bewildering as a whole. The contemporary novelist dealing with the disabling and debilitating sociological milieu discovers his true meaning and true self by adopting innovative forms: creation is replaced by *decreation*, convention by innovation, realism by surrealism and the hero by a protagonist. The world inhabited by the hero has taken the form of a

postmodern absurdist and meaningless universe with no well defined boundaries and parameters. The writer at times himself becomes the protagonist in his fictional cosmos, thereby narrowing the gap between the internal and the external fiction, reality and dream, the historical and the contemporary. Both Kurt Vonnegut and Jerzy Kosinski repeatedly portray their fictional heroes as postmodern individuals perpetually engaged in unraveling the mystery of human predicament and place them in a protagonistic situation that closely resembles their own position in a decreative postmodern society.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., a fourth generation German-American, was born in Indianapolis on 22 November 1922, to Kurt Vonnegut Sr., and Edith Lieber Vonnegut. From 1936 to 1940 he attended Shortridge High School, Indianapolis, where during his junior and senior years he was one of the editors of its daily newspaper *The Echo*. In Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, Vonnegut studied biochemistry besides working as a managing editor and columnist for the *Cornell Daily Sun*. The author got enlisted in United States Army and was sent to Carnegie Institute of Technology and University of Tennessee to study mechanical engineering. During World War II, Vonnegut, as an infantry combat scout along with many other American soldiers was captured as a prisoner-of-war in the battle of bulge from where he was sent to “open”

German city of Dresden to work in factory producing vitamins supplement for pregnant women. Dresden was firebombed by Allied Bombers on February 13, 1945, when Vonnegut and his fellow prisoners-of-war escaped death by being lodged in an underground meat-locker of a slaughterhouse. The Dresden experience left an indelible imprint of shock and horror on his soul and psyche.

The horrible experience of Dresden lacerated Vonnegut's mind and soul to the extent that in spite of desiring eagerly to write a book on this horrible episode, he could not do so for as long as twenty five years until the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five* in 1969. The historic tryst with Dresden and the resultant experience proved decisive in shaping Vonnegut's creative sensibility and career. The hero of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim, becomes Vonnegut's alter-ego and his own fictional persona undergoing the same horrible experience as his creator did. Billy, like Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout in *Breakfast of Champions*, agonizingly wrestles with the problem of finding the meaning of life.

With the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut enters a phase of literary career where he views man as a passive recipient of shocks that society and universe at large offer him. From *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) to *Timequake* (1997) Vonnegut invariably shows the insignificance of earthlings who have lost their free will. *Breakfast of*

Champions (1973), a fiftieth birthday present to himself emerges as Vonnegut's yet another tryst with the cardinal interrogatives about man's loss of free will and the meaning of life. In another novel, *Hocus Pocus* (1990), Vonnegut employs the synthesizing elements like past and present, science-fiction and flashback technique that enable him to reflect the prismatic absurdity of postmodern American society. In *Timequake* (1997), the world is made to go back by ten years to restart following the same course again only to highlight the disheartening fact of loss of human free-will and choice. Vonnegut's literary career was cut short by his unfortunate tragic and accidental death due to a fall from the stairs in his own house on 11 April, 2007.

As a true Pioneer of postmodern America fiction, Vonnegut encapsulates in his work the social, political and cultural history of America from 1950s onwards. His fiction is "more the authentic idiom of the whole culture, with its contradictions, dissonances and dreams as parts of the full orchestration" (Klinkowtiz and Lawler 1977: xii). As an infallible humanist, Vonnegut "is forever propelling us to recall that common humanity, a sense of decency, and good manners are bases of civilized, and civilized behaviour is within everybody's capabilities" (Klinkowtiz and Lawler 1977: xii). Though the tone of Vonnegut's fiction is pessimistic about the future prospects of mankind, he ends most

of his observations on an optimistic note. In this context, Thomas Marvin states “even though he does not expect that his work will improve society immediately, Vonnegut remains optimistic in the long run it will contribute to gradual improvement by teaching people to be more humane” (Marvin 2002: 15). Vonnegut looks at the world from a cosmic vantage point to ridicule the presumptuousness of man’s indulgence in life as an everlasting phenomenon.

Being one of the major novelists of Post War America, Vonnegut takes the position of a spokesman and portrays an unfeeling, robotic society and an American culture plagued with despair, greed and apathy. For his satirical and pessimistic novels as well as for his critique of excessive scientific advancements and mankind’s unbridled race for technology, Vonnegut has been labeled as a social satirist, science-fiction writer as well as black-humourist. But Vonnegut denies all these labels because he is primarily a serious writer committed to welfare of human race. Robert Scholes observes that “Vonnegut rejects the traditional satirist’s faith in the efficacy of satire as a reforming instrument. He has more subtle faith in humanizing value of laughter” (Scholes 1967: 145). For Vonnegut, “the element of death, fear and humour are almost interchangeable, the presence of one leading quite naturally to a consideration of the other two” (Buck 1975: 181). In his fiction,

Vonnegut employs a grim black sense of amusement, simply to confront bravely the black depressing facts of human existence, which is one of the major concerns of his fictional work. He lived his life more like his fictional heroes and died the way he believed about the fundamental nature of human existence.

Jerzy Kosinski was born in Lodz, Poland of Jewish parents on June 14, 1933. In 1939, soon after the Nazi invasion of Poland, Kosinski as a young boy got separated from his parents and was cast adrift in rural Poland for the entire duration of the World War II. At the age of nine, in a confrontation with a hostile peasant crowd, Kosinski lost the power of speech, but luckily at the age of fifteen, he regained it in a skiing accident. Completing high school in one year, he entered the University of Lodz to earn a Master of Arts in History in (1953) and Master of Arts in Political Sociology (1955). Kosinski became the youngest Associate Professor and state grantee at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. On December 20 1957, twenty-four years old with a rudimentary knowledge of English, Kosinski entered the United States of America.

In 1960, Kosinski made his debut in English language with a collection of essays: *The Future is Ours, Comrade*, which is a socio-political analysis of Russian life, published under the pen-name of Joseph Novak. Pen-name becomes a means of disguise for the author and

disguise, incidentally, becomes a marked and repetitive characteristic among Kosinski's fictional protagonists. Coupled with violence, disguise also constitutes a prominent postmodernist existential motif. In 1962, Kosinski published *No Third Path* as a sequel to his non-fictional English debut. In the same year he married Mary Hayward Weir, the young widow of a steel magnate from Pittsburgh. It was during his marriage to Mary that Kosinski turned toward writing fiction, producing *The Painted Bird* in 1965, and attaining the status of a celebrity. The novel was translated into more than thirty languages. In 1968, his second novel, *Steps*, was published. Written with the assistance of a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation, the novel won him the National Book Award in 1969. A succession of subsequent works followed: *Being Their* (1971), *The Devil Tree* (1973), *Cockpit* (1975), *Blind Date* (1977), *passion play* (1979), *Pinball* (1982), *The Hermit of the 69th Street* (1988). On May 2, 1991, Jerzy Kosinski did something which none of his novelistic protagonists could ever do: he committed suicide. Kosinski, the independent-minded child of postmodernist de-doxification, executed the final act of detotalizing totalisation with a flourish. For his innumerable friends, admirers and readers, Kosinski's sad and sudden demise, remains to this day the greatest act of betrayal on part of a writer.

A discussion of the twentieth century post-war American fiction clearly and prominently establishes that these novels celebrate the anti-hero, a man thoroughly at odds with the times but imprisoned by them. However, Kosinski's heroes outgrow this concept of despair and his anti-heroes proclaim their own specific dimensions, being either rebels or renegades, possessing substance in their own psychological and social, or anti-social definitions. Critics like Samuel Coale believe that in Kosinski's fiction there is an endless and excruciatingly modern quest for an elusive self. Kosinski himself writes about it in *The Art of the Self*: "Today, the basis of horror is often theft of the self, the fear of having one's identity overshadowed" (Kosinski 1968: 29). Kosinski's heroes, more like his own self, are formed only by the formlessness of events that seem to imprison them totally. This cinematic self, "essentially different from the well-rounded, literary characters of earlier fiction reveals the main feature of Kosinski's art" (Coale 1974: 360). While commenting on the 'self' as used by Kosinski in his fiction Byron L. Sherwin comments: "For Kosinski as for Kierkegaard, the Socratic admonition 'know thyself' may be interpreted as 'choose thyself', choice—freedom of action—is an essential ingredient in establishing a vision of the self, an awareness of the self" (Sherwin 1981: 22). In his heroes, Kosinski resurrects an absurdist and lost self. In this connection Daniel J. Cahill draws parallels

between the worlds a Kosinskian hero inhabits to the dark irrational universe of Kafka: man trapped in a world of dissolving meaning where there are few fragments to support or help against his ruin (Cahill 1972: 121).

Jerzy Kosinski's novels confront the art of writing fiction from a unique and personal point of view. He is a writer whose past includes a rejection of his mother tongue, in order to adopt an alien one, and to make the nature of his fiction quite aggressive. In his fictional works, Kosinski focuses upon man's frustrated inability to find and place himself in this world. The tension exists between man's life as a series of events and his struggle to find some sort of meaning that may possibly connect these disjointed events. His fiction cannot be dismissed as the product of prurient and masochistic imagination, as there is nothing that does not happen in a postmodern society.

The present study concentrates on the problematics that the protagonists of Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* and Jerzy Kosinski's *Pinball* negotiate in their daily lives. Chapter I, **Postmodern American Fiction: Agony or Ecstasy**, gives a brief and synoptic description of postmodernism and postmodern fiction with special reference to its American version. In Chapter II, ***Breakfast of Champions: Life as a Tentative Tangling of Tendrils***, the

main focus remains on the protagonistic situation of the two heroes Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout who inhabit a nightmarish landscape on which apocalypse is looming large and are agonizingly wrestling to find out the meaning of life in a suffocating and meaningless mass society. Chapter III, ***Pinball: Quandary of Sex, Violence, and Disguise***, deliberates on sex, violence and disguise as intrinsic components of the postmodernist ecstasy and the way disguise is used by the protagonists to escape from the intrusion of society upon the self. The debt to published scholarship on Kurt Vonnegut and Jerzy Kosinski and their works have been acknowledged in the form of references and bibliography. In the **Conclusion**, the findings of the individual chapters have been summed up.

Chapter-I

Postmodern American Fiction: Agony or Ecstasy

The term 'postmodern' is slippery in nature though occupying a privileged position in the vocabularies of literary critics and theoreticians, philosophers, cultural anthropologists and sociologists. In fact, so many issues are being discussed under the concept postmodernism that it is almost impossible to examine the boundaries of the concept itself: there are virtually as many postmodernisms as writers or critics professing a commitment to the concept (Hutcheon 1989: 10) . It is very hard to grasp its meaning as the term 'postmodern' can mean different things depending on the context in which it is being used. The origins of the term 'postmodernism' seem to be confused and unsettled because it denies the idea of knowable origins. In literature, the term 'postmodern', began to be used by critics to identify Post-World War II writers who were quite distinct from the modernists of previous generation. The prefix 'post' suggests that postmodernism is inescapably bound up with modernism, either as a replacement or as chronologically i.e. after modernism. The prefix can also be seen to suggest a critical involvement with modernism, rather than claiming the end or replacement of modernism. Postmodernism is seen as both a continuation of the experimentation practiced by writers of modernist period—relying on

fragmentation, paradox , questionable narrators etc.—and a rejection of Enlightenment ideas inherent in modernist literature. There are many accounts of postmodernism, each classifying it differently, but all of them explaining a different aspect of the same story of cultural fragmentation and indeterminacy.

There is no denying that the postmodernism has shifted its base somewhat since it came into circulation sixty years ago, and covers widely different phenomena. Some critics see it as wholly apolitical and for others it is a provocative statement. Ihab Hassan, for example, asserts that postmodernism suffers from a certain degree of semantic instability, that is, no clear consensus about its meaning exists among scholars (Hassan1987: 87). To elaborate it further Hans Bertens observes:

Postmodernism, then means and has meant different things to different people at different conceptual levels, arising from humble literary-critical origins in the 1950s to a level of global conceptualisation in 1980s.

(Bertens 1995: 7)

However, Patricia Waugh remarks that postmodernism tends to be used in three main senses: as a reference to the contemporary cultural epoch, as an artistic practice and as a development in philosophical thought (Waugh 1992: 3).The term postmodernism was used up to 1980s for a range of aesthetic practices such as irony, parody, pastiche, self-

consciousness and self-reflexivity etc. From 1980s onwards, as Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh argue, “the term shifted from functioning primarily as a description of a range of aesthetic practices ..., to a use encompassing a more general shift of thought in a variety of disciplines: art, architecture, music, film, literature, history, philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, fashion technology and other related disciplines” (Rice and Waugh 1989: 2).

In France postmodernism adhering to its conceptualization by Lyotard but drawing from the works of Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, becomes a label to describe the cultural and philosophical condition of a world in which Enlightenment and its other variants were no longer held true. Jean Francois Lyotard in his celebrated text rejects the belief of Enlightenment—ideas such as reason and progress, which are the basics of modernity—and goes on to discard “grand narratives” or metanarratives: theories that claim to be capable of explaining everything and resisting any attempt to alter their form. Lyotard observes:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives....postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.

(Lyotard 1984: xxiv)

Lyotard argues that in the postmodernism the 'great narratives' that are at the very bases of western civilization—religion, Marxism, the idea of progress through the application of rational principles etc.—have at least theoretically been challenged and disproved. Lyotard regards such metanarratives as repressive and tyrannical. All these metanarratives are guilty of having declared themselves universally valid and they have all contributed to the oppression of a large portion of the world. What we need, Lyotard tells us, is 'little narratives'—small scale, modest systems of belief that are strong enough to guide us, but are always conscious of their provisional nature and their local rather than universal applicability. Little narratives are put together on tactical basis by small groups of people to achieve some particular objective and do not pretend to have the solution to all the society's problems. Lyotard believes that "little narratives can help to break down the monopoly exercised by grand narratives" (Sim 2005: 7-9). Lyotard's main objective, therefore, is to discard the authority exercised by grand narratives, an authority that seems to him a threat to individual creativity.

Frederic Jameson uses the term 'postmodernism' as a consumer stage of capitalism, rather than the more widely accepted notion of production being the basis of modernism. For Jameson consumerism is a mode of production where cultural production performs special functions

and takes a specific form. Jameson characterises postmodernism as a cultural dominant, the artistic expression of late or multinational capitalism. Jameson specifically understands postmodern art as being fully integrated into commodity production: whereas the modernists struggle with the problem of the work of art in machine age, inventing forms which, in some cases , were meant to fully resist comodification, the postmodern condition is one in which the artistic and commercial have become inescapably intertwined.

In addition to labeling a historical period, postmodernism has several aspects that distinguish it from predecessors, modernism and realism especially. According to Linda Hutcheon, one of the main features that distinguish postmodernism from modernism is that it “takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement” (Hutcheon 1989: 1) . Any enumeration of such aspects shall certainly remain incomplete, since the very nature of the postmodern involves seemingly endless proliferation. For one thing, as Jameson notes frequently, postmodernity is characterised by a certain lack of historical sense. As Jameson puts it:

It is safest to grasp the concept of postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.

(Jameson 1991: ix)

Jameson believes that culture has been commodified and consequently has become what could be described as 'shallow'. He makes an emphatic claim about the 'depthlessness' of cultural production. There is concern for appearance, surfaces and instant impact which is but ephemeral. In other words, postmodernism appears to be shallow or profoundly superficial.

In postmodern writings there is a sort of disconnection or a break with the past, a loss of shared history that involves a break with a 'perceived community'. This lack of historicity leads to another characteristic of postmodernism that is the subversion of time by space. Postmodernism is often characterised by a profound sense of spatiality. Whereas modernism is 'the era of time, of temporal flux, memory and historical possibility; the postmodern is all about space, juxtaposition, extension and positions' (Foucault 1986: 22).

One more characteristic of postmodernism, what might be thought of as the psychology of the age, is visible in the seeming fragmentation of the subject. The age of realism might be characterised by the process of individuation or subjectivism, by the birth of modern, bourgeoisie individual. The modernist era is marked by the intensification of that individuality, most visible in the form of interiority—expressed through literary techniques like stream of consciousness—which, at its extreme, is

associated with a kind of madness turned inward. If neurosis, or paranoia, is emblematic of the modernist condition, the schizophrenia surely is the model of postmodernism. And for Jean Baudrillard, who gives the old Marxist notion of alienation a different twist, we have lost all sense of authenticity and live in a world-wide simulation that we helplessly take to be reality.

In his book *Simulations*, Baudrillard offered four basic historic phases of the sign: in the first phase, there is a truth, a basic reality that is faithfully represented. In the second phase, this truth or reality still exists, but is distorted or perverted through representation. This truth or reality has gone in the third phase, but we still try to cling to it by masking even its disappearance through different modes of representation. And finally in the fourth phase there exists no relationship between the sign and reality, because there is no longer anything real to reflect. Western society, Baudrillard believes, has entered the fourth phase of development, what he calls the hyperreal—an age in which image dominates, and the real is unknown. As Christopher Bracken succinctly puts it:

The procession of sign before the real ushers the west into a state that Baudrillard calls the hyperreal. The citizens of hyperreality inhabit a simulated world composed of models without origin. Although capitalism otherwise maintains a strict law of equivalence between

commodities it works to undo the equivalence of sign and real because it cannot function outside of reality. Power in today's industrialized societies is a simulation that re-injects referentiality into everyday life to convince people of the gravity of the economy and the necessity of work. Re-establishing the task of fantasy worlds such as Disneyland: they are simulacra that mask the fact that the everyday world is itself a simulacrum.

(Bracken 1999: 507)

Even Michel Foucault established that knowledge in postmodern society is functional—'knowing a thing for not knowing it but for using it'—whereas Jacques Derrida and his disciples assert that in postmodern and post-structural era there are only 'signifiers' and no 'signified' because the very concept of stable reality has vanished and with it disappears the idea of signifieds that signifiers point to.

A common point about postmodern condition—one with perhaps special relevance to representative postmodernist fiction writers—is the notion of pastiche. Pastiche, the imitation of past styles or genres, comes to characterise the postmodern: in the postmodern age, older concepts like originality are suspected if not discarded outright. However, as an artistic practice, pastiche seems to exert some critical energy, attacking and reforming older styles while forming entirely new ones through a kind of collage. But as Frederic Jameson notes in contrasting pastiche and

parody, the critical capacity of postmodern art seems lost by losing the very ground upon which to base itself. As Jameson observes:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a particular unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of linguistic mask, speech in a dead language, but it is a natural practice of such mimicry, without parody's any of ulterior motives, amputated of its satirical impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus a blank parody, a statue without eyeballs.

(Jameson 1991: 17)

In the postmodern context, pastiche leads to recycling of motifs, styles, and themes with the consequence that there now exist a 'society of spectacle'. This in turn leads to schizophrenia, a term that Jameson uses as a metaphor to explain the delusion shrouding contemporary culture. Jameson uses the term to describe a linguistic order caused by a break in the signifying chain due to the subject confronted by series of changing images. This fits in with postmodernism with an emphasis on the signifier rather than signified, and with surface appearance rather than substance.

Besides pastiche, the key markers of postmodernism for Frederic Jameson are: a depthlessness that situates meaning on the surfaces of texts, a weakened sense of historical time, fragmentation, a conflation of high and mass culture, a commodification of art, and a self-referentiality that makes each detail of the present into a symptom of postmodernity.

Postmodernity, on the other hand, can be studied in relation to culture and also in relation to literary criticism. Culturally postmodernism encompasses art and architecture, film and television, dance and music. In relation to literary criticism, postmodernism owes its origin to Charles Olson who first used the term in his essays in 1950s. Postmodernism has been studied along with post structuralism; as it shares the undecidability of texts, and goes along with cultural criticism which erases the boundary between 'high' and 'low' culture.

Ihab Hassan in his book *Paracriticism* (1975) equates postmodernism with anti-elitism and anti-authoritarianism. Linda Hutcheon views postmodernist fiction as 'historiographic metafiction' bringing history closer to fiction. In her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* Hutcheon labels postmodern historical novels as "historiographic metafiction" since they thematise the theory of contemporary historiography and problematise the distinction between history and fiction. She explains her reason for such a label thus: "[historiographic metafiction] puts into question, at the same time as it exploits the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real. This is why I have been calling this historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 1988: 92). Her definition is governed by the paradox created by the intermingling of metafictional self-reflexivity and historical reality in novels, "which are

both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Hutcheon 1988: 5). A postmodernist theory of history helps us understand that history invents stories about past events and it foregrounds certain events while suppressing some others for ideological reasons. Accordingly, in the analysis of postmodern historical novels, the metafictional elements, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, non-linear narrative and parodic intention foreground this process. Historiographic metafiction attempts to use historical material within the parodic self-reflexivity of metafiction which aims at undermining realism.

Historiographic metafiction is not only concerned with the question of the truth-value of objective historical representation but with the issue of who controls history. Therefore, in historiographic metafiction, the idea that historical “facts” are constructed ideologically is particularly emphasized. Thus, one of the attempts of historiographic metafiction is to focus on past events and historical personages which history chooses not to include. Excluded events are foregrounded, stories are retold and alternative histories are composed and recomposed. As a result, a multiplicity of histories is achieved since historiographic metafiction provides alternative versions to the already accepted one.

Moreover, in postmodern context the boundary between fiction and non-fiction seems blurred. Postmodernism does away with the idea of great book and great author. Lind Hutcheon elaborates it further as:

Rorty, Baudrillard, Foucault, Lyotard and others seem to imply that any knowledge cannot escape complicity with some meta-narrative, with the fictions that render possible any claim to 'truth', however provisional. What they add, however, is that no narrative can be a natural 'master' narrative: there are no natural hierarchies; there are only those we construct. It is this kind of self-implicating questioning that should allow postmodernist theorising to challenge narratives that do presume to 'master' status, without necessarily assuming that status for itself.

(Hutcheon 1997: 279)

Postmodernism has also been described as a profoundly contradictory phenomenon. It is seen as a continuation and a dramatic break from Modernism, a progressive development from Marxism and a rejection and denial of Marxism's basic principles. It is radically left wing and neo-conservative, both radical and reactionary. "It is the projection of the aesthetic on to the cultural and cognitive fields; it is the cultural logic of late capitalism: it is the loss of the real; it is a renunciation of all critical philosophical standards; and it is a radical critique of philosophy and the fields of representation" (Waugh 2007: 406). Postmodernism, in other words, seems riddled with contradictions and perpetuated through paradoxes. As Linda Hutcheon puts it:

Postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs, and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges.

(Hutcheon 1988: 3)

Hutcheon also believes that postmodernism permits contradictions because of its “inherently paradoxical structure” (Hutcheon 1988: 222).

Ihab Hassan, on the other hand, brought together the various trends and undercurrents as he defined postmodernism as an ‘anti-formal anarchism’. For Hassan postmodernism was an impulse of negation and unmasking, a celebration of silence and otherness that was always present, but has always been repressed within the western culture. Hassan has also delineated the distinction and the antithesis postmodernism has brought about vis-a-vis the concepts that modernism had generated earlier. For instance, “purpose” becomes “play” in postmodernism, the other notable postmodernist reversals being: “Anarchy” for “Hierarchy”; “Dispersal” for “Centering”; “Rhetoric” for “Semantics”; “Desire” for “Symptom”; “Participation” for “Distance”; “Schizophrenia” for “Paranoia”; “Irony” for “Metaphysics”; “Chance” for “Design”; “Anti-form” (disjunctive, open) for “Form”(conjunctive, closed), etc. Almost all of these labels as the outcome of postmodernist change become applicable to the thematic, structural, and narrative essence of the novels written by contemporary fiction writers.

Postmodernist fiction is now an international phenomenon, with its representatives from all over the globe. Generally speaking, the postmodernist fiction writers exaggerate certain novelistic techniques previously associated with the modernists in order to signal their perception of the fact that there has been a profound shift in cultural values. Some of the representative features of postmodernist fictional writings include: “the temporal disorder; the erosion of the sense of time; a pervasive and pointless use of pastiche; a foregrounding of words as material signs: the loose association of ideas; paranoia; and vicious circles, or a loss of logically separate levels of discourse”(Barry 2005: 113). All of these themes and techniques are often used together. For example, metafiction and pastiche are often used for irony. Linda Hutcheon claimed that postmodern fiction as a whole could be characterised by ironic quote marks, that much of it can be taken as tongue-in-cheek. John W. Aldridge elaborates it further:

In the fiction of [postmodern writers]...virtually everything and everyone exists in such a radical state of distortion and aberration that there is no way of determining from which conditions in the real world they have been derived or from what standard of sanity they may be said to depart. The conventions of verisimilitude and sanity have been nullified. Characters inhabit a dimension of structureless being in fiction itself stands as a metaphor of a derangement that is seemingly without provocation and beyond measurement.

(John 2005: 113)

The postmodern novel, being different from the realistic or modern novel in certain respects, has all the features and characteristics of the earlier modes of the novel writing inherent to it. Commentators like J. La Valley, Herman Kahn, and Christopher Lasch see causes of change in recent literature in deep cultural contexts. La Valley, for example, asserts that the new literature reflects a new consciousness that has been inspired partly by the breakdown of contemporary American culture, its traditions, and its justification of the American social setup. Kahn and Wiener refer to American culture as being in the “Late Sensate” stage, American art, including literature reflecting a culture in the state of decline (Kahn and Herman 1967: 40-41). On the other hand, Christopher Lasch argues that “bourgeois society seems everywhere to have used up its store of constructive ideas” and that there is “a pervasive despair of understanding the course of modern history or of subjecting it to a rational direction” (Lasch 1979: xii). Moreover, John Barth referred to it as “the literature of exhausted possibilities” and says that by “‘exhaustion’ I do not mean anything so tired as the subject of physical, moral, or intellectual decadence only the usedupness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities” (Marcus 1969: 267).

Postmodern philosophy accepts reality as a construction and since there is nothing to represent out there, the postmodern text comes to be a

way of reflecting the idea of constructed reality by means of its overt self-referentiality. Postmodern fiction is usually marked with intense self-reflexivity that denotes the author's consciousness of the rhetoric of the text. Instead of reflecting an external reality, the postmodern author refers to the rhetorical devices used to create the illusion of external references. The self-conscious narrator of postmodern fiction constantly refers to his own writing process and its fictionality in order to remind the reader that the novel is a linguistic construct. In every sense the postmodernist novel interrogates itself. Self reflexivity, then, is a counter-argument against established constructions of reality and to referential discourse. Its function is to make the novel eliminate the postures of realism. The presence of a self-conscious narrator who points to the rhetorical devices constructing the text is a means of breaking the illusion of reality. In order to build the connection between self-reflexive and metafictional challenge which serves postmodern questioning, one can refer to Patricia Waugh's theory of metafiction which she discusses in her work *Metafiction*. She defines metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 1984: 2). As is stated, in the light of poststructuralist theory the outside world is accepted as a "text," a fiction constructed by

language; and metafiction, to Waugh, makes us aware of how the reality is written in the way a literary fiction is written by means of laying bare the devices used in creating imaginary worlds. She claims:

If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself.

(Waugh 1984: 3)

In other words, self-conscious fiction is seen as a way of exploring "the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers ... the relationship between the world of the fiction and the world outside the fiction" (Waug.1984: 3). The metafictional novels help reveal the fictional construction of history by handling historical figures, events, and sources and self-conscious narrative at the same time. The questioning of historical reality is pursued through the self-conscious construction in metafictional novels. Historiographic metafiction, by referring to the historiographer's arbitrariness in pointing out certain events and by referring to narrative as the only tool of historiography to write about past events, just as it is the main element of literature, treat history as a verbal artefact in the same manner.

Brain McHale, against the backdrop of mimetic theory of art, asserts that there is the possibility of a mimetic relationship of the forms of postmodernist fiction to advanced, late capitalist, consumerist societies:

Postmodernist fiction at its most holds the mirror up to everyday life in advanced industrial societies, where reality is pervaded by the 'miniature escape fantasies' of television and the movies. The plural ontology of television dominated everyday life appears for instance, in Robert Coover's "The Baby Sitter" (from *Prick Songs and Descent*, 1969 and Walter Abish's *Ardor/awe/Atrocity* (from *Future Perfect*, 1979); here the television set, a world within the world, further destabilises an already fluid and unstable fictional reality.

(McHale 1987: 128)

While postmodern theorists like Linda Hutcheon describe postmodern fiction as an identifiable genre of writing, which can be put into proper context by comparing it to other forms of contemporaneous discourse, Brain McHale attempts to place his postmodernist fiction in a particular social and historical experience. Brain McHale's central thesis is that the difference between modernist and postmodernist texts can be most easily grasped as difference in their 'dominant'—a term that he borrows from Roman Jakobson, for whom dominant is the focusing component of a work of art that rules, determines and transforms the remaining components and guarantees the integrity of its structure

(Jakobson 1935). McHale suggests that where modernist fiction is epistemological—that is, concerned with problems of knowledge and understanding, postmodernist fiction is ontological—that is, concerned with the creation of and interrelation of worlds of being. McHale writes:

The dominant of modernist fiction is epistemological that is, modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as those mentioned by Dick Higgins in my epigraph: “How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?” Other typical modernist questions might be added: “What is there to be known? Who knows it? How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?”

(McHale 1987: 9)

Many a postmodernist novels written during Post-World War II era, clearly fit in with McHale categorisation. McHale subsequently argues that ‘the dominant of postmodernist fiction is ‘ontological’:

That is, postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground the questions, which Dick Higgins calls ‘post-cognitive’: ‘Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?’ Other postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world it projects, for instance: what is a world?; what kinds of world are there , how are they constituted, and how do they differ?

(McHale 1987: 10)

Brain McHale’s basic argument is about how postmodernism can be distinguished from modernism, but he also suggests that too many

ontological concerns of postmodernism may have a certain impact on the issues regarding the ‘security of existential identity’. Patricia Waugh briefly sums it as:

McHale does not comment on the broader cultural implications of the postmodern debate and his work is taxonomic rather than evaluative, but he does suggest that the postmodern concern with the ontological transgression may ultimately be bound up with the issues of security of existential identity. He suggests that in foregrounding the question of the existence of worlds, postmodernism allows us to imagine our own non-existence.

(Waugh 1992: 206)

Although not engaged with the larger philosophical and political issues put forward by the debate of postmodernism, McHale’s argument suggests that the aesthetic has profound existential overtones.

Most of the postmodern theoreticians – Patricia Waugh, Brian McHale, Ihab Hassan, Jerome Klinkowtiz and Niall Lucy etc.—have dealt with the novel in different ways and subjected it to searching interrogation. Among these theoreticians the American critics and novelists seem to be different in the sense that they instigate and honour the novel’s creative powers and its social functions. Ihab Hassan, for example, has asserted that postmodern American novels exhibit alternative modes of existence as an antidote to the encroachment of society upon the self, which has been considered as one of the perennial

concerns of American Literature. And this encroachment has been defined and explained at three different levels viz, “the ethos of mass society, the concept of manners, and the ideas of romance” (Hassan 1973: 104).

The years following the Second World War witnessed a certain remarkable change in the form, content and techniques of the novel written in USA. During the modernist phase of 1950's to 1980's, novelists in America brought about certain radical transformations, reflecting in their works an apocalyptic tendency in describing contemporary human culture, life and civilization on getting fractured, debased and above all dehumanized, thanks to the misguided and adventurist application of scientific technical and industrial advancements. In the aftermath of the Second World War American writers, particularly novelists began to portray their novelistic personages as humans wrestling with the unsettling and unpredictable ethos of mass society which no longer rendered itself to any assured definition and continues to do so till this date. The ethos of mass society, in other words, created a new compulsion: the novel now had to change its contours in order to cater to such kind of society and culture. The contemporary novelist as a socio-cultural spokesman of his times gave the novel a totally new treatment in terms of plot, characterization theme and

imagery. Novelists like Saul Bellow, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, John Hawkes, Thomas Pynchon and Jerzy Kosinski, made their works as symbolic of the totally recreated image of the human identity, the human self, and there by composing a new mythology of the space and machine age with the illustrations of a totally different protagonistic situation in the fictional societies of their novels. The assault of postmodernism on textual formats including the novel left a conscious writer with no other alternative but to adopt the alchemy of dismemberment and deconstruction, innovation and renovation, creation and recreation.

The postmodern techniques and forms like metafiction, surfiction, and black humour etc. dominated the Post-War literary scene and this era also witnessed the birth of a new generation of protagonists like Joseph Heller's Yossarian in *Catch-22* and Billy Pilgrim in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which have been described as anti-heroes. These heroes are peculiar kinds of heroes. They do not significantly change the prevailing social condition, nor do they possess any superhuman powers. However, such heroes possess one single fundamental heroic characteristic: they radically defy the prevailing condition of fictional reality created and they pursue some projection of an ideal despite the fact that the pursuit of ideal is doomed to failure. Various discussions on

twentieth century American fiction have established that the Post-War American novel celebrates and eulogizes the anti-hero, a man thoroughly at odds with the times and imprisoned by them. The alienation of the self from society, what Ihab Hassan believes, has been and remains the basic assumption of the modern American novel. But society has altered its contours and accordingly novel is presumed to have changed its dimensions. In postmodern scenario, society no longer lends itself to any assured definition. The helpless individual an inhabitant of such a society is pitted against technology and contemporary political system, victory is the process of defeat, the search is for self-definition and freedom and the necessity is for retreat into selfhood. One can “no longer assume as quickly as in the recent past that a spiritual or moral difficulty could find a precise embodiment in a social conflict” (Howe 1992: 428).

Ihab Hassan, in the twin essays “The Pattern of Fictional Experience” and “The Culture of Postmodernism” postulates and explicates the postmodern typology of novelistic form and structure and rightly points out that contradiction and change coupled with a high medium of self-reflexivity forms the axis of portraying the fictional protagonists. Writers like William Burroughs, Norman Mailer, Thomas Pynchon, Jerzy Kosinski, Kurt Vonnegut etc. went on weaving their novelistic narratives and spinning their fictional heroes in synthesised and

fabulatory manner. The reader now had to negotiate a new generation of central protagonists who came to be presented as existential explorers across an agonising spectrum of deculture materialism, dehumanisation and the profanities of highly provocative metropolitan living. Henry James once remarked that “the prose picture can never be at the end of its tether, unless it loses the sense of what it can do” (James 1956: 35). Cumulatively, the works of modern and postmodern American novelists have chronically reflected American society as an amorphous mass of “junk”, the term itself implying socio-cultural ethos as a heap of garbage, with humans as consumerist automatons lost across the chaotic waves of turbulent sea of confusion, anarchy and apostasy. The implosive and catastrophic dismemberment of American dream really brought about fission in the contemporary American experience, rendering the task of novel-writing as a difficult premise. Hybridised, synthesised, juxtaposed narratives presented every hero as a contemporary Odysseus embarking on journey of his self-discovery and affirmation, identity and authenticity.

The perennial problem of the American hero became the encroachment of society upon the self further entangling the protagonists. The advent of “doxa” (the term as extensively defined and referred to by the critical exponents of typology of postmodernism like Ihab Hassan, Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh and others implies an “altered

apprehension” of the human self. Such an apprehension totally unsettles the novelistic hero’s existential centre of gravity within his mind and psyche) further complicated matters for the hero and his main struggle now centered around the ‘Self’ vs. ‘Self’ tribulation rather than ‘Self’ vs. ‘Others’. In this context, it can be said that the protagonists of recent fiction appropriate an existential predicament which is not of their own choosing and “oppose the disillusioning reality with the vision of their own choice” (Hipkiss 1984: 31). Within a fictional cosmos, such novelistic humans as central characters seek a true territory ahead: “The true territory ahead is what he must imagine for himself. He will recognise it by its strangeness, the lonely pilgrimage through which he attained it, and through the window of his fiction he will breathe air of his brave new world. Strange, indeed, will be the gods who inhabit it” (Walton 1963: 365). Such an unavoidable indulgence of the hero has its generic roots in Mark Twain’s immortal boy-hero Huck Finn, who ultimately resolves his existential predicament by “lighting out for the territory.” Huck’s decision becomes a cardinal declaration governing the choice, the perceptions and the preferences of American heroes till date.

Serious writers of fiction in American, such as, Ralph Ellison, Norman Mailer, William Styron, Paul Bowles, Saul Bellow, John Barth, Vladimir Nabokov, Kurt Vonnegut and Jerzy Kosinski, Robert Coover,

John Cheever etc., have often placed the existential pattern of experience at the centre of their fictional work. And Ihab Hassan's discussion of contemporary American novel in *Radical Innocence* can be taken as a literary counterpart of Macquarie's *Existentialism* and is worth detailing because of its representative nature. Hassan equates the modern American experience—the conditions of which are motiveless and needless action, encounter with absurdity, anarchy, death and nihilism—with the existential. The 'pattern of experience' in contemporary American fiction is 'largely existential'(Hassan 1961: 115) as it is composed of contradiction, chance, illusory choice, relativity of perception, chaos, absurdity and nothingness. Ihab Hassan dubs the existential form as a "modern variant" (Hassan 1961: 120) of irony and proceeds to merge his definition of existential with Northrop Frye's definition of Irony in *The Anatomy of Criticism*. Ihab Hassan concludes that existential awareness is based on the discovery of 'aboriginal self' which in turn is the primal and anarchic American self. Existentialism for him is bound up with individual and society in dissolution; while alienation is 'axiomatic', it is possible for the existential self to be affirmative and preserve a "radical kind of innocence". 'Radical innocence' is the quality which Hassan attributes to the new hero. 'Radical', first, because it is inherent in his character, and goes to the roots or foundation of it. But radical, too,

because it is extreme, impulsive, anarchic, troubled with vision. The existential hero, often an “adolescent rebel-victim figure, is transcendent by virtue of [his] nakedness rather than [his] communal authority” (Hassan 1973: 114). In short, Hassan proffers an existential poetics of the novel which has as its bases a direct equation between the modern and the existential and between the existential and ironic mode.

The hero of contemporary American fiction is thus both a rebel and a victim. He finds himself at odds with the mass society’s “modes of behavior” and tries hard to discover alternate modes of life beneath the “frozen surface” of a highly automatic concrete world (Hassan 1961: 107). The new hero is therefore a diver who dives deep and tries to account for his “aesthetic distance” as well (Hassan 1961: 107). He is a child both of doom and opposition: at odds with his surroundings or society and also with himself. His energy becomes his energy of defeat because it is either directed against himself (the victim) or against the world (the rebel) and in either case he remains a misfit and alien to the society. The hero bears on his head the weight of the elements of Greek *alazon* (the imposter, compulsive rebel, or the outsider), the *eirone* (humble self-deprecating man), and *pharmakos* (the scapegoat and random victim) and these elements and traits tell upon his life (Frye 1957: 39-43). The new hero emerges as an ironic figure who is at the same time

an existential victim. In fact, the hero's image of the self in society ultimately determines the plot of fiction and it can be argued that the form of fiction relies on the description of the nature of the hero and the substance of his experiences. The plot of the novel gets charged with extreme or archetypal situations.

Chapter-II

Breakfast of Champions: Life as a Tentative Tangling of Tendrils

Breakfast of Champions or *Goodbye Blue Monday* is Kurt Vonnegut's seventh novel. Published in 1973, the novel was written by Vonnegut as a fiftieth birthday present to himself. In the preface to the novel Vonnegut makes it clear:

This book is my fiftieth birthday present to myself. I feel as though I am passing through the spine of a roof—having ascended one slope.

(Vonnegut 1973: 4)

The novel procures its title from the registered trademark of a breakfast cereal product prepared by General Mills Inc. The novel is a sort of parody of Vonnegut himself and his earlier works. It contains an averse confession that “the author cannot create order out of chaos”. The narrative in *Breakfast of Champions* functions as a jumble of Vonnegut's scientific or clinical diagnosis of the social matrix which reveals a “tragic” tendency to isolate the hero Dwayne Hoover a rich Midwest Pontiac dealer. The novel is dedicated to an Indianapolis widow, Phoebe Hurty who had comforted Vonnegut during the Great Depression. With the skillfulness and craftsmanship of a master synthesizer, Vonnegut employs various literary devices ranging from juxtaposition of past and

present, fact and fiction, autobiographical collage, irony, antithesis, contradiction and above all black humour, thereby bringing forth the debased and degenerative nature of society that is at the brink of cultural and moral collapse. In the novel Vonnegut laments over man's tendency for bringing apocalypse on humanity. The apocalyptic strain gets manifested through the "memories of holocaust from Auschwitz to Hiroshima, a success of wars from Korea to Vietnam ... ravages to the natural environment, renewed awareness of poverty in America, the discrimination of race and sex, political protest of every kind..."(Hassan. 1978: 2). This crisis of existence that modern times inflicted upon mankind becomes a major concern of the novels of Kurt Vonnegut. In *Breakfast of Champions*, Vonnegut places his hero Dwayne Hoover in a protagonistic situation haunted by an approaching apocalypse. Life has lost all its meaning for Dwayne Hoover. His existential predicament ends in his obsessive commitment to unravel the meaning of life. Dwayne Hoover deliberates upon the problematics of existence profoundly, his situation becomes thematic as well as tragic to the extent that he becomes a personification of *dianoia*—a theme in literature with deep conceptual interest. Kilgore Trout, a science fiction writer, plays a major role in *Breakfast of Champions*. Vonnegut employs a host of science-fiction stories written by Kilgore Trout, his alter ego, to convey a series of

apocalypses though on the extra terrestrial level. Kilgore Trout's stories serve as the thematic platform in the narrative attaining the form of "a series of oracular pronouncements" (Frye 1975: 55). Trout weaves his plots with stories from a number of planets from different galaxies to reflect the highly degenerative and dystopian state of affairs on Earth. Trout's book *Plague on Wheels*, for instance, reveals the story of life on a planet namely Lingo-Three:

Whose inhabitants resembled American automobiles. They had wheels. They were powered by internal combustion engines. They ate fossil fuels. They were not manufactured, though. They reproduced. They laid eggs containing baby automobiles, and the babies matured in pools of oil drained from adult crankcases.

Lingo-Three was visited by space traveler, who learned that the creatures were becoming extinct for this reason: they had destroyed their planet's resources, including its atmosphere.

(Vonnegut 1973: 26)

Kurt Vonnegut, as a sensitive human being and a conscious writer, shows a deep concern for negotiating the apocalypse that America as a nation has inflicted upon entire humanity in general and the Americans in particular. The various causes that have triggered this frightening decline are racism, war, violence, greed, environmental exploitation, overpopulation and so on. In the novel Vonnegut portrays an unfeeling

robotic society, and an American culture plagued with despair, greed and indifference:

Everybody on earth was a robot, with one exception—Dwayne Hoover. Of all the creatures in the universe, only Dwayne was thinking and feeling, and worrying and planning and so on. Nobody else knew what pain was. Nobody else had any choice make. Everybody else was fully automatic.

(Vonnegut 1973: 14)

The plot of the novel revolves around two old men, one very opulent and the other very poor. Dwayne Hoover is a fabulously “well-to-do” automobile dealer living in the heart of the Midland City, USA, and Kilgore Trout is Vonnegut’s persona, created to camouflage the authorial voice. Through the science-fiction stories, Vonnegut makes Trout the chief apocalyptic spokesman for both present and the future of mankind. Thus the novel seems to be an aesthetic exercise of Vonnegut’s “imaginative recreation of experience” that “becomes a revolt against world which appears to have no logical pattern”. Here Vonnegut employs an innovative and unprecedented literary device that makes him come face-to-face with his own fictional creations: Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout. Early, in the very first chapter of the novel, Vonnegut reveals that Dwayne Hoover will learn from Trout what life is all about. When Hoover comes to know that only Trout could provide answer to the question of the real meaning of life, his sole aim remains to meet Kilgore

Trout face-to-face so that the mystery about the meaning and purpose of life is resolved once for all. The reader interestingly follows Dwayne Hoover's journey from the beginning to the climactic meeting with Kilgore Trout at the end of the book. For the same reason, the very opening statement of narrative becomes significant when Vonnegut tells the reader that *Breakfast of Champions* is:

a tale of a meeting of two lonesome, skinny, fairly old white men on a planet which was dying fast. One of them was a science-fiction writer named Kilgore Trout. He was nobody at the time, and he supposed his life was over. He was mistaken. As a consequence of the meeting, he became one of the most beloved and respected human beings in history.

The man he met was an automobile dealer, a *Pontiac* dealer named Dwayne Hoover. Dwayne Hoover was on the brink of going insane.

(Vonnegut 1973: 7)

Towards the end of the novel the two old men meet during an Arts Festival at Mildred Berryton Memorial Center for the Arts in Midland city, the hometown of Dwayne Hoover. Dwayne's sole aim to attend the Arts Festival is his "quest for an absolute sense of significant meaning in life". Dwayne Hoover like Billy Pilgrim, the fictional protagonist of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, is obsessed to find out the meaning of life. The hero's addiction vis-a-vis the meaning of life is aggravated by his reading of a Kilgore Trout novel titled *Now It Can Be Told*. Dwayne loses grip

over his senses, becomes almost schizophrenic and even a series of sexual encounters with his secretary Francine Pefko, fail to restore the hero's confidence. Kilgore Trout's novel implants in the hero the idea that all human beings around him are mere machines like robots, he being the only one possessing free-will. This idea destabilises Dwayne's mental and spiritual condition and he runs amok. The novel *Now It Can Be Told* is written in form of a letter from the creator of the universe to the reader.

The reader is addressed as:

Dear Sir, poor sir, brave sir, you are an experiment by the Creator of the Universe. You are the only one creature in the entire Universe who has free-will. You are the only one who has to figure out what to do next—and *why*. Everybody else is a robot, a machine.

(Vonnegut 1973: 253)

From Trout's novel, Dwayne realizes that the people around him are machines: those who like him 'liking machines' and who hate him are 'hating machines'.

Dwayne Hoover was born in Midland City, spent first three years of his life in an orphanage and was adopted by a childless couple. After having served as a civilian employee in the U S Army in World War II, Dwayne became multimillionaire of Midland City with a long list of entrepreneurships. Dwayne owned:

not only the Pontiac agency and a piece of the new Holiday Inn. He owned three Burger Chefs, too, and five coin-operated car washes, and pieces of the Sugar Creek Drive-In Theatre, Radio Station WMCY, the Three Maples Par-three Golf Course, and seventeen hundred shares of common stock in Barrytron, Limited, a local electronics firm. He owned dozens of vacant lots. He was on the Board of Directors of the Midland County National Bank.

(Vonnegut 1973: 64-65)

Dwayne Hoover suffers badly, despite his property and wealth, and is burdened with problems of himself and his family. He is acutely aware of the fact that on the societal and familial planes he is a failure. He is mentally disturbed suffering from a kind of disillusion. Hoover's wife Celia Hoover has committed suicide by eating Drano, a sanitary germicide and his only son Bunny Hoover has grown up to be an infamous homosexual of the town who earns his livelihood by playing piano in Cocktail Lounge of the Holiday Inn owned by Dwayne himself. Dwayne's materialistic wealth acts as a whirlpool for him and he gets engulfed deep into it resulting in a binary fission or split of his personality. Dwayne breaks into "fragments" and each fragment shows mirror up to the hero's multiple confusions, obsessions, and disillusion. The reader at this point of narrative can easily grasp the author's message that helpless human beings on earth are mere puppets in the hands of alien forces. In other words, man's life is meaningless in a purposeless

and mechanical universe, a kind of Kafkaesque syndrome which defines human predicament at a larger level.

Kurt Vonnegut repeatedly portrays his heroes as perpetually engaged in unraveling the mystery of human predicament. The meaning of life functions as a pivot round which the bulk of Vonnegut's fiction revolves. Vonnegut's heroes, like their other fictional counterparts in contemporary American fiction, experience an ironic mode of existence. Dwayne Hoover's existence is defined by irony with the shadow of apocalypse looming large because the love and appetite of post-modern American materialism serves only to aggravate man's alienation and the trial and tribulations of his existence. The ethos of mass society has made Dwayne Hoover a mere dust particle that floats aimlessly across a sea of absurdity to his eventual self-annihilation.

Kurt Vonnegut, in the preface to the novel, makes a confession that the very exercise of writing *Breakfast of Champions* was to clear his "head of all the junk" (Vonnegut 1973: 5). Like his fictional protagonist, Dwayne Hoover, Vonnegut himself craves for some meaningful, justifiable, logical and comprehensible pattern of life and living. Vonnegut shares, with contemporary fiction writers in America, the premise that the "common pattern in American fiction is the exposure of an innocent hero to a series of events which awaken him to sense of

meaninglessness in nature and lack of moral direction in people” (Hauck 1971: 9). Dwayne Hoover is a specimen of post-modern man who lives in a decreative and anarchic world, monitored by political demagogues, economic biggies, a world completely disguised by media. Like other fictional protagonists of Post-War American fiction, Dwayne Hoover inhabits “a relatively comfortable, half welfare and half garrison society in which the population grows indifferent and atomised; in which traditional loyalties, ties and associations become lax or dissolve entirely (and) in which man becomes a consumer, himself mass –produced like the products, divisions and values that he absorbs” (Howe 1992: 130). Kilgore Trout’s novel *Now It can Be Told* tells Dwayne that he is “‘pooped and demoralised’. ‘Why wouldn’t you be? Of course it is exhausting, having to reason all time in a Universe which wasn’t meant to be reasonable” (Vonnegut 1973: 253). The hero inhabits a world that is meaningless and chaotic and any attempt to give meaning or construct some comprehensive design culminates in failure and total absurdity.

Breakfast of Champions, in a postmodern self-reflexive manner, removes the curtain that separates fiction and reality in order to reveal “that human experience is fragmented, irritating, apparently unredeemable” (Weinberg 1970: 11). Kurt Vonnegut himself asserts that a novel does not promise to “bring order to chaos” instead lend “chaos to

order” thereby suggesting that “there is no order in the world around us, that we must adapt ourselves to the requirements of chaos, instead” (Vonnegut 1973: 210). Such a premise gets manifested in apocalyptic deconstruction of everything, be it humans, the world they inhabit or even the cosmos.

A close reading of *Breakfast of Champions* presents before the reader a perennial problem tormenting postmodern mankind, which is the plague of boredom. Boredom has become the biggest enemy of mankind which deprives man of satisfaction, happiness and meaning, leaving human beings like Dwayne Hoover agape and aghast amidst the stormy sea of existence. Human beings seem to have traversed a trajectory of innocence to experience and then back to a kind of radical innocence, something that has reduced them to a level of machines. The advancement of scientific technology and materialistic progress in mass society makes humans like Dwayne Hoover act and react like machines or robots who remain ignorant of basic distinction between what constitutes the human and inhuman. Dwayne Hoover the ironic American Adam therefore functions in a society of automatons and is surrounded by “loving machines, hating machines, greedy machines, cowardly machines, truthful machines, lying machines, funny machines, solemn machines” (Vonnegut 1973: 254). Through Kilgore Trout’s story,

Vonnegut implants free-will in Dwayne Hoover to see what a human being is capable of doing once freed from the shackles of mechanical world. Unlike his social fellows Vonnegut's hero becomes a representative or model of an altered apprehension of self and the surroundings, an apprehension that is not the concern of the Post-War American consumer society. Dwayne Hoover is living an isolated life at home. His long conversations with his Labrador retriever Sparky reflect Dwayne's predicament:

He would get down on the floor and roll around With Sparky, and he would say things like this, "you and me, Spark," and "How's my old buddy?" and so on.

(Vonnegut 1973: 18)

Dwayne Hoover is at odds with the society he lives in. The robotic society of machines forces the hero to revert to childhood stage, a stage where he tries to communicate his feelings to an animal. Kilgore Trout, like Dwayne Hoover, is agonizingly wrestling with the question of absurdity and is living a meaningless life. After having lost three wives, Trout is living the life of a decrepit old man only to mutter and sneer to his parakeet, Bill, about the end of the world. Trout tells Bill that "humanity deserves to die horribly since it had behaved so cruelly and wastefully on a planet so sweet" (Vonnegut 1973: 18). Protagonists of American fiction like Kilgore Trout and Dwayne Hoover are the victims

of cruel forces which have brought the world to the verge of apocalyptic collapse and extinction. Trout tells his parrot that contemporary man is acting like the notorious Roman emperor Heliogabalus:

“We’re all Heliogabalus, Bill,” This was the name of a Roman emperor who had a sculptor make a hollow, life-size iron bull with a door on it. The door could be locked from the outside. The bull’s mouth was open. That was the only other opening to the outside.

Heliogabalus would have a human being put into the bull through the door, and the door would be locked. Any sounds the human being made in there would come out of the mouth of the bull. Heliogabalus would have guests in for a nice party, with plenty of food and wine and beautiful women and pretty boys—and Heliogabalus would have a servant light kindling. The Kindling was under dry fire wood—which was under the bull.

(Vonnegut 1973: 19)

Heliogabalus becomes emblematic of a dehumanized American culture, which breeds anomie, hatred, insomnia, and bewilderment. A culture where people are engaged in an unbridled race to hoard materialistic wealth; where God has been replaced with money.

Eliot Rosewater, Trout’s single fan in the whole world, arranges an invitation for him as a special speaker on the occasion of the Annual Arts Festival at Mildred Barry Memorial Centre for the Arts in Midland City. It is here that Trout meets Dwayne, subsequently. Through Trout’s science-fiction stories, Vonnegut expresses his repugnance vis-à-vis the

postmodern human condition. A profound apocalyptic strain runs through all the Kilgore Trout stories which collectively hold a mirror to the current state of affairs operating on our planet. The desire, will and conceptualization of modern man generate an energy which is the energy of defeat and self-destructive, self-deprecating tendency towards the evil. Trout's science-fiction stories are Vonnegut's many repetitive warnings to earthlings and these warnings are narrated as the major themes of *Breakfast of Champions*. In order to fulfill this novelistic need, Vonnegut weaves two parallel plots in the novel, one related to Dwayne's eccentricities vis-à-vis the meaning of life and the other detailing the Trout's journey from Cohoes to Midland City for attending the Arts Festival. The intersection and the fusion of the two plots ultimately resolve in Dwayne Hoover's collapse. Hoover's existential encounter with Trout makes him totally insane and he is taken to a lunatic asylum.

Dwayne Hoover, in *Breakfast of Champions*, like Billy Pilgrim, functions as a picaresque hero journeying across the wasteland of demonic human world suffocated with drug addiction, ecological pollution, racial discrimination, prostitution, homosexuality, pornography, violence, murder and what not. *Breakfast of Champions*, thus, becomes an emblem of pervasive schizophrenia, a world completely engulfed by commercialism. The novel stinks with paranoia, uncertainty

and dehumanizing materialism. Vonnegut's own protagonistic situation in the external world seems to be no better than that of Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout in the fictional world. The protagonistic situation of heroes in *Breakfast of Champion* becomes a kind of illustrative fable, a thematic parable about the condition of present day mankind. As a result, the novel represents "an intensification of low mimetic, in the sharpening of attention to details that makes the dullest and most neglected trivia of daily living leap into mysterious and fateful significance" (Frye 1975: 46). Vonnegut's sense of his hero, Dwayne Hoover, as a victim who swims pathetically across the turbulent sea of absurdity and meaningless creates tragic irony. The absurdity and meaninglessness become so devastating that the earthlings like Dwayne Hoover who inhabit a diseased, sterile wasteland feel that they have been cheated and insulted by their creator that "they might be in the wrong country, or even on wrong planet, that some terrible mistake had been made" (Vonnegut 1973: 9-10).

Breakfast of champions highlights the problems of the protagonistic situation applying to wastelanders like Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout, besides illustrating their helplessness and victimization. Dwayne becomes a helpless victim of a ruthless agency which is mass society, a society which does not render itself to any concrete definition

and remains continually in a state of flux. Hoover as the ironic *alazon* remains involved in a struggle with his enemy and the enemy is none other than the mysterious heavenly order and an incomprehensible societal ethos. Not only Hoover, but his other counterparts as well find it self-defeating and absurd to combat the predicament of human existence. Dwayne, with his fractured protagonistic situation undoes himself by assuming the role of a “deep diver” for whom society has become a “hard crust” and diving beneath it, the alazonic self of the hero tries to find “an alternative mode of existence” (Hassan 1961: 107).

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut situates his fictional protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, in the Dresden context. Vonnegut himself being the recipient of the horrible Dresden Experience had to struggle for twenty four years to distance himself from that traumatic experience so that he could write a book on that subject. Likewise in *Breakfast of Champions*, the fictional combination of Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout symbolize the dual aspect of Vonnegut’s own self: an alter ego “A would-be creator who failed and failed” (Vonnegut 1973: 97) and a hero who is presented as an ironic Adam, an exhausted Sisyphus at the boulder, whose identity revolves upon the twin axles of meaninglessness and absurdity. Be it Billy, Trout or Hoover, as ironic Adams they “remain dramatically in the position of children baffled by their first contact with

an adult situation” (Frye 1975: 220). The god who operates in the novelistic cosmos of *Breakfast of Champions* is described as an egomaniac or egotist, highly presumptuous, punishing disobedience who derives pleasure in inflicting pain and suffering on helpless human beings. Postmodern Americans are imagined as walking across the streets of Sodom and Gomorrah. That is why during a conversation with truck driver Kilgore Trout holds divinity responsible for an environmental devastation:

“I realized”, said Trout, “that God wasn’t any conservationist, so for anybody else to be one was sacrilegious and a waste of time. You ever see one of His volcanoes or tornadoes or tidal waves? Anybody ever tell you about the Ice Ages he arranges for every half-million years? How about Dutch Elm disease? There’s a nice conversation measure for you. That’s God, not man. Just about the time we got our rivers cleaned up, he’d probably have the whole galaxy go up like a celluloid collar. That’s what the Star of Bethlehem was, you know.”

(Vonnegut 1973: 85)

Vonnegut’s science-fiction writer portrays God as a sadist who has already programmed the protagonistic situation of humans on earth in terms of an apocalyptic scenario. That is why the science-fiction stories of Kilgore Trout focus upon dead planets from different galaxies in order to scrutinize the current state of affairs on our own planet. Human beings

are pictured as fully programmed robots manufactured by an indifferent ‘God’ to destroy the planet called Earth:

“The creator programmed Robots to abuse it for millions of years, so it would be a poisonous, festering cheese when you got here. Also, He made sure it would be desperately crowded by programming robots, regardless of their living conditions, to crave sexual intercourse and adore infants more than almost anything.”

(Vonnegut 1973: 254-255)

In a satirical tone Vonnegut describes the world as overcrowded with humans no different from programmed machines craving for sex and producing babies like consumerist products. The idea, deeply ingrained in Hoover’s mind, is that every human being around him is programmed to devastate and nullify all the revered institutions like religion, culture, family and society. As a sensitive and committed humanist Vonnegut feels disturbed over the path mankind was treading in the twentieth century. Vonnegut laments the loss of socio-cultural values and he talks about the ethos of mass society in terms of individual anomie and agony:

I have no culture, no humane harmony in my brains. I can’t live without a culture anymore.

(Vonnegut 1973: 5)

The plot-structure of *Breakfast of Champions* coupled with Dwayne Hoover’s existential problems strongly substantiates Vonnegut’s

statement that he himself possesses “no culture”, no “humane harmony” in his mind. Kurt Vonnegut and his hero Dwayne Hoover experience a similar antagonistic situation. They both inhabit the societies, one real, and other imagined where the colour of the skin determines the social values and standing of human beings. Discrimination on the basis of race and colour constitute the most detesting and disgusting kind of deculture where superior whites hate the inferior blacks and black man is even sawed in half with a barbed wire. The blacks as ‘Niggers’ are stereotyped by whites as lazy, dirty, unlawful and dumb and are simply seen as lesser beings. Vonnegut himself considers racism as one of the most hateful and dehumanising phenomena in the history of human civilization.

Dwayne Hoover’s antagonistic situation assumes a totally apocalyptic position when Vonnegut shifts his deconstructive focus to man-made apocalypse. Floods, famines, diseases, epidemics and even unchecked population growth are the various dismal things that directly attribute to man’s own foul actions especially the unrestrained production of babies. In this context, Vonnegut argues how the divine nature of man can be maintained and justified on the planet when humans keep on multiplying like insects with children “arriving all the time—kicking and screaming, yelling for milk” (Vonnegut 1973: 13). Dwayne Hoover, as sensitive as Vonnegut himself, becomes crazy at the sight of the

degenerative and diseased surroundings because of all the creatures in the Universe, “only Dwayne was thinking feeling and worrying and planning and so on” (Vonnegut 1973: 14). Dwayne was the only person to know what pain was all about. Vonnegut realizes human beings around him and Dwayne are programmed machines who sustain themselves on chemicals. This realization urges Vonnegut to conclude that “there was nothing sacred about myself or about any human being, that we were all machines, doomed to collide and collide and collide” (Vonnegut 1973: 219). To intensify the satire and dismantling humour Vonnegut identifies two monsters that always inhabit the human brains in America: “the arbitrary lust for gold” and “girls underpants” (Vonnegut 1973: 25). However, as a gradualist, Vonnegut expresses his belief that humanity can still retrieve itself from the brink of apocalypse by admitting and realizing the futility and ravages of the actions done so far.

Vonnegut, as the author of *Breakfast of Champions*, believes himself to be the ‘God’ of his fictional world and has all the power and authority over his fictional personages whom he assigns different roles. He manipulates his characters like a puppet-master pulling their strings during the puppet show. In the novel, Vonnegut admits this very fact as:

I was on par with the Creator of the Universe there in the dark in the cocktail lounge. I shrunk the Universe to a ball exactly one light-year in diameter. I had it explode. I had it disperse itself again.

(Vonnegut 1973: 200)

As God created the Universe, the cosmos, Vonnegut, derives great pride by talking about a parallel, that is, the fictional world of his novels and his fictional characters represent real human beings in present day world. Dwayne Hoover in *Breakfast of Champions* represents Vonnegut himself as well as any other individual from post-modern American society. Dwayne's protagonistic situation in the novel becomes a paradigm that defines, determines and analyses the basic nature of human existence in today's world. The only character who seems to realise his situation is Kilgore Trout, who tells his parakeet: "the way things are going, all I can think of is that I'm a character in a book by somebody who wants to write about somebody who suffers all the time" (Vonnegut 1973: 241). Vonnegut, nevertheless, in an unprecedented novelistic manner, meets Kilgore Trout and tells him "I'm your creator,You are in the middle of a book right now—close to the end of it, actually" (Vonnegut 1973: 291). Moreover, indeed, Vonnegut sets Trout free by the end of the book, awarding him with Nobel Prize, not for literature but for medicine.

In present day mechanised world human beings float like dust particles across the listless atmosphere of mass society. Such atomised

humans simply qualify as consumers, and any one of them can be a Dwayne Hoover for whom even sex fails to be an antidote to existential boredom and *anomie*. Dwayne Hoover's protagonistic situation in *Breakfast of Champions* comes closer to Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. However, Camus' Sisyphus finally reconciles with his situation by means of an absurd resolution, a kind of recognition, but Dwayne Hoover's practical life in *Breakfast of Champions* becomes so hopeless that only a terrible earthquake can flatten the slope and relieve Hoover from the burden of rolling the "boulder" up the "hill" only to have it rolling down again. For Dwayne Hoover the boulder is nothing else but his own sterile dehumanized existence with hill top as the possible meaning of life. In an attempt to render the fractured social scenario intelligible for the postmodern agonised self, Vonnegut makes his fictional counterpart, Kilgore Trout, answer the question "what is the purpose of life?", that he finds scribbled with a charcoal on a bathroom tile in New York:

To be
the eyes
and ears
and conscience
of the Creator of the Universe,
you fool.

(Vonnegut 1973: 67)

However, Vonnegut himself feels unsatisfied with this hypothesis and thus offers another solution through Rabo Karabekian during the Arts Festival in Midland City. Vonnegut describes it as “the spiritual climax of the book” when Rabo Karabekian explains his painting “The Temptations of Saint Antony”, comprising of a single vertical stripe of Day-Glo orange tape:

I now give you my word of honour ... that the picture your city owns shows everything about life which truly matters, with nothing left out. It is a picture of the awareness of every animal. It is the immaterial core of every animal—the ‘I am’ to which all messages are sent. It is all that is alive in any of us—in a mouse, in a deer, in a cocktail waitress. It is unwavering and pure, no matter what preposterous adventure may befall us. A sacred picture of Saint Anthony alone is one vertical, unwavering band of light. If a cockroach were near him, or a cocktail waitress, the picture would show two such bands of light. Our awareness is all that is alive and may be sacred in any of us. Everything else about us is dead machinery.

(Vonnegut 1973: 221)

Rabo Karabekian’s explanation of his masterpiece constitutes the thematic and aesthetic culmination in *Breakfast of Champion*, providing with an “ultimate answer that man is more than physical being and is in some way divine or somehow partakes of the divine”(Weinberg 1970: 15). Human beings on earth may behave as robots being driven to destruction by the chemicals but they do share one peculiar characteristic

that makes them different from machines. There is essential virtue in man and every human being possesses a spiritual element that has been subjugated by the consumerist consciousness that dominates present day mankind. To conclude one can say that Dwayne Hoover in *Breakfast of Champions* personifies Vonnegut's three-dimensional answer to the complicated problematics of postmodern man's life and living and his irresistible desire to follow the path which may ultimately lead to self-annihilation. And the kind of life a postmodern man is living is obviously a "tentative tangling of tendrils" a phrase that Vonnegut used as the title of one of the chapters in *Cat's Cradle*.

Chapter-III

Pinball: Quandary of Sex, Violence, and Disguise

Pinball (1982) Jerzy Kosinski's eighth and bestselling novel is a rock and roll mystery set in the world of music. The novel is a typical postmodernist example in which the central protagonist, James Osten, like Kosinski himself, assumes a false identity in order to counter the ravages of a debasing and detotalised ethos of mass society. *Pinball* centers on the enigmatic intermix of all the postmodernist traits: sex, violence, and disguise, to depict "the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life" (Jameson 1998: 1-20). As regards the thematic aspect of *Pinball*, like any other novel produced in Post-War America it takes cognizance of the deteriorating ethos of mass society that intrudes upon the freedom of individual self. The chief personages, and even some minor characters, in *Pinball* are victims of existential crisis, thus adopting disguise which guarantees them freedom. Structurally and thematically, the novel also reflects the sham security of wealth and mirage of success. As a postmodernist novel, *Pinball* creates in the minds of readers a "model of postmodernism, a particular typology of culture and imagination" (Hassan 1985: 11). This typology can be conceived in terms of a mirror which reflects a culture that is totally anarchic, decreative and

disruptionist with its fracturing impact on man's self and psyche. Like Kosinski's earlier novels, *Pinball* also seems to be replete with an "anti-formal, anarchic, and decreative culture" which is one of the prominent characteristics of postmodernist fiction (Hassan 1985: 12). Patrick Domostroy, one of the chief personages in the fictional society of *Pinball*, calls such society as a "free-wheeling media crazy society" (Kosinski 1982: 35).

Pinball, as an instance of postmodernist problematics, presents the protagonist as a displaced person in a chaotic landscape. The hero of the novel, James Norbert Osten, belongs to a rich family. His father, Gerhard Osten, owns a leading music company namely Etude Classics. Osten disguises himself as Goddard in order to escape from the intrusion of external elements upon the freedom of his self. A living legend, the biggest recording star in America, the heartthrob of millions and yet unknown:

Goddard has been the biggest recording star in the country. Yet he is still nothing but a voice and a name—a complete mystery. Nobody has ever seen him or managed to find out a least bit of information about him.

(Kosinski 1982: 17-18)

Goddard's identity remains a secret even from his most intimate friends, his lovers, and his own father. He manages to remain a voice without a

face. Ever since his first big record was played on the air, all the magazines, newspapers, T.V and Radio stations made tireless efforts to unravel Goddard's identity. Goddard's whereabouts, his physical appearance continue to be a complete mystery. Andrea Gwynplaine, a voluptuous and veritable enchantress, who can go to any extreme to achieve her desired aim, indulges in orgiastic sexual encounters with Domostroy and succeeds in making him join hands with her for entrapping Goddard in order to unravel the mystery behind this legendary musician. Patrick Domostroy as a canny schemer weaves a net with Andrea to trap Goddard by forging letters stuffed with musical expertise and posting those letters with nude and sensuous photographs of Andrea. The anonymous letters are written on the stolen White House stationary to dupe Goddard and make him believe that such letters come to him from the daughter or the wife of some high official from the White House, who wants to remain anonymous. The legendary Goddard is hooked by this trick and is curious to know about her. Goddard is impressed by the final letter of the 'White House Woman', in which she admires his anonymity and considers it necessary for the composition of enticing and mesmerizing music. The anonymous woman respects Goddard's double existence and considers it most essential for his creativity:

You are right to shield yourself from all those who if they know who you were, would seek to alter the conditions of your life as well as the form of your art.

(Kosinski 1982: 17)

The ‘White House Woman’s’ analysis of music is erudite and flawless. It is quite evident that the writer of these letters possessed profound knowledge and understanding of music, extensive expertise in modern music and most important—an uncanny intuition. The anonymous woman writes to Goddard that she loves him only for his music: “I will unflinching detect a soul in you without a note of music to assist me” (Kosinski 1982: 175). By inventing the ‘White House Woman’ and by forging such intriguing letters, Andrea and Domostroy leave no option for Goddard but to find out this mysterious woman. While tracing the delicate lines of nude body in the photograph sent by the anonymous woman, a curious sensation arises in Goddard that he had seen such photograph before –long before he received it.

He studied the photographs again and again for hints that could lead him to her. His eyes traced the exquisite, harmonious, almost austere, lines of her body, searching in vain for the slightest clue to her identity.

(Kosinski 1982: 187)

Osten finally realizes that this photograph resembled a picture of his step-mother, Vala Stavrova, taken by Patrick Domostroy. A suspicion arises

in Osten's mind that the 'White House Woman' is, in some way, connected to Domostroy. The nexus between music and disguise, between anonymity and nudity achieves new heights when Goddard, aroused by the curiosity to know the faceless nude woman in the photographs, discloses his own secret identity on encountering the sensuous Andrea and indulging in sexual orgies with her. For all the main characters in *Pinball*, sex becomes the practical manifestation of disguise. Patrick Domostroy, Andrea Gwynplaine, Jimmy Osten and the black beauty Donna Downes enact their individual as well as collective roles in a type of "sexual utopia in which everyone has the right to everyone else, where human beings, reduced to sexual organs, become absolutely anonymous and interchangeable" (Lasch 1978: 69). In Andrea's execution of her sexual masquerade, Domostroy plays the role both of a participant and of audience:

When I want to have a man, he could be the hunch back of Notre Dame. His looks, his age, his business just don't matter. Only his mind matters—and I don't care if it is crooked. I must get to him as he really is. When I do—and no holds are barred in the process—I feel free, safe, abandoned to all that pleases him, to all that pleases me ... I've gone after every man I ever wanted. And I've always gotten him. Always.

(Kosinski 1982: 29)

A free and unrestrained indulgence in sex becomes a bizarre exercise for the postmodernist self, especially for practicing the "other

self”, that is the self in disguise. All the four chief personages of *Pinball* play and enjoy the extraordinary game of sex as perfectionists—Domostroy and Ostent together with Andrea and Donna form a postmodernist ecstatic mixture of man-woman demonic erotic interplay.

Donna Downes, a music student at Julliard, is Jimmy Osten’s girl friend but holds Domostroy in great regard for his musical talent. Donna seeks Domostroy’s help in preparing herself for the Chopin Competition—a cutthroat music competition in Warsaw. Towards the concluding part of the narrative Andrea and Donna virtually exchange their places vis-à-vis Osten and Domostroy. Jimmy Osten curiously searching for the ‘White House Woman’ aims at Andrea, who is introduced to him by Donna Downes. Andrea who is also expecting Goddard any time and because of the latter’s anonymity, suspects every person who seems to come close to her. In order to find out the real identity of Goddard, Andrea puts Osten on her special high brand of pot, and during their erotic interplay, Goddard forfeits his anonymity by revealing his identity. Towards the climactic portion of the narrative, *Pinball* adopts the typical postmodernist blend of sex, music, violence, and disguise concluding in a mini mayhem. Andrea, her gangster friend, Chick Mercurio, and Domostroy’s two hired hoodlums lose their lives. Osten and Domostroy are left to cope with the aftermath of the blood-

spilling climax. Kosinski's novel becomes emblematic of postmodernist anti-totalising totalisation where violence remains the only reward for practitioners of music and disguise. The wheel comes full circle: Domostroy promises Osten that latter's second self as Goddard won't be made public. Osten retreats back to his life as Goddard, possibly retreating deeper into the realms of anonymity and Domostroy is left to brood over his helplessness.

Domostroy and Osten, the two heroes in *Pinball*, are the denizens of a demonic human world sickened with violence, crime, and sexual perversion. Both the heroes—one old, publicly known and failed and the other a voice without face but successful—embody the plight of the composer faced with the problem of incessant creation. Both use music to disguise their identity: since music does not reveal the composer and thereby camouflages the postmodernist self. Jimmy Osten as Goddard becomes an antithesis and alter ego of Patrick Domostroy. Both nurture a series of affairs with women, and these relationships suggest Kosinski's belief that sex plays an important role in artistic creation. Both Andrea and Donna, in turn, become involved with Domostroy and Osten, so that all the four characters pair off in different ways and each new pairing explores and evokes a new dimension of the relationship between emotional experience and inspiration that finally drives the artist to

objectify that experience through art. Patrick Domostroy and Goddard represent for Kosinski the forms of artistic achievement and both combine between themselves what can be termed as “dispersal that needs centering in order to be dispersal ... Yearning for transcendence” (Hutcheon 1989: 49).

Jimmy Osten as the mysterious Goddard, experiences the zenith of his success as a composer, yet as a realist he doubts his ability to sustain his inspiration to produce more and more rock hits in future. Staring out at the desert that surrounds his ranch, his ‘House of Music’, Osten envisages a stage in his life when his inspiration would desert him:

Here, where no sounds broke the quiet, he would stand and imagine that one-day the well of his music might become as dry and soundless as this desert. Until then, he knew, he had to search his inner life for traces of any spring that had so far eluded him.

(Kosinski 1982: 139)

Jimmy Osten is specimen of a typical postmodernist self, characterized by its solitariness while operating in the social context. Osten, as mysterious Goddard feels propelled “by his inwardness, his immediate feel of self, his involvement with his personal struggle toward his goal” (Weinberg 1970: 15). In other words Osten’s mysterious existence as Goddard symbolizes postmodernist “self-reflexive experimentation, its ironic ambiguities and its contestations” (Hutcheon 1989: 43).The

paradoxical and contradictory existential construct of postmodernist living gets manifested in Osten's objective as Goddard, to make his creativity immortal while keeping his secrecy intact. Osten's inner life has so far produced a single inspiring relationship with Leila Salem, the wife of the Lebanese ambassador to Mexico. His brief love affair with Leila manages to fuse the ideal aspect of his creativity with the physical nature of experience, catalytically releasing a spurt of his creativity. Osten's need to base his inspiration on the passion of experience is described as:

The mind, he reflected, was like an ideal musical instrument—invisible, portable, capable of synthesizing all sounds—yet powerless in itself, it was also flawed because it required its listener, the body, to exercise leverage on physical matter. This prompting, this necessary transfer of power from the mind to the body was for him one of the deepest mysteries of life.

(Kosinski 1982: 133)

Osten's love affair with Leila, the only meaningful one in his life, has been over for two years and he desperately feels the need of human contact and love to sustain his creative powers. When Osten receives Domostroy's anonymous letter he thinks that Leila herself has written to him, but the display of musical expertise in the letter makes him realize that the writer is too knowledgeable to be Leila and thus a "sense of entrapment came over him"(Kosinski 1982: 167). Osten begins to track

down the mysterious ‘White House Woman’, as he thinks that knowing her would help him create better music. He dreams about the faceless nude of the photographs, he thinks of her as a partner with whom he could share his life not only as Jimmy Osten but as the legendary Goddard as well. Osten fantasizes how he would drive her to his ranch, pretending that he was lost:

He would stop at the main house, and they would get out as if he had never been there before, he would open the door for her—to the New Atlantis and to his entire past.

(Kosinski 1982: 268)

Andrea, Osten believes, will make “the perfect partner to share his creative secret” (Kosinski 1982: 269). Ironically, the way out of the prison of mystery is to let someone else in, and this is symptomatic of the paradoxical, contradictory self-reflexiveness of postmodernist existence.

In real life, Jimmy Osten, in spite of his being the legendary Goddard, is as alone as his elderly counterpart, Patrick Domostroy. When he reads his first forged letter from Domostroy, Osten feels that his life of anonymity is “a prison with no exit”(Kosinski 1982: 92). Domostroy and Osten, both postmodernist individuals face the same dilemma: creativity is enhanced by a stimulating partner and endangered as well. On discovering the ‘White House Woman’, Osten’s fantasizing about

Andrea—his vision of a partnership in passion is shattered, his tongue almost torn out, and his life threatened. On the other hand, the affair between Donna Downes and Domostroy does result in a new surge of creativity in Donna and eventually she wins the concert. The last sexual-cum-musical encounter between Donna and Domostroy harmonises the musical rhythms with the waves of sexual impulse:

Within minutes, her music was out of breath she was. The energy seemed to have gone out of her playing; the sound that had been flowing through her from within had lost its buoyancy and seemed to come only from the music sheet over the key board, as separate from the pianist as she was from the instrument she played.

(Kosinski 1982: 249)

In any case, whatsoever, Donna Downes is a postmodernist woman par-excellence, the epitome of demonic fusion, an apocalyptic union of sex and innovative creativity. Domostroy sees in Donna a version of himself as artist: both are spiritual exiles, practicing their art in an alien language. Donna's luring presence at the keyboard of piano makes her appear to Domostroy as more than a promising student:

As he listened to her, he came to see that the state of his mind and the pattern of his life would be arbitrary from this point on unless he could go on replenished by her.

(Kosinski 1982: 220)

It is another illustration of an artist's need for experience of passion to create lasting musical compositions. Jimmy Osten produced successful rock compositions, when he fell in love with Leila, and now Domostroy hopes to recover belief in himself and his creativity by falling in love with Donna. Domostroy is searching precisely for the kind of passion that once delayed Chopin's tuberculosis, allowing him to compose more masterpieces. In the final scene between Domostroy and Donna, when the two of them are alone in the ballroom of Old Glory, it becomes clear that their union, first on the piano bench and then on the ballroom floor, surges in both a spring of creativity:

At length, with one last plunge into her beautiful young body, he finally found, in a realization as swift as sound, the certainty of his own wholeness.

(Kosinski 1982: 253)

Their passionate lovemaking gives rise to a confident spirit in Donna that eventually assures for her the top position in Warsaw Competition. Jerzy Kosinski, ostensibly though, repeatedly establishes in *Pinball*, that uncertainties of a self in the chaotic, anarchic society are sought to be neutralized and rendered into something creative and artistic through the medium of sexual fusion. The excessive indulgence in sex coupled with episodes of violence, reflect in *Pinball* an "unfeeling detachment among human beings who are envisioned as things and to whom we cannot and

need not relate, except to use them as objects for the discharge of our narcissistic aggression” (Aldridge 1983: 15). For instance, Domostroy becomes a sexual victim of Andrea as she exploits him to reach Goddard; Osten, as Goddard, sexually uses Andrea, only to ascertain the extent of threat to his existential invisibility. Osten and Domostroy both use Donna as means to intensify their ability to compose. In this sordid drama, only Donna retains some gentility and truth, as she develops relationships with the two men, precisely to learn more and more about creative music. Her passion is to become a musical virtuoso, which she eventually succeeds in. Domostroy and Osten together with Andrea and Donna are the denizens of a society that seems to reaffirm the capitalist belief “that human beings are ultimately reducible to interchangeable objects” (Lasch 1978: 69). This is the legacy of deculture, a prominent feature of postmodernist consumer society. Postmodernist deculture bases itself upon the ethos of mass society—a chaotic landscape where individuals like Jimmy Osten and Domostroy find themselves adrift. The fictional society in *Pinball* reflects Kosinski’s idea of a postmodernist society in which reason is reduced to mere calculations, and can impose no limits on the pursuit of pleasure: “on immediate gratification of every desire no matter how perverse, insane, criminal, or merely immoral” (Lasch 1978:

69). The novel reflects a nightmarish landscape, a decreative, anarchic culture where individuals have been overpowered by demonic Eros.

One more example of sexual eccentricity is furnished by one of Domostroy's students at the drama school of an Ivy League University. She becomes his musical assistant and later on proves helpful in getting White House Stationery from the old man, who was the owner of the house where she lived. This lady possesses a taste for bizarre and when she finds the old man dead, she calls Domostroy to make love to her in the presence of the dead man, as the presence of the corpse excites her sexually. The woman feels that death is watching life:

His presence definitely excites her—the idea of Death watching Life. She said the two of us making love then and there would have made a perfect subject for Hieronymus Bosch or Dali.

(Kosinski 1982: 77)

The eccentricities and wanderings of Kosinski's maverick heroes are quite relevant, if viewed and analysed in the context of postmodernist culture.

Excessive use of sex in *Pinball* has been criticized and Kosinski has even been accused of being pornographic in his fictional narratives. However, the fact remains that Kosinski projects sex as a means for intimate encounter as well as an opportunity for self-understanding.

Every sexual encounter of Kosinski's fictional heroes becomes an important episode in the evolutionary process of their self-awareness.

Like any other novel produced in Post-War America, *Pinball* reflects the deteriorating social milieu that intrudes upon the freedom of individual self. The chief personages, and even some minor characters, in *Pinball* are victims of existential crisis, they feel insecure thus adopting disguise, which guarantees them freedom and security. *Pinball* concerns itself not so much "with social defeat and victories as with adamic falls and quixotic redemptions" (Baumbach 1965: 2). In the novel, there are repeated illustrations to substantiate the argument that the main personages Domostroy, Osten, Andrea and Donna interact and go about the business of their life, securing their private world by wearing disguise. Moreover, the so called 'redemptions' are made possible by music. For instance, the narrator while describing Domostroy's emotional condition being dictated by music, points out that the man was guided by auditory, and his art was music. In case of Jimmy Osten and Donna Downes as well, music replaces the countless "encounters and collisions of men and objects with a mystical fusion of sound, places and distance, of mood and emotion" (Kosinski 1982: 10). Jimmy Osten, as Goddard succeeds in making himself famous yet invisible only through music.

Osten includes the following lines from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in his poetic composition:

I am a boy
That can enjoy
Invisibility

(Kosinski 1982: 36)

Osten's preference for anonymity and a life full of freedom is repeatedly reflected in the novel. While analyzing Goddard's music, Domostroy and Andrea discuss the personages who seem to have influenced him. Domostroy thinks that the mysterious musician's and composer's melodies, harmonies, rhythms and musical forms, would reveal more about him. He takes an example of one of his songs, called "Fugue": "In music *Fugue* signifies contrapuntal imitation, but in psychiatry it means a state of flight from reality" (Kosinski 1982: 50). Goddard, as a postmodernist individual, also hides himself and wants to escape from reality in order to preserve his self and identity from the encroachment of mass society. Disguise provides Osten freedom and security to the extent that he boasts of his art of being invisible: "I've learned how to make myself invisible" (Kosinski 1982: 85).

Jimmy Osten loves his anonymity because it guarantees his freedom, and he loves his freedom because it allows him to be

anonymous. While in seclusion in the New Atlantis, Osten as Goddard was really at home:

a disembodied spirit floating in a mysterious continuum, a mystic possessed by melody, as removed from the natural world as music itself. He had hung as his motto on the white sound proofed wall: *ognun suoi il segreti*—“Everyone has his secrets.”

(Kosinski 1982: 139)

Osten’s denial of a public self constitutes the ultimate affirmation of his private self. Executing his famous public image and identity—the Goddard self—by altering his real singing voice, Osten remains happy to be Jimmy Osten and not Goddard. The disguise as a postmodernist weapon is complete. Contrary to Goddard’s disguise, the demonic nature of Andrea’s disguise, while executing her criminal plan with Domostroy, gets reflected in her address to her former lover:

they all failed to find out Goddard. So I zeroed in on you, Domostroy, because—for all of your music and experience—you are a loser and I knew I could get you cheap. Furthermore, you’re such a cold, calculating, obscene son of a bitch that I somehow sensed you’d be mean enough to flush Goddard out.

(Kosinski 1982: 74)

Andrea’s words are spoken moments before her brutal killing during the climatic episode of violence. In *Pinball*, self-in-disguise thus symbolizes social evil, or the fact of evil itself. *Pinball* concludes with one of the

main characters dead, another unmasked, the third one away from the scene of action, and the fourth one (Domostroy) playing with a pinball machine. In the novel reference to 'pinball' is made for the first time by a beautician, Angel, when she meets Domostroy in a bar. At another occasion, Goddard's song is compared to the ball in a pinball machine because one "can never tell which way the guy's going in a song" (Kosinski 1982: 41). The novel ends with Domostroy concentrating on a pinball machine, but the game is over for Domostroy. He ends his 'game' at the same stage with which he had started: alone in his refuge. Domostroy, like Jimmy Osten and Andrea Gwynplaine, plays the game of deceit and deception which are essential instruments of a postmodernist self in disguise.

Sex, violence and disguise, being the intrinsic components of postmodernist ecstasy in *Pinball* also suggest the disruptionist, anti-formal and anarchic impact of postmodernist culture and society on fictional forms and narrative patterns. The fictional personages in *Pinball* belong to a chaotic world which is based on "Anarchy", "Dispersal", "Schizophrenia" and "Anti-form"(Hassan 1985: 11-12). Life has become meaningless and absurd for Kosinski's protagonists. They live their lives in bits and pieces, a series of disconnected and disjointed events. In *Pinball*, Kosinski emphatically shows the attempts made by his

protagonists to find some sort of meaning that may possibly connect the scattered events of their otherwise disjointed lives. In addition to this, most of the fictional personages in the novel can be described as the contemporary counterparts of Sisyphean figures engaged in agonizing tasks of attaining self-awareness, identity and sense of belonging. For Domostroy, Osten, Andrea and Donna the “boulder” keeps on “rolling” and there is no remedy unless some terrible tremor flattens the slope. The central protagonists in *Pinball* finally end up as rebel-victims, identifying with the Kafkaesque syndrome of existential problematic. Their existence is an ironic one and their existential predicament centers on futility and chaos.

To conclude, one can say that *Pinball* is a postmodernist text par-excellence, in which Kosinski establishes himself as the playboy of detotalised and demonic postmodernist existence; an existence that assumes meaning only in terms of the eccentric and the bizarre.

Conclusion

The Post-War American novel had to go through a great deal of change, vis-à-vis the form, content and technique, as it had to cater to an altered socio-cultural and economic scenario. American writers, especially the novelists, had to cope with an anarchic and decreative ethos of mass society and a chaotic landscape where the American Dream had attained nightmarish proportions. Initially in American tradition the hero was a quester always on some sort of a journey. An idealistic, non-conforming American hero, like Moby Dick or Huck Finn, had the ability to confront social norms with heroic endurance. However, in postmodern American society an individual finds himself adrift, like a dust particle, across the turbulent waves of absurdity, meaninglessness, frustration, and eventual self-annihilation. And the protagonists of Post World War II novels like Yossarian in Joseph Heller's *Catch -22*(1961), Billy Pilgrim in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) etc., have been labeled as anti-heroes.

Postmodern American novel, unlike its other versions, shows deep social concerns and the 'encroachment of society upon the self' turns out to be one of its perennial concerns. Postmodern American fiction also comes closer to the existentialism of Albert Camus and Franz Kafka, as the fictional protagonists of the Post-War American novels are found

caught up in an existential predicament to unravel the mystery behind universe and the existence of human life. Such fictional personages have become the contemporary counterparts of Sisyphean figures struggling hard to know the purpose of their life as well as to find out their lost identity. However, most of the times, their accumulative energy becomes their energy of defeat and they eventually end up as rebel-victims, thus showing close resemblance with the Kafkaesque syndrome of existential problematic that centers around the obsession regarding the meaning of life and the purpose of human existence.

Postmodern American novelists, like Kurt Vonnegut, often take the position of socio-cultural spokesmen. In *Breakfast of Champions*, as a committed humanist, Vonnegut laments over man's excessive dependence on scientific technology and advancements which has invited the apocalypse on humankind. In the novel, Vonnegut puts his hero in a protagonistic situation, similar to his own, and his existential predicament is an ironic one. In *Breakfast of Champions* human beings are portrayed as puppets in the hands of alien forces. The world gets described as a meaningless, mechanical and purposeless abode, a kind of Kafkaesque syndrome which encapsulates every human being including Vonnegut himself as well as his fictional protagonists. Both Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout are wrestling to find out the meaning of life in an otherwise

meaningless universe. The meaning of life functions as a pivot around which the whole plot of the novel revolves and Vonnegut's protagonists qualify as human beings wrestling with unfathomable absurdity that smothers and suffocates their lives.

The Post-War America has become a wasteland and *Breakfast of Champions* as a fictional work highlights the problematics of the protagonistic situation applying to the wastelanders like Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout and their victimization at the hands of the world. Dwayne Hoover like his other fictional counterparts assumes the role of a "deep diver" and dives deep in order to "find alternative modes of existence." Dwayne Hoover is a victim of existential crisis living an absurd life, more like Sisyphus at his boulder. Vonnegut, however, attempts to provide answer to the questions regarding meaning and purpose of life. In *Breakfast of Champions*, Rabo Karabekian's spiritual exegesis of his painting of Saint Anthony constitutes the thematic and aesthetic apotheosis and thereby providing an answer that man is more than a physical being and has a divine element in him. Moreover, Vonnegut's portraiture of Dwayne Hoover, in the novel, is in fact an answer to the problematics faced by a postmodern individual.

Jerzy Kosinski's *Pinball* presents the protagonist as a displaced individual in an uncharted and undefined landscape. The hero of the

novel, Jimmy Osten, more like his creator, disguises himself as Goddard in order to combat the intrusion of society upon the freedom of his self and it is only disguise that guaranties him freedom and security. Structurally and thematically the novel reflects the illusory security of wealth and the mirage of success. Sex, violence and disguise being the intrinsic components in Kosinski's fiction, also play a predominant role in *Pinball*. Both Jimmy Osten and Patrick Domostroy, the two central protagonists in the novel, use music to disguise their identity as music does not reveal the composer and thereby camouflages the postmodernist self. Jimmy Osten as legendary Goddard becomes an antithesis and alter-ego of Patrick Domostroy whose creative powers have declined. Both these protagonists nurture a series of affairs with women and their indulgence in sexual orgies suggest Kosinski's belief in the role of sex as an inspiration in artistic creation. *Pinball*, towards the climactic portion of its narrative, assumes the typical blend of sex, music, violence and disguise and ends in a mini mayhem.

For Kosinski's protagonists, as also for those of Kurt Vonnegut, life has become meaningless and absurd; their lives are a series of many disjointed events. In *Pinball* Kosinski emphatically shows the attempts made by his protagonists to find some sort of meaning that may possibly connect the dispersed events of their lives. The fictional personages in

Pinball, like protagonists of Kurt Vonnegut, show a close resemblance with Camus's Sisyphus. For all the main fictional personages in the novel the boulder of Sisyphus will go on rolling down the slope and there seems no possible remedy. The central protagonists in both *Breakfast of Champions* and *Pinball* end up as rebel-victims and cumulative essence of both the novels as postmodernist works signify what postmodern sociologists call an "excremental culture", the Kafkaesque syndrome in which human beings may not turn into insects but their existential predicament suggests futility, chaos, absurdity and nothingness.

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