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**The Interplay Between Technology and Truth-Seeking in the Postmodern
Era: A Close Reading of Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963)**

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By:

Tounsi Zineb

Nedjam Khadidja

Board of Examiners:

- **Dr. Naoumi Mohamed....., University of Laghouat, Chairman**
- **Ds. MOUISSA....., University of Laghouat, Supervisor**
- **Mrs. Bederina Sarah Ahlem....., University of Laghouat, Examiner**

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Dedication

Praise be to Allah always and forever

I dedicate this work to my heaven on earth, my mother who had always been
there for me.

To my beloved father.

To my brilliant partner and sister, Khadidja Nedjem, who taught me the real
meaning of teamwork.

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Dedication

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Abstract

Modern technology and its relation to truth-finding have been questioned in the postmodern writings. Postmodern literature conceptualizes this combination in different social contexts. Kurt Vonnegut is among the postmodern authors who tackled technology and its influence on American society. Vonnegut, in his fictitious novel, portrays the crucial journey towards the search for truth in relation to technology, chiefly in his oeuvre, *Cat's Cradle*. This novel embodies the character's search for ways to fulfill the lack of meaning in their lives; it examines the nature of truth-seeking and its relationship to human belief systems. The story depicts a fractured and chaotic universe in which different people have their own perspectives on reality, emphasizing the inherent complexity and contradictions of truth-seeking. This dissertation, scrutinizes the human unconscious's self-destruction by elucidating the nonsense of the world and the delicate nature of our existence. This paper discusses the issue of technology and truth-seeking through different approaches to achieve a comprehensive interpretation of the selected novel. The research findings point out the reckless pursuit of scientific progress without cherishing the ethical implications through analyzing the need for responsible innovation and awareness of the larger ramifications of scientific findings. Yet, the work emphasizes the limitations of human cognition, highlighting the difficulties in arriving at a final reality. The results serve as a warning about truth and technology, which allow human to find comfort in real facts.

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General Introduction

General introduction

General Introduction

Postmodernism is a philosophical movement that emerged as a reaction to Modernism after the Second World War. It is a response to gender division and social classification. It is also characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, and absurdity. Postmodernism brought about social and political transformations. Moreover, the term postmodernism refers to a school of thought that rejects the concept of absolute truth. Kurt Vonnegut, on the other hand, was a critic of technology development, believing that it led to destruction. The advancement of science and technology led writers to question the meaning of life. By that point, they had begun to experiment with new forms, themes and topics in their writing. Vonnegut, however, is one of the writers who contributed to American postmodern novels.

Cat's Cradle (1963) is a satirical science fiction novel by the American writer, Kurt Vonnegut. The story of a writer who claimed that technology could contribute to the end of the world, a tale that caused confusion and ambiguity in the mind of readers for a great deal of time. Additionally, it deals with the issue of technology and the meaning of religion, as it highlights the difference between technology and Bokononism through the use of black humor. Bokononism is a fictitious absurd religion invented by a colored man named Bokonon. The people of San Lorenzo relied on this religion to rescue them from despair and to escape the ugly truth of reality through the confronting lies of Bokononism. Furthermore, Karass is part of it, which refers to a group of people that are somehow linked to each other in order to fulfill the will of God.

Cat's Cradle serves as humanity's wake-up call, like many of Vonnegut's satirical works. For Vonnegut, bravery is not a pipe dream, and decency is not a myth. However, he is aware of the torpor that creeps into the soul, and the terror that seizes a person on the

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verge of taking action. Additionally, the novel also focuses on the humorous recklessness of nuclear physicists in a satirical way, and sometimes as a quite funny dream. It emphasizes modern satire.

This dissertation will focus on the interplay between technology and truth-seeking in the postmodern era, through the lens of Kurt Vonnegut in his work *Cat's Cradle* (1963). Moreover, this research will highlight the representation of science and technology as well as their negative effects on humankind. In addition, this research aims to reveal the hidden truth in the novel in a way that focuses on scientific progress. Kurt Vonnegut uses religion to highlight the dangers of faith and dogma, while arguing that people need lies to believe in to get through life. *Cat's Cradle's* proclivity to find meaning in everything makes humankind miss the life that is right in front of them. This research is conducted to answer the following questions:

- How does Vonnegut present the postmodern era through the novel?
- How does Kurt Vonnegut portray technology and truth seeking in *Cat's Cradle*?
- How does Vonnegut satirize humanity's obsession with 'truth'?

In an interest to find an answer to the previous research questions, this research suggests various assumptions such as the following: Kurt Vonnegut presents the postmodern era through the use of fragmentation, repetition, and absurdity. Secondly, technology is depicted through the character Felix Hoenikker, the father of the atomic bomb and the inventor of Ice-Nine, also represents science's naivety, which could inflict impairment and destruction. Truth-seeking, on the other hand, is projected through Bokononism, in which Vonnegut describes it as harmless lies. Thirdly, Vonnegut satirizes

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humanity's obsession with truth by showing the futility of people's attempts to establish strict systems or ideologies that depend on their perception of truth.

The objective of this study is to provide a better understanding of the postmodern movement and to explore Vonnegut's writing style since it is considered a classical literary work, through blending techniques such as dark humor and philosophical musings. Overall, the rationale behind choosing it lies in its literary merit, engaging narrative that point out the fact it tackle social issues and technology concerns, which provide Kurt Vonnegut a chance to warn the world through his writings.

There are a number of studies that have been conducted on this topic, prompting them to review and analyze major features of Vonnegut's work, such as its narrative structure, thematic depth, and social sphere. Peter J. Reed points out in his book *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: Writers for the 70s*(1972) that truth and technology are part of a dystopian vision because he concentrates on understanding the symbolic significance of technology and its relationship to truth. Reed underlines the dystopian implications of technology and its portrayal of the possible deception that creates a threat because of unsecured scientific advancements that were defined as harmless innovations. Additionally, Harold Bloom's work, *Modern Critical Interpretations: Kurt Vonnegut's Cat's Cradle*(2002), discusses Vonnegut's use of satire to criticize science, religion, and politics, as well as the consequences of these critiques in the context of the novel. In addition to the critics of Jerome Klinkowitz, in his two books entitled *The Vonnegut Effect and Kurt Vonnegut's America*(2010), examines Vonnegut's works, including an extensive review of *Cat's Cradle*. He provides a detailed study of Vonnegut's writings and their relevance to American society exposing issues such as war, technology, consumerism, and the American

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Dream to reflect his concern for moral issues, namely the lack of logical truth and empathy, which resulted in tragic outcomes in social life.

The above-mentioned researchers are concerned with analyzing truth seeking via technological destruction. These variables have been explored independently in previous studies; however, what is missing is a review of the unethical implications of scientific research and its impact on humankind. Moreover, it lacks the interplay between technology and truth that delves into scientist's immoral responsibilities, which result in falsehoods that affect human values. For this reason, this research paper aims at analyzing the link between technology and truth seeking by examining the resulted effect through the lens of sociological and psychological theories provided by scholars.

This paper is conducted through mixed methods and approaches. Initially, it uses a historical approach to cover the historical background of the novel's period, which is postmodernism. Additionally, it relies on a cultural approach that tackles the decline of values within a postmodern society. Further, the humanistic approach is used to emphasize subjective experiences by examining the human condition, it aims to uncover deeper meanings and explore the complexities of human existence like hope, relationships, inner struggles, and moral dilemmas that are portrayed in the novel.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter tackles the theoretical background of the novel *Cat's Cradle*, which offers critical insights into postmodern ideology as it explains the major theories. The second chapter, however, offers a detailed analysis of the novel. Most interestingly, it includes the portrayal of technology in Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*. The third chapter is devoted to the writer's endeavor to project

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truth finding in the postmodern epoch and the way technology and religion concealed lies as they developed.

Chapter one

Technology and Truth-Seeking in Postmodernism

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Introduction

Postmodernism has been regularly understood as a way of thinking that has rejected many of the central principles of modern western rationality. Even though proponents of postmodernism have seldom made strong arguments in favor of a perspective that seeks to reconsider and refine the notion of rationality, Postmodernism rejects the grand-narratives that have structured the societies of the past. These grand-narratives can be considered as totalizing concepts that attempt to provide human existence with knowledge or meaning. Furthermore, society has become disillusioned and no longer accepts these frameworks as providing constructive guidance or values. Accordingly, Postmodernism has raised a controversial debate among scholars who share the discussion about whether this ideology has any real meaning. Despite the controversy, this ideology continues to impact the 21st century, especially in art and literature. One of the key issues that have been pointed out throughout the post-modern era is the issue of truth. As the postmodernists struggle to find meaning and truth about the world, it is also a matter of whether the self has the absolute freedom to find truth and find a valid meaning to its existence. Nevertheless, it is mandatory to explore the postmodern ideology to get a closer background behind the rise of the movement and to expound the issue of truth finding within the postmodern framework.

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I. Critical Insights on Postmodernism

Postmodernism is one of the most controversial and uncertain term in history. As a philosophical concept, it denies the existence of any objective truth. Fedrico de Onis, a Spanish writer and a critic, in his book, first coined this term: “*Antologia de la poseiaespanola e hispanoamericana*”. It is argued that terms such as modernism and postmodernism did not start in the United States or Europe, but in Hispanic America. (P. Anderson 4) The term Postmodernism came as a reaction to modernism that was progressively being doubted and rejected. Among the philosophers who influenced postmodern philosophy were Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and many others. They contributed to the flourishing of the postmodern era, despite the fact that they did not claim it. Postmodernism’s purpose was to investigate the injured western individual because after the Second World War, there was a massive gap in cultural and social heritage.

There has been a vital question about this movement in the world. In his work titled *The Question of Postmodernism*, Ihab Hassan introduced the impact of postmodernism on various fields. He states, “is postmodernism only a literary tendency or is it also a cultural phenomenon”. (Hassan 33) He answered this question as he sees the term “postmodern” is used more in different fields such as art, literature, history, music... (Hassan 31) According to him and other writers and critics, the term postmodernism denies the boundaries between “high” and “low” forms of art and literature. The term postmodernism alludes to a shift from the modern conventions of unity, coherence, reason and other principles that were

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celebrated by modern thinkers. This shift was a radical change from believing in reason and logic to a whole world of thorough chaos.

This change in thinking is characterized by skeptical tendencies towards life in general and towards the possibility of making sense of the world in particular. According to Jean-François Lyotard, postmodernism is described as “incredulity towards metanarratives¹” (Lyotard 22) when people dismiss those narratives, they do not have a unifying belief that could hold them together. Lyotard articulates that these narratives are not useful in enabling life or conveying knowledge.

II. Postmodern literature

Postmodern literature appeared as a movement that opposed modern literature, in order to search for the meaning of life in the chaos that World War II caused. It can be recognized as a specific way of depicting postmodern life and culture. The term postmodern literature describes the works of literature that were produced after the Second World War and marked via stylistic and ideological ideas, depending on literary conventions such as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, commonly unrealistic and downright impossible plots, parody, paranoia, dark humor, and authorial self-reference. Moreover, the Second World War had an impact on the western countries, especially their writers, which resulted in the emergence of a new literary genre that allowed the postmodernist writers to explore the human artistic side through studying the human psyche; it likewise allowed them to express deep paranoia, anxiety, absurdity and a sense of

¹ Metanarrative , according to the Oxford Dictionary is a description of events that provides a stricter for people’s beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences

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meaningless life. Postmodern literature is built on techniques, such as the embrace of randomness, playfulness, paradox, dark humor, intertextuality and absurdity, which refer to theater of absurd.

Writers started to use black humor and irony to confuse readers and prevent them from finding meaning in the story. Writers declined concepts like wholeness and conclusiveness, and preferred to utilize fragmentation to reflect the fragmented selves of individuals, and this occurred through interruptions, isolations, and unstable ideas. Fiction in postmodern literature must be understandable in terms of specific currents in literary theory and practice. It was seen through magical realism, which refers to impossible or unrealistic fictional events. This entails thinking about postmodern fiction in terms of form rather than context, assessing how social and cultural change might prompt a shift in what fiction does and how it positions its readers to respond to it. Finally, intertextuality is the interpretation of texts that focuses on the idea of borrowing texts from other literary works through the use of pastiche, which is the combination of previous literary works and techniques to create a new style.

III. Postmodern philosophy

Among the philosophers who influenced postmodern philosophy were Jean François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. They contributed to the flourishing of the postmodern era, despite the fact that they did not claim it. This line of contradictory thoughts made postmodern individuals face emptiness after deconstructing themselves from these social regimes; thus, they struggled to find truth and to construct a

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sustainable meaning to their existence and identity, and these are the key issues that have been highlighted in the post-modern era.

Postmodernism is closely associated with Post structuralism, it appeared in the 1960s and 1970s. This movement is concerned with the interpretation of language and the study of economies and cultures in the social sciences. Post structuralism is based on the binary oppositions, which means that post-structuralism questioned the validity of ontology and indicated the creation of truth regimes; through this process, poststructuralists developed new ways of thinking about difference and identity. The principles of structuralism and post-structuralism are divided between theorists who work constantly to prioritize epistemology and ontology. Epistemology or the theory of knowledge, attempt to study the concept of truth in terms of epistemic notions such as knowledge, belief, acceptance, verification and justification. Nonetheless, it is considered the essence of the transcendent truth, which postmodern individuals believe that there is no objective truth, but that the truth is constructed by society. They begin to search for truth using their own research, individual experiences, and personal relationships to draw appropriate conclusions instead of depending on the truth that was found by parents, the government, or the church. Additionally, the postmodern culture was defined by an average level of skepticism, which made people hesitate to draw conclusions about the world, and prefer exploring on their own, which led them to become disconnected from reality.

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IV. The Absence of Reality in the Postmodern Setting

In the postmodern world, people could not differentiate between what is real and what is not. Jean Baudrillard discussed the absence of reality in a world that is full of representations and images. In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1983), he introduced the theory of the representation of images. He sees that “the simulacrum is never what conceals the truth - it is truth that conceals the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (Baudrillard 1) He also stated that the postmodern era is experiencing the final stage of representation where there is no valid truth, so human beings at this point have moved from the real to the hyperreal, which is a situation in which people are confused between what is real and what is not. For that reason, they are actively linked to fictitious representations that mistakenly offer a misleading image of reality .This can be illustrated by internet and the media, which try to enforce a specific unrealistic way of life through advertisements that convince people that certain goods are essential to maintaining a lifestyle.

Baudrillard claims and believes that there is no absolute truth in the postmodern epoch and this resulted fragmented reality. The images, or as he puts it, “simulacra” hide reality and hold no real meaning. Baudrillard presented four historical stages of the development of simulacra: the first stage is “The reflection of a profound reality”; it shows a faithful image. The second stage “masks and denatures a profound reality” which shows a falsification of reality and evil appearance of it. The third stage “It masks the absence of a profound reality”. In this stage, he states that simulacra pretends to be a faithful copy, a copy has no original. The final and fourth stage he points out: “It has no relation to any

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reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum”. He described this stage as a pure simulation in which there is no relationship to any reality but only copies of it. (Baudrillard

6) For Baudrillard, the absence of reality is when the simulacra take control, which makes pure reality has no place. He sees the world as a collection of images that are supposed to represent reality, but this is not the case because these images or representations are elusive and serve to obstruct rather than convey their message.

V. Conceptions of Truth

Truth has been a contentious subject among philosophers, critics and thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard entails and denies truth, especially in his book *Postmodern Condition* (1979). In his book, Lyotard argues that knowledge cannot claim to be offering truth in any absolute sense; it depends on the tricks of language that are always relevant to specific contexts. On the other hand, Post-modern theorists believe that there is no absolute or universal truth, claiming that truth changes with the appearance of new discoveries such as scientific events that took place in the world.

Truth has been a vital subject among critics, and with different theories have been put forward to explain it. The correspondence theory is regarded as the oldest theory that was explored by Plato. In this theory, the main object is to understand the meaning and acquisition of knowledge. According to Alan Richard White “a set of beliefs is true if the beliefs are comprehensive, coherent, and do not contradict each other” (Ashghar 296). Simply put, “a proposition is true just in case it correspondences to facts or the world”

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(Schmitt 145) According to this theory the thing that determines whether a proposition is true or incorrect is its relevance to the real world.

Another theory is the coherence theory of truth. It states that the truth of any proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions; it focuses on the established norms and beliefs of a given community. According to Schmitt (1995), “a true proposition is one that belongs to some designated coherent set of propositions” (Schmitt 103) .This theories supporters regard truth as a system of signifiers and signified. These two theories believe in the objectivity of truth. As a result, truth is discovered through an established system of words and their connotations.

The next theory of truth is the pragmatic theory that The American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce presented it. He quoted in Asghar that, “truth is defined as an ideal community of researchers could agree upon. He concluded that many traditional philosophical concepts have no practical use and therefore meaningless” (Ashghar 297) Truth is seen as a property of any individual. In addition to believing in subjectivity of truth, it also focuses on the usefulness of solving problems and answering inquiries. According to William James, truth is not static but fluid. For him, therefore, “The truth is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons” (James 155) He believes that truth is discovered by attending to the practical consequences of ideas and that truth is just a mere agreement of ideas with matters of fact.

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VI. Truth under the Shades of Postmodernism

Postmodernism marked a radical shift in emphasis from Modernism and it became an obvious movement in literature, art, philosophy and architecture. One of the things that characterize the postmodern age is the break down from the established norms in society including all fields, social, cultural, and aesthetic. People who lived in this age questioned the rationality of their beliefs and principles, such as the notion of truth in the world. At that time, the belief in an absolute truth and the existence of a fixed reality of things were discarded; Postmodernists denied the existence of objective truth in the world. According to them, “truth is a matter of perspective or context rather than being something universal” (Stokes 369). For most postmodern individuals, the term of absolute truth does not exist, and it has been replaced by a personalized sense of truth that may vary from one to the other.

Theorists of postmodernism namely Baudrillard, Lyotard, and Harvey, to name a few, argue that the contemporary world, which is classified by continued changes in society, needs new ways of thinking and writings. Therefore, the postmodernist’s belief in neglecting modern conventions was a response to the change in people’s lives, they started to doubt and question their previous lives and tried to bring their own ideas, concepts and new ways of writing to the world. (Kellner 3)

In the postmodern era, truth is seen as a relative and not fixed. They relate it to each individual’s own perception and own interpretation. What makes truth illusive is the belief in both relativity and multiplicity. Best and Kellner see the postmodern era as a theory that

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offers a critique of representation and the modern belief that theory mirrors reality. Consequently, they highlight the multiplicity and relativity of reality in the world. According to them, truth is a matter of perspective because everyone has his/her own interpretation of it. It is not something that people can find out for themselves over there in the world (Kellner 4). Fredric Jameson is a philosopher, and cultural critic who stated his arguments concerning the idea of truth before Baudrillard and Lyotard. He sees postmodernism as a “stage of development of capitalist society” (Kellner 186) this stage is marked by the doubting the previous beliefs such as the universality of truth. The skepticism concerning these beliefs opens the way for the emergence of a new world that is characterized by the loss of meaning. The absence of universal truth is due to postmodern skepticism about any foundation that can provide meaning and coherence to the world.

Theorists who came before Jameson, such as Baudrillard and Lyotard, shared many similarities with his perspective on postmodernism. He sees the postmodern era as a number of cultural shifts in all fields including literature, art, and architecture (Kellner 186). These changes in people's lives, particularly in their perspectives on the notion of truth and its elusiveness, as well as their sense of skepticism toward metanarratives according to Lyotard, are the key manifestations of postmodern culture. Jameson and Foucault's views about postmodern culture are argued to be similar. They both see the postmodern culture as a rupture in world history rather than being a continuation from modern times. Jameson's views are the same with Deleuze and Guattari because they see postmodern people as controlled by higher authorities that affect their lives in many ways. Jameson and Baudrillard see the postmodern era as a world with images, as he put it,

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Simulacra. In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), he defines the term simulacra as the copies of the original while Simulation as the act of copying or viewing only the surface of things. These images do not accurately depict the world as it is; rather, they conceal the truth, which makes it nearly impossible to establish a single, absolute reality. Best and Kellner (1991) demonstrated the connections between Jameson's theories on postmodern culture and other theorists like Michael Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard, and others:

Like Foucault, Jameson attempts to resist presentism and to recover the historical past; like Deleuze and Guattari, he analyzes the schizophrenic breakdown of the subject and the colonization of the unconscious by capitalism; like Baudrillard he holds that postmodernism is a culture of images and simulacra that projects a vast hyperreality, and like Baudrillard and Lyotard, he emphasizes the fragmentary character of postmodern culture. (Kellner 184)

Both Baudrillard and Lyotard consider the postmodern era as a world with no objective knowledge and no absolute truth. They both emphasize the notion of reality in society. On one side, Lyotard is more interested in the distrust of the grand narratives in the postmodern era. While Baudrillard problematizes the term of reality in postmodern society, he focuses on the representations in his theory of simulacra and simulation, where he states that there is no objective reality, only images that present other images, which show the absence of absolute truth.

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VII. Post Modern Technology

Postmodernism was seen as a reaction against modern intellectual's beliefs and values, which lead people to refer to knowledge as ignorance, social development as reversal, dominance as submission, presence as absence. Accordingly, knowledge has become viewed as a tool to manipulate and a commodity to be traded. In this claim, Floridi states that no previous generation was ever exposed to such an extraordinary acceleration of technological power over reality, with the corresponding social changes and ethical responsibilities (Floridi 127). The combination of scientific knowledge and technological rationality helped define the postmodern epoch. In the second half of the twentieth century, technological innovations such as digital technology, including television, computers, and the World Wide Web, as well as nuclear power such as bombs, helped to build a new historical era. This intensive push of technology resulted in different events in American society, such as the industrial revolution and globalization, which have brought environmental disasters like Seveso, Bhopal, and Chernobyl. All of them brought environmental crises that will damage humankind. Postmodernists throw knowledge into doubt, which makes the individual's perception and experience of reality blurred. Thus, reality is considered doubtful, leading humans to a dilemma where no single reality is real, and this is achieved due to technology's ability to create false realities through the use of representation and the creation of hyper realities.

Technology has its defenders and decliners. Melvin Kranzberg, one of the founders of the academic discipline of technology history, and Samuel Florman, the popular writer and practicing civil engineer, are defenders in that they claim that technology industrialized

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societies and provided them with a luxurious life. The English lake poets, the French symbolists², are among the few individuals who stood against technological encroachment. More recently, Jacques Ellul, Hannah Arendt, and Marshall McLuhan provided humanity with a vision of the apocalyptic world by pointing out how the world has become subjected to machines. McLuhan and Kenner in *The Counterfeiters* warn about technology's assaults on freedom by identifying the paradoxes of technology because they see technology as grain again justice. Postmodernists argued that science and technology were destructive and oppressive because they had been used to destroy and oppress others. They refused to use them because they were entrusted with tools that would deconstruct and harm the world.

Technology in the postmodern era was defined via anthropology³, in which it can be understood as a tool that helped them explore sensitive topics such as nominalism, ideography, historicism, anti-essentialism. Moreover, it is still possible to speak of postmodern technology as a manipulative instrument, as the possessor or calculative owner of acquisitive and appropriative values. This would be the revelation of the early political economy where technology represented the terminus diminishment of property rights so privileged in primitive capitalism. Technology is the beginning of the end of cultures and history, a tool that will bring apocalypse to this world.

² Henry Miller, Matthew Arnold, and Louis Mumford are English lake poets and French symbolists.

³ Anthropology is the study of human biological and physiological characteristics and their evolution.

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VIII. On Technologies' Destruction

The quest to understand technology was necessary to express this intellectual process, but it has distorted results, and postmodernism is a direct result of this effort. The widespread use of technology in postmodern age helped to foster the competition among narratives, which they saw it as an opportunity to express in their literary works. They tackled technology to show it as a double-edged sword because it can be used in human evolution or it can be destructive to others. Technologies come with the price of losing personal data and systems to viruses and Trojans. Thus, the use of technology, shifted life from healthy to toxic among family members, society, and nature, and this led to weaker familial bonds and the death of nature due to the poisoned innovations.

The rapid pace of technological materials affects human progress through the selection of appropriate methodologies for finding and creating knowledge. According to Pullinger (1999), an individual now has the opportunity to choose different identities, both through the facilities of the Internet and by the lifestyle choices made possible by IT-driven consumerism. Technology helped both capitalism and communism to rise, but in a way that harms the economy, which also touches the lives of individuals by leading them to become consumers par excellence. Differently put, they became objects of consumption. The machine production of capitalism was driven by use value of consumption but technology affected these values and migrated them into seduction: a game of chance and indifferent relations of pure positionality. Capurro states “through the data administration capabilities of information technology (storage, distribution, and manipulation), the hierarchical concept of knowledge is distorted and weakened.” (Capurro 19-28)

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Those who hold the technological systems have reached a point beyond human control consider technology fundamentally pessimistic. Condella says, "It is exactly this perception that technology is just something technological that has given rise to the illusion that society is in control of technology and not vice versa." (Condella 112) Technology can be considered an erratic tool due to its frequent effects that are applied in new contexts, and this means the results change significantly from the use cases intended by their users. For instance, computers and the internet were designed to help humans transmit information between networks, but they also lead to unexpected paths such as crime and fraud.

Furthermore, over the past two centuries, technological progress has contributed to job destruction. New innovations created jobs but made workers lose their jobs because of these new machines that replaced humans, which tend to affect employment and income inequality by making them suffer from poverty. Technology is nothing like the Enlightenment world imagined, but it is full of shocking disasters. The increasing frequency of disasters like Hiroshima has made people in 'advanced' societies consider the possibility that the progressive agenda, with its promise of limitless growth and a continuing improvement in the conditions of life for everyone, has not been realized and perhaps will never be realized.

In the nineteenth century, , Finley Breese Morse launched a plan to publicize a new innovation called the telegraph in American society. He said, "The greater the speed with which intelligence can be transmitted from point to point, the greater is the benefit derived to the whole community" (Ezrahi 80) . Telegraph blinded the Americans logic by its speed of transmitting passengers or items, and made them predict that telegraph can improve their

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living, but they could not know how this machine work, this lack of information about telegraph lead to a massive disaster such as putting political leaders under time limitations. Aside from that, telegraph messages were easily distorted; a distorted message was frequently worse than no message at all, which made Tom Standage say, “And although it did indeed dramatically alter the balance of power between providers and publishers of information, the newspaper proprietors soon realized that, far from putting them out of business, it afforded them great opportunities.” (Standage 216)

Pioneers such as Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida criticized the concept of postmodern technology. According to Baudrillard, “postmodern communication technologies generate free-floating images, where no one can experience any experience if it is not in a derivative format. That even its corpse has disappeared, science and technology step onto the scene: what if this crime was a sideshow, and the real is elsewhere?” (Baudrillard 13). Likewise, Nietzsche described technology as the mental shutdown that dominates the activity of the human mind. Baudrillard is one of the theorists, who tackled the digital world. He confirmed that technology no longer functions under the sign of use-value, but as abuse value due to the fact that it functions at the edge of seduction and violence.

Sartre and Albert Camus have gone deeply into the impossibility of knowledge, but the contemporary French thoughts had different characters of difference and self-use of technology, which means they highlighted technology as a language of violence due to harmful technologies like atomic bombs. These insights are essential to postmodernism. Yet, the dynamic shift in technological mastery of social and non-social nature, even in the

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face of political resistance, works to confirm the power of a world of virtual technology as a destructive tool. Ernst Juenger, Friedrich Georg Juenger, and Martin Heidegger believed that technology was the primary source of deliverance or disaster, and they claimed that not individual human decisions were responsible for the disasters of Nazism, but rather technology. The Nazis were inflamed by technological progress, which led millions to their deaths with no consideration for the consequences of their actions. With a war dominated by technology and requiring the use of innovative tactics and propaganda. It can be said that World War II was a modern war.

IX. Obsessed Individuals

The virtual world occurred in postmodern times, in which new enticing innovations like computers, television, cars, and even virtual games started to conquer houses and markets. This wild spread of virtual reality allowed technology to become the dominant sign of the contemporary world. This invasive power of the dynamic technological language of virtual reality has become the basic daily life of individuals, in which recoding human experience by the codes of computer software is paramount. Technology shifted to a horrific sign that possessed the body and mind of humans, as Baudrillard referred to it as the seduction of the simulacrum. Barthes formulated this as a rhetorical strategy for comprehending technology's game. Deleuze and Guattari pointed out the delirium and paranoia of life after the creation of machines. The world of digital dreams has become alive, and this is what has consumed humans and made them possessed by technology.

Possessed individualism refers to the subjectivity of aesthetic excess, where the subject no longer has any real existence but only a perspective or virtual appearance as a site where

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all the referents converge and implode. This addiction, technology is used in the daily life of humans, which has resulted in temporal rapidity, which means the loss of awareness in time and space. Moving forward, the interior self that is full of memories can have fantastic reveries of a past that started to disappear, as if it has never really existed because it has occupied via virtual space, the space of new technologies and a seductive virtual world. Possessed individualism can be defined as a sign of the disappearance of ideology into the language of rhetoric like the machines (Kroker 6) . Featured by forgetfulness, charmed by seduction, and disciplined by the codes of the virtual world, the possessed individual form is taken by nihilism in the last dying days of rationalism. Yet, information technology has given a rise to a new wave of enslavement and dominance. Nietzsche's "maggot man," Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre, described the possessed subject of technological society by stating:

Sometimes possessed by the imminently reversible language of seduction (Baudrillard); sometimes possessed by technologies of cynical power tattooing the flesh and colonizing the imaginary domain of psychoanalytic (Foucault); sometimes possessed by cynical rhetoric without a subject (Barthes); and sometimes possessed by the strategical language of a democratic war machine (Virilio). (Kroker 13)

Ultimately, these obsessed individuals are having a strong connection with technological innovation, which made them spending their whole time using new innovations trying to keep up with the digital world and this point out the irresponsible

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attitudes toward themselves because due to this strong attraction will lose their mental and physical health which is the jewel of human being.

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Conclusion

Postmodernism is founded on the principle of doubt about the absoluteness of knowledge. This epoch is featured by untruthful events, interpreted knowledge, flexible reality, and subjectivity. Additionally, the postmodern context had different viewpoints concerning technology and the terms of truth seeking through subjective truth. Yet scholars and theorists like Baudrillard claim that there is no truth and that it cannot be attained through what he calls simulacra, which hides reality from the eyes of postmodern people.

Chapter two

The Depiction of Technology in Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*

Chapter two The Depiction of Technology in Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*

Introduction

Cat's Cradle is an autobiography narrated by the protagonist, John, or preferably Jonah. This novel recounts the protagonist's unexpected journey as a free-lance writer in an attempt to collect materials in order to write a book about what Americans did when the atomic bomb was first dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. Kurt Vonnegut's experiences during the Second World War had an impact on his writings and philosophies, which reflect the helpless human condition and emphasize the role of chance in human actions. The sub-novel is categorized as science fiction that describes the lives of people living in foma⁴. In addition to that, the novel highlights the scientific and technological effects on mankind in a fictional framework. This chapter offers additional readings that ensure a better comprehension of this literary work. It demonstrates how *Cat's Cradle* is characterized as postmodern, including the use of postmodern techniques and methods. Accordingly, this chapter is dedicated to the portrayal of technology in the novel.

⁴ Foma: a term meaning "harmless untruths" from the fictional religion Bokomonism in Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Cat's Cradle*.

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I. Insights on Cat's Cradle

Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* narrates the story of apocalyptic events created by the mishandling of science by the famous scientist Dr. Felix Hoenikker⁵. This fiction story is narrated by the protagonist, Jonah, a reporter whose traveling seeking information about the bomb blast in Hiroshima. He sets out to question the Hoenikker children Frank, Angela and Newt in order to ask them about their father, who created the bomb. In the novel Jonah informs the readers that he was Christian back then, and now he is a Bokononist, a fictional religion based on the little Caribbean island of San Lorenzo. As viewed in the novel, "It was to be a Christian book. I was a Christian then. I am a Bokononist now." (Vonnegut 12)

The journey begins when Jonah sends a letter to the youngest siblings, Newt. The letter does not remember much of that day because he was a child. He keeps describing his father as brilliant, but at the same time, he is emotionally immature. His father tried to play with him in the cat's cradle but ended with Newt being upset. Newt gives Jonah Angela's address to hear her side of the story, as for Frank nobody knows where he is. Jonah keeps looking for another piece of information; he went to the research laboratory in Ilium where Dr. Hoenikker used to work to question his colleagues, who described him as a heartless man. During the conversation between the two, Jonah understood that the U.S military asked Dr. Hoenikker to find a solution to the problem of mud, so he came up with a scientific invention called "Ice-Nine" a crystal that seed can freeze the entire earth.

Jonah learns that Frank is on San Lorenzo from the newspaper, he also sees Mona Monzano's pictures the daughter of the island's dictator. On the way to San Lorenzo Jonah

⁵ Felix Hoenikker is one of the main characters in the novel; he is the father of the atom bomb.

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meets with Newt and Angela, who claims that her father does not have the credit he deserves. On the island, Jonah discovers that Dr. Hoenikker divided of Ice-Nine for his three children. After several events, Papa Monzano commits suicide using Ice-Nine and his body accidentally falls on earth, freezes earth's oceans, and ends the world.

II. *Cat's Cradle* : A Postmodern Viewing

Cat's Cradle: The Day the World Ended is a science fiction novel first published in 1963 and was accepted in 1971. It was written after the Second World War. This novel contains the main techniques of postmodernism, such as the use of the first-person narration in order to give the protagonist a voice, dark humor, metafiction, parody, irony and intertextuality. Kurt Vonnegut presents a unique form of intertextuality⁶. This technique in the novel is provided in a distinctive way since they are not mere quotations of the factual figures, but indirect references to various texts through which the reader can easily regard the shift between the past and the present in the plot. The novel warns human about modern science by referring to it as a cause that has the potential to end the planet. Vonnegut employs the image of a *Cat's Cradle* to persuade us to reassess how we should deal with modern technology in order to avoid such a disaster.

Cat's Cradle depicts postmodern techniques, concepts, themes, characters, and events in order to reflect the real postmodern epoch. Moreover, to portrait the absurd life to describe the world of chaos and disorder. It mocks the development of modern notions through the ultimate truth of grand narratives. Vonnegut used the plot of *Cat's Cradle* to

⁶ Intertextuality: means 'between texts' and is a field of study in which the relationship between texts is investigated.

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make a postmodern parody to refer to the fact that science does not lead to a utopia. One of the most significant examples of Vonnegut's postmodern attitude in the novel is the symbol of a "*Cat's Cradle*", which is a design made by threading string between one's hands.

Vonnegut used this to symbolize that humanity's ideas and "truths" are based upon lies or narratives. "No damn cat and no damn cradle" (Vonnegut 166) is an exceptional example of Vonnegut's understanding of postmodernism and his use of its concepts in *Cat's Cradle*. The term *Cat's Cradle* is a game that represents chaos, lies, and inhumanity. Additionally, the protagonist, Jonah, is an individual subject who refers to the foundation of knowledge in the world, and this is seen as skeptical. The self-referential and intertextual elements of the novel embody the fiction of the nuclear threat, which Vonnegut connected fiction to nihilism to instigate the world ambiguity. Nihilism is depicted as a reaction to the failures of traditional belief systems and human pursuits. Yet, Nihilism is seen via the characters and themes of the novel. The created religion is the main target of Vonnegut's nihilistic critique in the novel; Bokononism, the fictional religion, acknowledges the emptiness and highlights people's addiction toward comforting lies to give their lives a sense of purpose and meaning. Vonnegut suggests that science can contribute to a nihilistic viewpoint by highlighting the insignificance of human endeavors. As well as the topic of power and its corrupting effects. Ultimately, Vonnegut declares that the quest for power and control may lead to nihilistic results, as seen through characters such as Papa Monzano, the dictator of San Lorenzo, and Frank Hoenikker, the power-hungry son of Dr. Hoenikker.

One of the conspicuous techniques used by Vonnegut is dark humor. This letter was heavily used in Vonnegut's writings. It is the ability to use humor to address serious

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subjects with lightheartedness, such as fear, death, depression, and suicide. Vonnegut illustrated dark humor in *Cat's Cradle* in several scenes; it appears with the character Philippe Castle who has a conversation with another telling him about a smashed ship near "Papa" Monzano's castle stating: "At Father's hospital, we had fourteen hundred deaths within ten days. Have you ever seen anyone die of the bubonic plague? [...] Father worked without sleep for days, worked not only without sleep but without saving many lives, either."(Vonnegut 158) This technique characterizes most of the postmodern works. Vonnegut's writings have an exceptional style because not all writers can discuss several and different subjects without losing their reader's interest. Despite his inaccurate remarks and gloomy humor, he is nonetheless very popular. His use of dark humor is highly marked, only to show that society is based on a lie.

III. The Portrayal of Technology in Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*

Technology is highly noticeable in Vonnegut's novel; it appears to be a huge unsolved problem due to the atomic bomb and Ice-Nine, which they led to chaos and destruction of the world. Vonnegut wants to tell the world that technology is not used only to make life easier, but it can also have a negative effect on people in different ways. This can be illustrated in *Cat's Cradle*; the substance of Ice-Nine can be viewed as an example of a technological advancement that, despite its best efforts to make the world better, has the potential to wipe out all life on earth. (Bloom 57) Vonnegut describes the end of the world and human race in details through Jonah's voice to make sure that the last thing the reader keeps in mind, after reading the novel, is a detailed image of death caused by science

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in modern times, as viewed in the novel: "In that bowl were thousands upon thousands of dead. On the lips of each decedent was the blue-white frost of Ice-Nine" (Vonnegut 262)

Vonnegut sees that technology as a device that can be developed to solve a problem but subsequently turn into a weapon. Technology is not necessarily intended to be dangerous. Vonnegut chooses not to end the world using the atomic bomb, but instead he tries to show the irresponsibility of scientists who think they have control over things that they have no hope of managing. Felix Hoenikker invented Ice-Nine ordered by the U.S marines to solve the problem of mud; after that, it became a technology with dangerous implications. Ice-Nine is a device that efficiently freezes any liquid it comes into contact with. It is an illustration of the immense destruction caused by the technology, especially when it is created or applied without consideration for human race. In fact this invention can destroy a whole nation's water supply and cause its doom. Contrary to the general belief that science can address itself to all human problems, technology is often used to create human problems as illustrated through Hoenikker and other scientist, who perceive it as a proviso to discover the truth and find out the results of their discoveries. This blending of known truths and lies is a violation of established norms. (Hanuman 18) Accordingly, technological progress might lead to the destruction of the human race because of the lack of interest of science in the survival of humanity.

Technology in *Cat's Cradle* is treated as an obvious threat to humans, and this image is undoubtedly illustrated in the novel with the character Dr. Hoenikker when he makes a cat's cradle between his hands in the same way he makes his scientific inventions without showing any interest in the devastating result of the atomic bomb. He also tries to

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play with his child Newt on the day the bomb is dropped on Hiroshima, singing, "When the wind blows, the cray-dull will rock. If the bough breaks, the cray-dull will fall. Down will come cray-dull, catsy, and all" (Vonnegut 21) revealing his indifference and irresponsibility towards human lives.

Vonnegut with his playful writing style invites the reader to investigate his work. The book warns society that science can destroy the world. In order to avoid such a catastrophe, Vonnegut uses the image of *Cat's Cradle* to induce us and to reconsider how we should deal with technology. Nevertheless, the book maintains humanistic hope in spite of its apocalyptic ending and gloomy view of the world. Ultimately, the humanistic hope in the novel lies on the notion that through practicing empathy, love and connection with others, people can find meaning and purpose in their life, it implies that there is value in interpersonal connections and the pursuit of common ideals even in a world full of absurdity and disorder. Through these ideas, Vonnegut provides a glimmer of hope in the middle of the despair, arguing that the decisions we make and the connections we cultivate can have an impact on creating a more kind and meaningful world. As illustrated in the novel: "There is love enough in this world for everybody, if people will just look" (Vonnegut 26)

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IV. Withering Inventions in *Cat's Cradle*

Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* narrates an apocalyptic event created by the misuse of science. The novel tackles the destruction of the world by technological inventions namely: the bomb and the Ice-Nine. The physicists embody the cat cradle because they are the ones who move and control the string of the cradle. As Newt Heonikker points out the gruesome picture with many black scratches and asserts, "A cat's cradle is nothing but a bunch of X's between somebody's hands." (Vonnegut 165-166) Vonnegut attempts to show that human temptation to control life, death, and nature has led to crucial results like the atomic bomb and Ice-Nine. *Cat's Cradle* discusses information about the atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima and the Ice-Nine that were created by Felix Hoenikker, who was conceived by the United States Marines to solve the problem of mud. It is worth pointing that Dr. Felix's ideas toward academic knowledge are ironic, because of his scientific ability, but he chose to manufacture destructive inventions that damaged the world. Yet, the same person, Felix Hoenikker, created the setting for the novel's story of the world being destroyed by the artificial chemical Ice-Nine and the first atomic weapon, both of which are weapons of mass destruction.

IV.1 Ice-Nine

Ice-Nine is a molecular substance invented by Dr. Felix Hoenikker that changes its chemical structure and freezes into solid form without requiring a temperature decrease. As it is defined in the novel, when Dr. Breed told John about Hoenikker's creation, which is the Ice-Nine, he said, "This is a substance that can make water crystallize at an atomic level, a

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seed of doom for the substance makes atoms 'stack and lock' and freeze." (Vonnegut 20) In addition, it represents the ideal of scientific inquiry, claiming persistence inside the realm of theory, and reflects Vonnegut's personal experience with scientific postulation, inspired by the General Electric story. It demonstrates the human race's capability for scientific invention as well as its ability to turn such inventions into cruel and devastating uses. This invention will devastate a nation's water supply and assure its destruction, like Ice-Nine, made his generation more problematic and destructive in nature. Surprisingly, a real-life Nobel Prize winner proposed the concept to Vonnegut.

John asked about the Ice-Nine "If the streams flowing through the swamp froze as Ice-Nine, what about the rivers and lakes the streams fed?" Dr. Breed confirms they would freeze too. John follows the logic and asks about the oceans connected to those rivers. Annoyed by John, Dr. Breed confirms that they'd freeze too, as well as "the springs feeding" the frozen lakes and streams, and all the water underground feeding the springs. (Vonnegut 22)

Dr. Hoenikker gave the Ice-Nine in pieces to his children; his elder son, Frank, surrendered the ice to "Papa" Monzano, President of the Republic of San Lorenzo, in exchange for the office of Minister of Science and Progress. Dr. Hoenikker's other children, Angela and Newt, however, gave their ice to the United States and the Soviet Union for their lovers. The Ice-Nine substance can result in chaos in a way that harms humanity, as confirmed by Dr. Breed, who was forced to admit that the effect of Ice-Nine is total chaos. "They'd freeze, damn it!" culminating in its alterations to rainfall: "When it fell, it would freeze into hobnails of Ice-Nine and that would be the end of the world!" (Vonnegut 50)

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Furthermore, John lectured the Hoenikker's for their careless and reckless handling of Ice-Nine, accusing them of misusing it when they had the opportunity to destroy it. Instead, they repeat their father's mistake and resolve to clear up the mess later. Ice-Nine is referred to as a threat throughout the novel, and it represents men's well-intended promises and acts. Nonetheless, Ice-Nine conquered the world with tornadoes that raged over the frozen sea, but they justified their lethal errors by claiming that 'accidents happen'. This is seen through the San Lorenzo mass suicide in the wake of Ice-Nine.

Moving-forward to the political game of *Cat's Cradle*, the pieces of Ice-Nine that are between the United States and the Soviet Union are a symbol that refers to the cold war during the Kennedy years. John F. Kennedy was an extremely popular president among young people, and he inspired hope for a better society. In fact, on June 3 and 4, 1961, shortly after taking office, Kennedy met with Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna, and *Cat's Cradle* was published in 1963. Vonnegut wished to demonstrate via the novel's characters and events that the employment of technological weapons against one another had not only killed one another but also affected humanity's health.

IV.2 Atomic Bomb

The atomic bomb revolutionized the world and made everyone aware of its consequences. To summon and preserve a sense of reality, Vonnegut grounds his own speculative, destructive, fictitious technology and apocalypse in the memory of *Cat's Cradle* events through Jonah and Dr. Hoenikker and his attempts to depict the disparaging dilemmas of the atomic bomb. The title given to Dr. Hoenikker by his children is 'father',

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and it refers to the scientist's connection to the atomic bomb. Newton reminded Jonah that he was only six years old when they dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima "I remember I was playing on the living-room carpet outside my father's study door in Ilium, New York. The door was open, and I could see my father. He was wearing pajamas and a bathrobe. He was smoking a cigar. He was playing with a loop of string. Father was staying home from the laboratory in his pajamas all day that day. He stayed home whenever he wanted to". (Vonnegut 8-9)

Dr. Hoenikker was a heartless scientist that lacked ethical and moral issues in technology. He was acquainted with the bomb's potential, but he chose to neglect that his invention was used against humanity and caused death even for himself. He died because of Ice-Nine, and this was seen in Newton's letter, which poignantly conveys this sentiment: "After the thing went off, and it was a sure thing that America could wipe out a city with just one bomb." (Vonnegut 25) The following passage further illustrates the hitherto mentioned assertion:

Science has now known a sin. And do you know what Father said? He said, "What is sin?" "[...] (9) When asked to respond to what a secretary perceived as an absolute truth" God is love" he responds "What is God? What is love?" When Newt first responds to John's letter he explains of his father; I don't think he ever read a novel or even a short story in his whole life. I can't remember my father reading anything. (Vonnegut 26)

Vonnegut made clear that he does not accept the existence and the creation of nuclear weapons, he tried to warn the world through his literary works, and he pointed out

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his fears in a book called *Conversation with Kurt Vonnegut* by Allan, William Rodney. His vision is further illustrated in his novel, *Cat's Cradle*, as follows:

But for me it was terrible, after having believed so much in technology and having drawn so many pictures of dream automobiles and dream airplanes and dream human dwellings, to see the actual use of this technology in destroying and killing 135,000 people and then to see the even more sophisticated technology in the use of nuclear weapons on Japan. I was sickened by this use of the technology that I had had such great hopes for It was a spiritual horror of that sort which I still carry today [...] as for nuclear weapons, I can't imagine why anyone wants them. I don't want my country to have them. I don't want anybody to have them. [...] they threaten the entire planet. (Allen 232)

The heretofore-mentioned quote demonstrated Vonnegut's distaste for technological developments because they reminded him of a childhood trauma. He utilized his work and conversations to give more insights into his ideas on technology and its influence on society. Moving forward to Angela, the daughter of Dr. Hoenikker seemed completely unconcerned with the implications of her father's research. For her, the day Hiroshima was bombed was as ordinary as any other day. This was caused by her father's lack of attention to her, as he always does, completely disregarding the bomb's mass death and damage. The atomic bomb is more than a dangerous weapon; it caused a lot of chaos, such as death and illness, and even survivors suffered from thyroid, breast, lung, and other cancers at higher-than-normal rates. Despite the fact that it can remove a country's culture within seconds,

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the impacts remain for decades and cross generations. As it happened in Japan, most victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki died without receiving any attention to alleviate their anguish. Some of those who entered the cities after the bombings to help died because of the radiation. Finally, that is just a tiny percentage of the consequences that technology has resulted and this made Vonnegut attempt to point out these catastrophic tragedies through his science fiction works, which are mirrors of reality, in order to warn against the embrace of technology without contemplating its impact on society.

V. Influence of Technology on the American Society

In the postmodern world, technology has impacted society as it plays an important role in making life easier in many aspects, such as education and communication and so forth. Accordingly, technology has affected individual's psyche by making it difficult for people to maintain healthy relationship with family due to its extensive use. Most importantly, it has impacted society negatively as it has weakened family relations. Because of technology and its consequences, people are busy with many devices instead of sitting and having a conversation together as the previous times all because of technology and its effects, everyone in the world is addicted to something related to technology, such as different platforms, texting, watching series, playing games.

In 1979, technology had its defenders, particularly Melvin Kranzberg, one of the founders of the academic discipline of the history of technology, and Samuel Florman, the famous author and practicing civil engineer. According to Kranzberg, he argued that "technology's very success in the most industrialized societies ironically provided them

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with the "luxury" of being able to criticize technology's alleged excesses and to call for such non-technological objectives as social justice and environmental preservation.” (Segal 1) Florman, for his part, invited and asked us to recognize inherent and unchanging human frailties and abandon unrealistic expectations for what technology might accomplish in order to live amid varying degrees of technological development over time. (Segal 1)

Technology can be seen as a source of knowledge; in every home, we find more than one scientific device, such as televisions, computers, and smartphones and so on, which play a substantial role in life because they stimulate people's interactions with each other. Often, it contributes to spreading values and traditions by enabling individuals to see the world from a distance. Additionally, it provides more sources of information than were previously available. Technology has a substantial effect on our communication as well; nonetheless, there are huge and significant drawbacks to technology.

Cat's Cradle is a great illustration of the risk that Vonnegut sees in technology. It can be seen as a reflection or interaction with technology's culture. He explores how people behave toward technology and examines its character's attitudes, which have always been fundamentally ambivalent and how scientific and technological progress does not have anything innate. These technological advancements can easily become weapons of mass destruction, such as the mishandling of Ice-Nine that occurs on the island of San Lorenzo. In the novel, the fear of the apocalypse through invention becomes the fundamental issue as the novel's addresses the invention of the dangerous substance Ice-Nine is managed with the ignorance. Again, Vonnegut shows us the dangers of the excessive experimentation with technology that can cause as a frozen apocalypse that happens on earth because of

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technologies inconsiderate fall into the hands of a scientifically ignorant society that possibly will threaten the world. The scientific progress can easily be noticed in the character Papa, the leader of San Lorenzo, who welcomes one of Hoenikker's sons that carries Ice-Nine into his community with, "Science—you have science. Science is the strongest thing there is" (Vonnegut 144)

Vonnegut makes fun of science through the character of Dr. Hoenikker and his ignorant belief that truth is flawless. In his interviews with his colleagues, the narrator Jonah presents an image of Dr. Hoenikker as an oblivious man to the danger his own mind holds for the purposes to which his discoveries may be put. In a letter from Newton, we see what Dr. Hoenikker said after testing his invention, the atomic bomb: "After the thing went off, after it was a sure thing that America could wipe out a city with just one bomb, a scientist turned to Father and said, 'Science has now known sin.' And do you know what Father said? He said, 'What is sin (Vonnegut 25) Additionally, Todd Davis the famous critic, stated that: " Hoenikker represents Vonnegut's greatest fears: a man who has a mind so brilliant that he can find the means to destroy the world, but who has no conception of right or wrong, of moral value." (Davis 64)

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VI. The Connection Between Fate, Free Will, and Technology

Cat's Cradle explores the boundary between fate and free will through characters and the paths they have chosen for their lives. Despite the fact that some of them believe in predetermined destiny and others believe they will create their own future, John believes that the course he takes in the novel is predetermined by fate. The novel addresses the concept of free will and fate because the protagonists all believe in them. Again, Dr. Hoenikker portrays both free will and fate in the novel through his creations of Ice-Nine and the atomic bomb because he was able to avoid inventing such things to prevent the catastrophic results, but he chose to build them and name them as his legacy, ignoring the fact that this was a reckless action. This act, however, is a sign that he is in full control of his free will, but at the same time, he was obliged to make them for the military, which also demonstrates fate. The concept of fate and free will is also seen in San Lorenzo's people; they were condemned to failure regardless of who led them, and they have always been this way, and this is due to their misuse of technology laws. It is also seen when John criticizes the Hoenikkers for their irresponsible handling of Ice-Nine because they were aware of the destruction inherent in the scientific invention of Ice-Nine and inspected to carry the Ice-Nine with them until one of the pieces led to the mass death of the San Lorenzo people. Due to the devastating operations in San Lorenzo, Vonnegut attempts to demonstrate severe irony in San Lorenzo and expose the inadequacy of science.

The fictitious religion Bokokonim also tackles fate and free will, which for Bokonon is already written. After all, the Bokonian religion states that everything happens, as it should. The narrator is caught up in events that are completely beyond his control, but

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are unavoidably leading to a conclusion. In the end, the entire planet is destroyed by a seemingly inconceivable series of coincidences and entirely random events that are strangely explained by Bokononism. On the other hand, the novel provides little evidence other than John's promises that not everything that transpired was a coincidence. The theme of fate versus free will influences the course of the story and develops postmodernist ideas through the changes and impacts of the character's thoughts and actions. For example, Jonah was determined to write a book about the day the world ended, but fate intervened. His curiosity leads him to investigate Hoenikker's life, which eventually leads him to the imaginary Caribbean island of San Lorenzo. A chance interaction with Hoenikker's children and his study on Ice-Nine sets a different way for the events that follow.

However, there are terms in Bokononism that indicate that man has no free will in the universe. Wrang-wrang is one of these that is defined as "a person who steers people away from a line of speculation by reducing that line, with the example of the wrang-wrang's own life, to an absurdity" (Vonnegut 59). Jonah defined wrang-wrang as a line that helps him avoid being nihilistic, in which it can be a key word that shows Vonnegut's position on free will. Moreover, to the idea of zah-mah-ki-bo another Bokonist, which means fate is inevitable destiny is viewed as follows, influences that: "the word duffle is related to zah-mah-ki-bo, and it is the destiny of thousands upon thousands of persons when placed in the hands of a . . . fogbound child" (Vonnegut 135) These words are also included in the Bokononist vocabulary. The emphasis in Bokonon religion is on a structured universe. There is a paradox that derives from a passage in *The Books of Bokonon* that implies man's free will and an uncaring universe as it stated in the novel:

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In the beginning, God created the earth, and he looked upon it in His cosmic loneliness. And God said, "Let Us make living creatures out of mud, so the mud can see what we have done." And God created every living creature that now move, and one was man. Mud as man alone could speak. God leaned close as mud as man sat up, looked around, and spoke. Man blinked. "What is the purpose of all this?" he asked politely "Everything must have a purpose?" asked God. "Certainly," said man. "Then I leave it to you to think of one for all this," said God. And He went away. (Vonnegut 177)

Bokonon realized that if he made his religion illegal, everyone would practice it. Just as he anticipated at the end of the story. He informed them that God wanted those dead, so they have to commit suicide. While the people believe, they are making their own decisions. Bokonon makes them for them; he is "playing God." Even John believes that something outside of his control attracted him to the island. In the context of this work, destiny is related to free will. It appears as if fate has brought all of the characters to San Lorenzo for the end of the world. This is ironic because John was writing a novel about the end of the world, albeit one based on the atomic explosion. It is unknown if people shape their own fates depending on their knowledge or whether things simply happen. Bokonon predicted the future, which was widely known. Jonah had frequent feelings of being compelled to do specific things or go to certain places. His constant presence in the right location at the right time seemed to him to be a sign that God was in charge of his life and directing him to his destiny. However, it is unclear whether Jonah was fated to end up in a specific location simply because that is where he did end up. Fate, or destiny, pulls humans

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toward certain other people or things. However, no matter what they do, they always have the option to accept or decline participation. Mona and Jonah, for example, are left alone in her father's cave. "How do you do?" Jonah asks. Mona just responds, "It is not possible to make a mistake." (Vonnegut 198)

Vonnegut tackles ethical and philosophical problems regarding humanity's responsibilities in the face of scientific advancement by connecting fate, free choice, and technology. He challenges the idea that technology can fix all issues or lead to a utopian future. Instead, he encourages thinking about the ethical implications and potential consequences of unchecked technological developments. *Cat's Cradle* essentially investigates the complicated link between fate, choice, and technology. It emphasizes the potential consequences of humanity's reliance on technology. Finally, the interplay between fate, free choice, and technology in *Cat's Cradle* highlights the underlying complexity and ambiguities of human existence. While people have the ability to choose and act, Vonnegut contends that, they are also susceptible to fate and the unexpected repercussions of their activities, particularly in the sphere of technology due to the importance of individual decisions in shaping one's destiny.

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Conclusion

As a conclusion, *Cat's Cradle* is a portrayal of the direct response to the twentieth century's devotion to science. It criticizes scientists and those who feel they can comprehend, control, and survive the world's private information through technology. Kurt Vonnegut attempts to depict these ironic scientific inventions, in order to show the misuse of technology, which resulted in an actual danger to the world. This chapter aimed to highlight the risks of science through Hoenikker's ignorance and naivety towards scientific moral duty.

Chapter Three

Truth-seeking in *Cat's Cradle*

Chapter Three Truth-seeking in *Cat's Cradle*

Introduction

The postmodern age is viewed as an age of complete uncertainty that kept people questioning their ability to make sense of it. The issue of truth is the main subject raised by different scholars and authors in the postmodern epoch, who have portrayed it in their works. Kurt Vonnegut is one of those who tackle this issue in his writings, mainly *Cat's Cradle*. Yet, Vonnegut underlines the fundamental limitations of human understanding and the dangers that develop when truth becomes a question of power and control. Vonnegut sees the world reality as elusive, subjective, and frequently distorted for personal or political benefit. The novel's central theme is the problem of finding the truth and how it impacts humans. Thus, the results of truth seeking are portrayed through the novel's characters, when they struggle with their own quests for truth, frequently facing contradicting narratives and misleading realities, such as their striving to find the truth about their existence in the world whether it is fate or free will. This chapter examines the nature of truth and the issue of finding it in the previously described novel.

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I. Truth-Seeking in *Cat's Cradle*

In the world of postmodernism, truth has always been rejected and seen as damageable, censured, and negligible; thus, it can be said that truth is not objective. The notion of truth can be found in the context of postmodernism as a cause for a dubious reaction because this situation has provoked criticism of postmodernists of modern history in order to know the hidden truth in the world. In an interview with Vonnegut, he said that, “everything is a lie, because our brains are two-bit computers, and we can’t get very high-grade truths out of them. However, as far as improving the human condition goes, our minds are certainly up to that. That’s what they were designed to do. And we do have the freedom to make up comforting lies. But we don’t do enough of it” (Allen 77)

Cat's Cradle, is used as a significant symbol to show how Vonnegut explores lies and truth. Some of his characters lie to themselves to feel happy just like children. Since they love to play, they pretend to see the cat and the cradle. Despite the fact that cat's cradle is just a loop of string, yet it is put around and between the fingers, as illustrated along the following words: “No wonder kids grow up crazy. A cat's cradle is nothing but a bunch of X's between somebody's hands, and little kids look and look and look at all those X's ...” (Vonnegut 162). The novel opposed the idea that truth is pure and has value. Nevertheless, it warns people that truth all by itself is an unforgiving thing. Accordingly, Vonnegut's seeks to dramatize how people tell lies and assume them to be true, at the same time; he highlighted the difference between the two. Hence, the question readers should ask themselves is whether they will find the truth in the lies. In his epigraph in *Cat's Cradle*, he points out what he thinks about truth, acknowledging, “Nothing in this book is true. Live by

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the foma [harmless untruth] that makes you brave and kind and healthy and happy". These two contradictory statements show the relationship between truth and falsehood that forces the reader to question what Vonnegut means by truth and put them in the suitable frame of mind to appreciate the novel.

Vonnegut, further, comments in the novel that, "truth was the enemy of the people, because the truth was so terrible" (Vonnegut 78). Through humor, he tries to convey to the reader that the quest for truth, whether through religion, science, or other pathways, is not always advantageous or helpful and does not help one find their purpose in life. According to Thomas F. Marvin, The lack of truth is beneficial because:

When people believe that they have the 'Truth', they seek to impose their beliefs on others, and religious wars are the inevitable result. The highest truth in Bokonon's religion is that all spiritual truths are actually useful fictions, creations of the imagination that do not exist outside of the human mind. The meaning of life is not something we can discover in the outside world. We must create it for ourselves. (Marvin 88-89)

Friedrich Nietzsche, in his essay "On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense", stated that: What then is truth? [...] Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (Nietzsche 17)

Through this essay, Nietzsche examines truth as an illusion created and believed in by human beings. The novel *Cat's Cradle* creates an atmosphere of doubt where the idea of

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truth may be questioned. Through the religion of Bokkononism and through the text itself, Vonnegut highlights man's hypocritical behavior toward the quest for truth. Moreover, this is illustrated in the novel through Nietzsche's work, "he desires the pleasant life-preserving consequences of truth. He is indifferent toward pure knowledge which has no consequences; towards those truths which are possibly harmful and destructive, he is even hostilely inclined." (Nietzsche 81)

Vonnegut made it clear through characters that man are hypocrites including Dr. Felix Heonikker, he is described as a brilliant but ethically uncaring scientist. Despite his intelligence and knowledge, he exhibits a lack of concern for the effects of his scientific discoveries.

II. Humanity's Obsession with the Truth

Cat's Cradle explores humanity's obsession with seeking truth and knowledge, often highlighting the absurdity and dangers that arise from this obsession. He shows humanity's obsession with truth by illustrating how humanity demands illusions. Several characters become driven throughout the novel by their constant search for truth, whether scientific, religious, or personal. The protagonist, John, becomes increasingly preoccupied with discovering the secrets behind Dr. Felix Hoenikker's scientific discoveries, particularly the deadly substance known as Ice-Nine. Additionally, one of the novel's key themes is the belief that knowledge and truth-seeking can be detached from ethical considerations. Dr. Asa Breed and Dr. Felix Hoenikker, for example, embody the quest for scientific knowledge without thinking about or being concerned with the potential ramifications of their discoveries.

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Science, which based on truth and knowledge, is not portrayed as being worth as much as religion, which is founded on lies. On top of that, the fictional religion of Bokononism is important in criticizing humanity's fixation with truth. Bokononism recognizes the manufactured character of its own beliefs, presenting a system of soothing lies and harmless untruths to provide its followers with consolation and a sense of meaning. This satirical depiction emphasizes the human desire for soothing truths, even if they are intentionally wrong. Bokonon initiates his work in the Books of Bokonon by noting, which means that everything in life is based on lies. Bokonon's invented myths provided solace and comfort to individuals, offering a sense of purpose and meaning in their otherwise unfulfilling lives. In contrast, the truths uncovered by science serve as reminders of the harsh realities and inherent greed within the world. As implied by Vonnegut's novel, all beings require illusions to feel at ease in a chaotic and uncertain world. Thus, if untrue beliefs and ideologies about life and death provide comfort to the person, humans will accept them because people are willing to accept fake compliments, make allowances for how others treat them, and worship false gods or prophets in the name of comfort.

Since their lives were meaningless and there was no absolute truth in their world, people needed illusions to feel more comfortable. Thus, in order to feel comfortable, people began to believe in fake gods and religions. In *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut shows the readers that people believe in a factious religion, which is Bokononism to provide "people with better and better lies [...] These lies will prevent them from seeing the truth that life was as short and brutish and mean as ever." (k. Vonnegut 169-171) Moreover, Kurt Vonnegut satirizes humanity's obsession with truth in *Cat's Cradle* through the Bokononism religion of the San Lorenzo people. He also points out that humanity requires illusions and lies to feed their

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obsession with the truth and comfortable and secure. Yet many characters in the story seek to fill the void in their lives by choosing to think that their reality is predicated on lies. The *Cat's Cradle* novel demonstrates science and religion as foundations of truth and lies, and this is seen through the fictional religion Bokononism, the characterization of Felix Hoenikker, and Vonnegut's logic. Dr. Hoenikker creates Ice-Nine, which is "a force of nature no mortal could possibly control." (Vonnegut 28) Ice-Nine refers to the power that truth and science hold to control individuals' lives.

Unlike most faiths that declare to hold the absolute truth and meaning of life, Bokononism has contradicted ironies. Nonetheless, Bokononism is transparent about its deception on the account that instead of claiming the perfect truth, it confesses that it is built on lies as clarified, "Don't be a fool! Close this book at once! It is nothing but foma!" (Vonnegut 256). Vonnegut highlights that science and religion represent absolute truth. Moreover, followers of Bokononism blindly attach themselves to the faith without examination, and the pursuit of development in science is considered a quest for truth. These ideas of science and religion are revealed in *Cat's Cradle* to show humanity's obsession with the search for truth, yet their desire for truth ultimately leads them to death. Humans appear to be obsessed with truth. Many people believe that science is the truth because it can be demonstrated. Religion, on the other hand, may be true but cannot be proven because it cannot be defined. When Miss Faust is speaking to John, she gives an example: When Asa Breed asked her to say something true, she responded, "God is love" (Vonnegut 58), but when she asked her to define "God" and "Love" she could not. As a result, her assertion is not true. Within this narrative, science appears to be the means of discovering the truth, but religion appears to be made up of lies.

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Vonnegut indicates through that the obsession with truth can be mistaken, leading to disillusionment, moral ambiguity, and the disintegration of interpersonal bonds. He questions the idea that acquiring knowledge and absolute facts may lead to genuine happiness or utopia. He points out that the consequences of humankind's pursuit of truth are endless, as well as the value and implications of such obsessions. In his quest for understanding, he warns against the blind pursuit of knowledge and emphasizes the significance of considering ethics, empathy, and the interconnectivity of human interactions.

III. The interpretation of Truth in Society

Vonnegut explores the concept of truth as truthful lies in the novel to show the embrace of comforting falsehoods and narratives that create a feeling of meaning and purpose in social life. Along with this, he introduces a religion he invented for the novel, Bokononism, to express society's illusions about the validity of truth. Through the portrayal of truthful lies, he questions the nature of truth and its function in shaping society. He also contends that the quest for ultimate truth is sometimes pointless or even harmful, and that accepting comforting illusions can help one manage the complexities and uncertainties of life. Thus, truth in society is portrayed in contradictory way just as when everyone on the island is claimed to dislike Bokonon's followers, despite the fact that everyone on the island is a committed Bokononist.

Vonnegut used the island of San Lorenzo in the novel in order to demonstrate how lies can benefit humanity more than truth. The island is incredibly poor, and they have no way of developing its economy or natural resources to make it a viable place to live. Instead of attempting to do so, people ought to believe in the reassurance that their faith can bring

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them, whether genuine or not. Nonetheless, it might give them hope and happiness, as it is stated in the novel:

Well, when it became evident that no governmental or economic reform was going to make the people much less miserable, the religion became the one real instrument of hope. Truth was the enemy of the people, because the truth was so terrible, so Bokonon made it his business to provide the people with better and better lies. (Vonnegut 169).

Therefore, the terrible lies of Bokononism are often referenced throughout the narrative. Nonetheless, the Bokonon religion has spread like wildfire among the residents of San Lorenzo, making them rely on this false optimism to survive. Vonnegut's Bokononism beliefs introduce the sense of salvation in lies, where all faiths are built on lies and that man requires them to survive. Again, Vonnegut wants to display that any religion would promote comfort to its believer, even if it were based on lies because religion builds a strong community bond, which encourages trust in other members of society. Hazel Crosby, a Christian visiting San Lorenzo, shared her faith in Christians by stating: "I'm sure glad it's a Christian country [...] or I'd be a little scared." (Vonnegut 135) For her, Christianity is her comfort zone, which made her confess to her husband that she is not scared on San Lorenzo Island due to her bond with religion, and this refers to the fact that no matter how full of lies truth is, it will secure the individuals because they decide to believe in it. There is another situation that happened to a Newt, who is a short man called midget believes that he is a tall man. However, Newt's reality is that he will never be as tall as other full-grown people will be. Lying to Newt and telling him that he is as big as others are if he thinks so gives him the appearance of power and confidence. At the end of *Cat's Cradle*, Bokonon appears to annul

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his entire religion due to the world's destruction and people who have passed away, which made Bokonon write the final passage of his holy book:

If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity; and I would climb to the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes statues of men; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who.
(Vonnegut 277)

This shows that Bokonon has changed his mind due to his confusion about whether to believe that he is not a younger man because he is too wise to do so, or to restrict his age to show regret toward forgetting his religion and creating a faith full of lies that led many people to their deaths. Ultimately, Vonnegut demonstrates truthful lies in society by showing Bokononism as a helpful religion, not because it offers people some sort of universal truth but rather because it provides them with elaborate lies to believe. His lies prove more liberating because they provide men with a way to feel better about their lack of meaning and destitute existence. In essence, *Cat's Cradle* disputes on the human desire to embrace 'truthful lies' in order to find meaning and purpose, even when confronted with reality's paradoxes and complexities.

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IV. The Quest For Meaning in a Meaningless Universe

Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, delves into the human desire for meaning and purpose in a seemingly meaningless world. Vonnegut explores the human condition through satire and humor throughout the work, including the longing for utopia, the hazards of unrestricted scientific advancement, and the search for meaning in a world that frequently appears to be devoid of it. In the book's setup, Vonnegut utilizes the absurd to point out the beliefs of meaninglessness in human society. He represents the way that mankind craves for understanding the meaning of its existence, he was concerned with one question: what is the meaning of life in a meaningless universe? He often deals with meaninglessness but cynically; he gives us one answer, which may offer us some hope. He insists that we are in control of our fate and that we should make meaning for ourselves that will make us kind, loving, and gentle instead of destructive and ruthless.

However, *Cat's Cradle* can be considered an eschatological⁷ book in which Vonnegut demonstrates the human search for meaning in a meaningless and wrong world. Vonnegut's depiction of a meaningless life in *Cat's Cradle* is a critique to humanity's obsession with power, control, and the pursuit of knowledge without regard to the ethical implications and this is directly stated in the novel:

“Tiger got to hunt, bird got to fly;
Man got to sit and wonder 'why, why, why?'
Tiger got to sleep, bird got to land;
Man got to tell himself he understand.” (Vonnegut 177)

⁷ Eschatological: a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humankind

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It explores the nature of human existence and the implications of human acts in a world where meaning is frequently elusive or deceptive. The concept of Ice-Nine, a chemical with the ability to freeze all water and ultimately eliminating life on Earth, is one of the novel's fundamental motifs. Ice-Nine represents humanity's ability to develop catastrophic technologies and systems that can make life useless. The notion of a meaningless existence is embodied through the figure Felix Hoenikker, one of the scientists responsible for producing Ice-Nine. Despite his brilliance and technical accomplishments, he is presented as emotionally disconnected and unconcerned about the consequences of his inventions. His pursuit of knowledge and scientific progress has disastrous consequences, highlighting the potential meaninglessness of human existence. In addition, the protagonist, John, is involved in a web of strange events and interacts with numerous personalities, each with their own take on life's meaninglessness. Hence, the novel satirizes religious dogmas, political ideologies, and scientific advancement, implying that all of these systems fail to deliver true purpose or meaning in the end.

One of the themes of the novel is the absurdity of human endeavors and the arbitrary nature of existence. Vonnegut argues that humans frequently pursue ambitious objectives and build complicated belief systems to give their lives significance, only to discover that these creations are ultimately hollow and meaningless. Despite its mythical origins, Bokononism is revealed as an intentional creation religion that aims to offer comfort and solace to its believers. The *Cat's Cradle* theme itself serves as a metaphor for the absurdity of existence. The novel is a simple string game that appears elaborate and intentional, but eventually collapses into meaninglessness when the strings are released. The piece itself represents the fragile aspect of human existence and the appearance of purpose, which often fades upon

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closer inspection. Again, Vonnegut uses satire throughout the work to criticize aspects of contemporary society and human nature. He exposes the foolishness of human institutions, ideologies, and the quest for power through dark humor and sarcasm, implying that these goals frequently lead to a sense of emptiness or meaninglessness. Finally, Vonnegut poses provocative issues concerning the essence of life and the search for meaning by emphasizing the absurdity and eventual failure of human activities.

V. The Utopian Dream in *Cat's Cradle*

Utopia is a universal concept that has drawn readers for centuries and influenced many writers. This concept is explored in a satirical and critical manner in Vonnegut's novel. The concept of truth seeking is used to study the issue of utopia through the search for the ultimate truth, which might have unintended effects and calls into question the notion that a utopian society can be formed on a single, fixed fact. The pursuit of truth and scientific development is offered as a fragile foundation for establishing a flawless society in the context of utopia. Continuously, Vonnegut uses humor to inquire about the concept of utopia, arguing that real utopia is unachievable and that attempts to construct perfect communities frequently result in unexpected consequences. San Lorenzo, with its destitute conditions and dictatorial governance, stands in stark contrast to Bokononism's goals. The characters in the novel seek the truth about Ice-Nine the fictional chemical Ice-Nine, which is a symbol of the hazards of utopian dreams, through the substance's father, Felix Hoenikker, and the protagonist John, who ignorantly contribute to the chaos and destruction that occurred. Yet, Vonnegut's narrative criticizes human's desire to construct and stick to belief systems and ideologies in their quest for meaning and order. When pursued to its logical conclusion, the quest for truth can lead to dogmatism, extremism, and the suppression of dissident voices.

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This, in turn, undermines the possibility of a true utopia. The utopian dream is explored on the fictional island of San Lorenzo. It is depicted as a small, poor nation governed by Papa Monzano. Despite its seemingly terrible conditions, San Lorenzo is the setting for the protagonist's encounter with the idea of a utopian society.

The utopian dream is presented in the novel through the idea of foma in Bokononism, which is considered essential for the well-being of individuals and society. Vonnegut's novels and stories are full of failed utopian dreamers, who try to make the world a better place. Bokononism acknowledges that its teachings are fake, but maintains that they are needed for people to live with satisfaction.

Margaret Atwood's argument for the utopia/dystopia tradition matches Vonnegut's own thoughts linked to critics desire to label him and his work. Atwood's definitions are also appropriate for the tradition within which *Cat's Cradle* sits:

Utopias are often satirical, the satire being directed at whatever society the writer is currently living in- that is, the superior arrangements of the Utopians reflect badly on us. Dystopias are often like dire warnings than satires, dark shadows cast by the present into the future. They are what will happen to us if we don't pull up our socks". (Atwood 94)

John the protagonist initially sees San Lorenzo as a dystopia due to its poverty, dictatorship, and lack of resources, which lead him to question the nature of it. He realizes that the pursuit of an ideal society may be pointless, and instead, he finds beauty and meaning in the imperfect reality of San Lorenzo. The utopian dream in *Cat's Cradle* is presented as a complex and subjective concept, where people can find their own versions of realization and meaning even in challenging circumstances. Vonnegut's depiction of utopia is a cautionary

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one; he highlights the dangers of blind faith, the misuse of technology, and the unintended consequences of human action. This led to the search for a utopian society coming to a catastrophic end. In general, *Cat's Cradle* challenges the notion of utopia, presents a critical point of view on human beliefs and desires for a perfect world. Ultimately, Vonnegut implies through some satirical components that the search of utopia might be misdirected, leading to ignorance, injustice, and even disaster. He aimed to question the unrealistic ideas of a perfect society and draw attention to the flaws and limitations of human nature and systems. Vonnegut offers a critical and thought-provoking take on utopia, emphasizing the significance of accepting the world's complexities and imperfections rather than striving for an unachievable ideal.

Overall, the utopian dream in *Cat's Cradle* is a reflection of the human need for purpose and a sense of belonging, even in the face of harsh realities. It explores the idea that the quest for a perfect society may not lie in changing outward circumstances but in finding personal meaning and connection within the existing world.

VI. The Religious Credo in *Cat's Cradle*

Kurt Vonnegut presented the concept of religion as a factious one in the novel; he introduces a religion named 'Bokononism'. The creator of Bokononism was a black man called Lionel Boyd Johnson, who came from very a wealthy family in Tobago. After the First World War, a ship landed him in San Lorenzo, a mythical South Sea haven of poverty, disease and hunger. Arriving with Johnson on San Lorenzo was Earl McCabe, a marine deserter who later became the dictator of the island. His work consisted of reshaping economics and laws, while Johnson's task involved making a new religion for the

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inhabitants. As Bokonon (“Bokonon” is the San Lorenzan pronunciation of Johnson) writes in the Calypso⁸ below:

I wanted all things to seem to make some sense, so we all could be happy, yes,
Instead of tense. And I made up lies So that they all fit nice, and I made this sad
world a par-a-dise. (Vonnegut 125)

Bokononism was a religion that parodies all religions and spread the belief that well-meaning lies are more helpful to humanity than absolute truths. The novel begins on a standard carnivalesque, noting, “Nothing in this book is true. Live by the *foma* (harmless untruths) that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy” (Vonnegut 6) . Vonnegut depicts Bokonon as a holy wanderer who finds nothing, but lies and idiocy. He talks about the creations of humans and their attempts to convince themselves and others of the importance of their pursuits and that the lies of this religion have the means for making men feel better about their lack of purpose and destitute existence. In the world of Bokonon, there is no absolute truth, and wherever truth occurs in the novel *Cat's Cradle* that is highly criticized, the Bokonian lies, especially ‘foma’, or the bittersweet and harmless lies provide comfort against the truth in a society on the verge of chaos. Jerome Klinkowitz asserts that Bokononism is a “faith that must be built on self-apparent pretense and artifice to be effective” for such “artifice to succeed it must always maintain its identity as arbitrary convention and never succumb to temptations of absolute truth” (Klinkowitz 46-47).

From the beginning, Vonnegut entails the fact that Bokononism is not a real faith; it is just a made-up fiction, but people believe in it simply for its potential to satisfy their needs. According to Vonnegut, “faith is not rooted in religion, but in man himself” (D. A. Hanuman

⁸ Calypso: religious poem.

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16). He believes that writers can influence people's ideas profoundly, and this can be illustrated in the novel; Jonah, the narrator in Vonnegut's fiction, divulges the purpose for the telling of his tale, his purpose was to write a book about the apocalypse, but eventually the journey took another path and was under- mined by Bokononism:

When I was a much younger man, I began to collect material for a book to be called *The Day the World Ended*. The book was to be factual. The book was to be an account of what important Americans had done on the day when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. It was to be a Christian book. I was a Christian then. I am a Bokononist now. (Vonnegut 12)

In *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut tries to play with people's beliefs that there must be a purpose for everything by explaining the origin of the earth with his creation story in the novel, stating:

In the beginning, God created the earth, and he looked upon it in His cosmic loneliness". "God created every living creature that now move. "Let Us make living creatures out of mud, so the mud can see what We have done." "One of these creatures was Man. Man then inquired what the purpose of this creation was. (Vonnegut 256)

This is what led people to espouse religious beliefs in the first place such as Bokononism as mere 'foma'. Vonnegut makes Bokononism a religion of lies and falsehood because any religion is, in some senses, as absurd as the world for which it is created. In a philosophical sense, all religions are founded on the 'lies' of their founders because man can not know ultimate reality and cannot come up with a logical explanation for the purpose of existence. Bokononism, which admits its own lies, is no more than Bokonon's attempt to

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create meaning for modern man in his absurd condition; no one should take anything Bokonon says seriously because it cannot be trusted to tell the truth due to the fabricated religion's lies. These 'sacred lies' of Bokononism are what make the religion popular. (Anderson 44-45)

In San Lorenzo, where *Cat's Cradle* is centered, all people strangely believe in Bokonon's falsehoods; these lies in other words, are necessary for man and useful in explaining an otherwise unexplainable life. Jonah, the narrator of *Cat's Cradle*, says that: "anyone unable to understand how a useful religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book either" (Vonnegut 16). Bokononism, like any other religion, has its own philosophy to express its subjective and objective truths. For example, "Boko-maru" is a bokononist ritual in which two people press the soles of their feet together in order to "mingle their awarenesses" (Vonnegut 156). Thus, this religion was invented based on love, lies, controlling people, and awareness that the lies would prevent people from thinking about the poverty of their daily lives. Vonnegut represents Bokononism as being the most paradoxical religion in that it reflects both "the heartbreaking necessity of lying about reality, and the heartbreaking impossibility of lying about it" (Vonnegut 274). Bokonon advocates that we must have faith even when, paradoxically, all faith is false.

The novel depicts a reasonable world in which truth is used for material and individual achievement without concern for the enduring impacts those realities will have on human beings. Vonnegut's main intention through portraying the Bokonian religion is to point out how people blindly depend on religion, and while Bokonon only lead people into oblivion, he espouses the philosophy that people see what they want to see and read into what is there in reality.

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Conclusion

Cat's Cradle explores truth seeking through the concept of truth and lies, which is seen through the lenses of religion and science. The fictional religion in the book, Boknonism, is based on the premise that all faiths are lies, but these lies can encourage people to live happier lives. It also investigates the concept of truth as a social construct, like Boknonism, a religion founded on deception, yet it gives its followers a sense of community and purpose. Finally, the novel implies that truth is not always a straightforward concept, but can be managed and corrupted by those in power, which aims to expose that science can be a dangerous lie when it is used without regard for the consequences.

General conclusion

General conclusion

General conclusion

As a conclusion for this paper and through a close reading of Kurt Vonnegut's novel, *Cat's Cradle* depicts technology and truth-seeking as complicated and connected concepts that frequently lead to unexpected and dangerous outcomes. Vonnegut tackles concerns regarding the nature of truth, the role of science, and the influence of technology on society throughout the novel. Technology and truth are crucial in the most postmodern studies and Vonnegut himself expresses his concerns through his literary works. He highlights that our environment of technology is much more complicated, powerful, and not always beneficial. Yet, it could be catastrophic somehow because of shifting culture, beliefs, and even traditions on account of people's interactions with it and the way they tend to use it.

Furthermore, this dissertation links the effects of technology with truth seeking in the postmodern era. One of the main themes of *Cat's Cradle* is the search for knowledge and truth. It gives a gloomy vision of technology through emphasizing its enormous capacity to create and destroy both the world and its humanistic values. Throughout the novel, the protagonist, Jonah, explores several themes, including the nature of truth and its relationship to human society. He becomes involved in a complex web of events surrounding the creation of a substance called Ice-Nine. As he delves deeper into the story, he grapples with the concept of truth and its nature in developing the atomic bomb and the mysterious chemical known as Ice-Nine. These innovations lead him to acknowledge that it is capable of freezing all water on earth and has the ability to wipe out all life. Vonnegut

General Conclusion

advises against pursuing technological advancement blindly without contemplating its consequences.

This autobiographical novel shows that truth-seeking is not necessarily a noble task. In fact, it frequently results in chaos, devastation, and a loss of human values. In the story, technology, specifically the creation of severe technologies such as the atomic bomb, is portrayed as a two-edged sword. According to Vonnegut, truth tends to be subjective, elusive, and even harmful. The protagonist, John, sets out on a mission to learn the truth about the inventor of the atomic bomb, Felix Hoenikker, and his creation of Ice-Nine. His trip, however, demonstrates the inherent complexity and ambiguity of truth, as well as the possibility of manipulation and lies.

Additionally, while science and technology have the ability to benefit society and address pressing problems, they also have the potential to have disastrous repercussions. Vonnegut criticizes the way science and technology are often driven by the desire for power without regard to the ethical implications or the possibility of unexpected consequences. Besides, Vonnegut implies that the pursuit of truth may be elusive and subjective. The novel's protagonists follow belief systems and truths, such as the fictional religion of Bokononism. These belief systems provide an avenue to find meaning and purpose in a chaotic world, but they also reveal the arbitrary and manufactured character of reality.

Overall, it delivers a warning about the risks of unrestrained technological development and the inherent limitations of truth seeking. It warns people against pursuing scientific advancement blindly without contemplating the potential implications and encourages them to explore the role of technology and truth in molding human existence.

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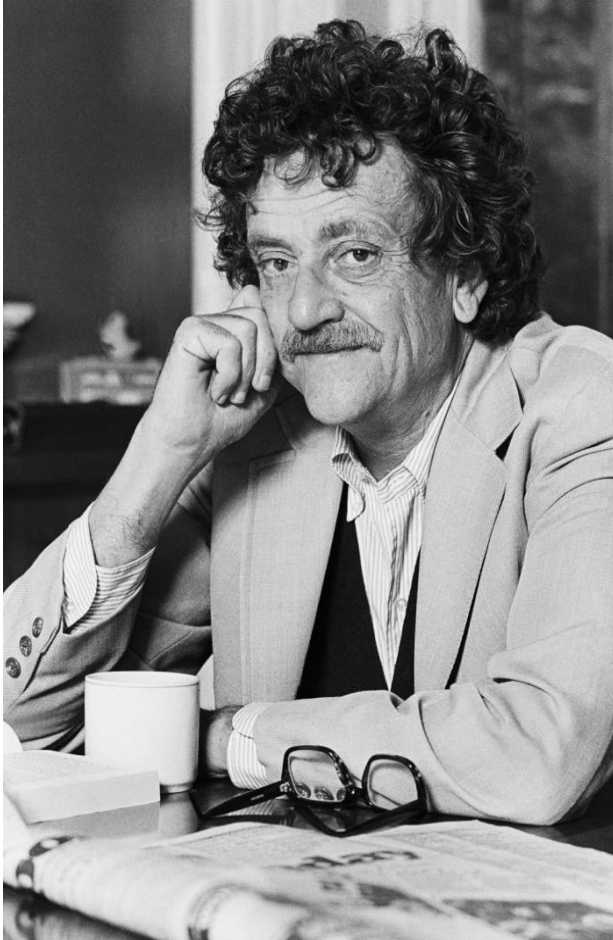
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Appendices

Appendix A

The Biography of Kurt Vonnegut

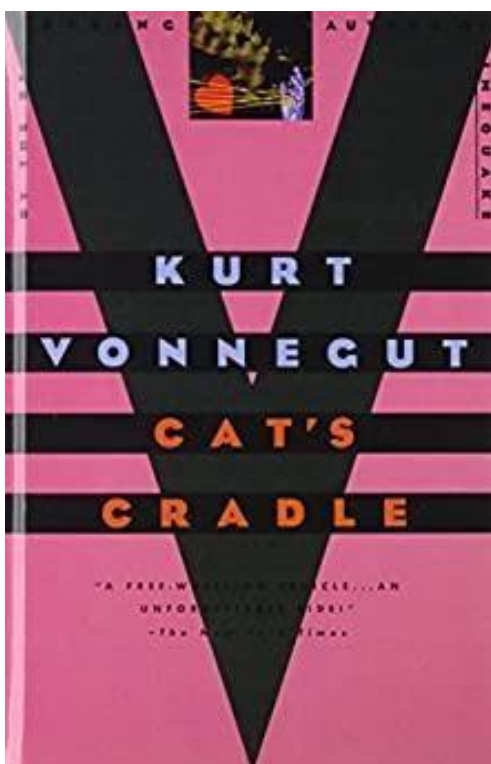


Kurt Vonnegut Jr, born on November 11, 1922 in Indianapolis, is an American author and humorist. In a more than 50-year career, he published over fourteen novels, three short-story collections and five plays during the postmodern epoch. *Slaughterhouse- Five* is one of his most famous works and is considered one of the bestselling novels of all time. Vonnegut's experience in the Second World War has inspired him to depict themes of war through his writings. He is renowned for his use of postmodern strategies as well as fantasy

and science fiction components. Some critics classified Vonnegut as a science fiction writer due to his numerous literary works that dealt with technology, such as *Cat's Cradle*, which was nominated for the Hugo Award as the best science fiction novel. Kurt Vonnegut died on April 11, 2007, due to brain injuries caused by a fall at his home days before his death.

Appendix B

The Synopsis of *Cat's Cradle*



Cat's Cradle is considered to be the most accessible novel published in 1963 as Vonnegut's thesis in anthropology. The novel follows the character Jonah as a reporter, his work leads him to a new island, where he ends up believing in a new fictitious religion. Jonah seeks to write a book titled *The Day the World Ended*, while searching for materials for this book; he comes into contact with the family of the father of the atomic bomb, Dr. Felix Hoenikker, who died as a mysterious figure. Jonah speaks with Newt, the eldest son of Hoenikker. He remembers playing with his toys the day the bomb was dropped while his

father was engrossed in a string game called Cat's Cradle. Jonah then makes another interview with the colleagues of Dr. Heonikker in research laboratory in Ilium to find out that the deceased scientist is a creative genius. Ultimately, John travels to the island of San Lorenzo to connect with the older brother, Franklin Hoenikker, to know his side of the story, while their sister, Angela, is visiting. On San Lorenzo, the events begin to unfold; Jonah finds that the people of the island believe in religion that is based entirely upon lies. He also realizes that each of the Hoenickers has a piece of Ice-Nine, their father's final discovery. The latter, is an invention that freezes anything it comes into contact with. The novel comes to an end when 'Papa Monzano', the dictator of the island, commits suicide by taking Ice-Nine, and his body falls into the sea, which led to the destruction of the earth

Résumé

La technologie moderne et sa relation avec la recherche de la vérité ont toujours été remises en question dans les écrits postmodernes. La littérature postmoderne conceptualise cette combinaison dans différents contextes sociaux. Kurt Vonnegut fait partie des auteurs postmodernes qui ont abordé la technologie et son influence sur la société américaine. Vonnegut, dans ses romans fictifs, dépeint le voyage crucial vers la quête de la vérité par rapport à la technologie principalement, dans son œuvre *Cat's Cradle*. Ce roman incarne la recherche des personnages pour combler le manque de sens dans leur vie; elle examine la nature de la recherche de la vérité et sa relation avec les systèmes de croyances humaines. L'histoire dépeint un univers fracturé et chaotique dans lequel différentes personnes ont leurs propres perspectives sur la réalité, soulignant la complexité inhérente et les contradictions de la recherche de la vérité. Cette thèse, scrute l'autodestruction inconsciente humaine en élucidant le non-sens du monde et la nature délicate de notre existence. Cet article aborde la question de la technologie et de la recherche de la vérité à travers différentes approches pour parvenir à une interprétation complète du roman sélectionné. Les résultats de la recherche soulignent la poursuite téméraire du progrès scientifique sans en chérir les implications éthiques en analysant le besoin d'innovation responsable et la sensibilisation aux ramifications plus larges des résultats scientifiques. Pourtant, le travail met l'accent sur les limites de la cognition humaine, soulignant les difficultés à parvenir à une réalité finale. Les résultats servent d'avertissement sur la vérité et la technologie, qui permettent à l'homme de trouver du réconfort dans les faits réels.

ملخص

لطالما كانت التكنولوجيا الحديثة وعلاقتها بتقصي الحقائق موضع تساؤل في كتابات ما بعد الحداثة. يصور الأدب ما بعد الحداثة هذا المزيج في سياقات اجتماعية مختلفة. كورت فونيجوت هو من بين المؤلفين ما بعد الحداثة الذين تعاملوا مع التكنولوجيا وتأثيرها على المجتمع الأمريكي. فيونيجوت، في رواياته الخيالية، يصور الرحلة الحاسمة نحو البحث عن الحقيقة فيما يتعلق بالتكنولوجيا بشكل رئيسي، في *Cat's Cradle* تجسد هذه الرواية بحث الشخصيات عن طرق لتحقيق عدم وجود معنى في حياتهم. وهو يدرس طبيعة البحث عن الحقيقة وعلاقته بنظم المعتقدات البشرية. تصور القصة عالما مفككا وفوضويا يكون فيه لمختلف الناس وجهات نظرهم الخاصة حول الواقع، مع التأكيد على التعقيد المتأصل وتناقضات البحث عن الحقيقة. هذه المذكرة، تدقق في التدمير الذاتي اللاوعي للإنسان من خلال توضيح سخافة العالم والطبيعة الحساسة لوجودنا. تناقش هذه الورقة مسألة التكنولوجيا والبحث عن الحقيقة من خلال نهج مختلفة لتحقيق تفسير شامل للرواية المختارة. تشير نتائج البحث إلى السعي المتهور للتقدم العلمي دون الاعتزاز بالآثار الأخلاقية من خلال تحليل الحاجة إلى الابتكار المسؤول والوعي بالتداعيات الأكبر للنتائج العلمية. ومع ذلك، يؤكد العمل على قيود الإدراك البشري، ويسلط الضوء على الصعوبات في الوصول إلى واقع نهائي. النتائج بمثابة تحذير حول الحقيقة والتكنولوجيا، والتي تسمح للإنسان أن يجد الراحة في الحقائق.