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## POST-WAR AMERICAN SOCIETY AND ITS POLITICS: A STUDY OF KURT VONNEGUT JR'S A MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY

### Article Particulars

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### Abstract

*This paper deals with topics of humor, to problems with modern technology, to Vonnegut's opinions on the differences between men and women and on politics, and the issues about post-war American society, from humanistic perspective. We have been watching American politics since the modern era to resent elections. Donald John Trump's victory raises many doubts across the globe on the American new political administration. As he clearly stated in his first interview since the election, the majority of unauthorized immigrants in the US have nothing to fear from his administration but 'what we are going to do is get the people that are criminal and have criminal records, gang members, and drug dealers'. For the course of action, we have to wait for few more days to see Trump's administration and its effects on post-modern American society.*

**Keywords:** *Technology, American politics and post-war American society.*

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Kurt Vonnegut a post-war American author whose novels and short stories are a mixture of realism, satire and science fiction. *A Man Without A Country: Memories Of Life In George W Bush's America* (2005) is an essay collection deals with Vonnegut's opinions on politics and the issues of post-war American society, although the book's title itself is a thought-provoking contribution to the realm of Kurt Vonnegut and also the sub title suggests that the book focuses extensively on Vonnegutean time American politics. In these essays he devoted to criticize George W. Bush as President in the United States.

The essays narrated in first person point of view that 'I' refers to the author Vonnegut. In the first essay, he talks about the art of joke telling and how hard to him fit into his own family. He explains us how he feels at the dinner table when he was a young boy, 'I was boring to all those other people (p.13)'. His family members were not ready to hear about the dumb childish news of his days. 'They wanted to talk about really important stuff that happened in high school or maybe in college or at work (p.13).' So the only way he could get into a conversation was to say something funny. 'I think I must have done it accidentally at first, just accidentally made a pun that stopped the conversation, something of that sort (AMWAC p.13).' And then he found out that a joke was a way to break into an adult conversation.

Then Vonnegut couldn't imagine a humorous book or skit about Auschwitz (a Nazi concentration camp in south western Poland), for instance. And it's not possible for him to make a joke about the death of John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King. He said 'Otherwise I can't think of any subject that I would steer away from, that I could do nothing with (AMWAC p.13)'. He understands the total catastrophes are terribly amusing, as Voltaire (a French writer) demonstrated.

Vonnegut examines that humor is an almost physiological response to fear and he took Freud's analysis to understand it. In Freudian sense, humour is a response to frustration one of several. He expresses his disgust on American life that there is terrible tragedy everywhere in America and therefore these men are too sweet to survive in this world and are in terrible danger all the time. They could be so easily killed. There are such things as laugh less jokes, what Freud called 'gallows humor (p.14).' In America, many real life situations are so hopeless that no relief is imaginable. He wondered what the poor people are doing tonight. 'Nobody laughed, but we were still all glad he said it. At least we were still alive! He (Bush) proved it (AMWAC p.14).'

Vonnegut reveals the dangers of a machine created utopia realised by American technology and human evolution can go to hell as far as his concern. He says 'what a mistake we are. We have mortally wounded this sweet life-supporting planet the only one in the whole Milky Way with a century of transportation whoopee (AMWAC p.19).'

Therefore he declares 'let's wreck the whole joint. Anybody got an atomic bomb? Who doesn't have an atomic bomb nowadays (AMWAC p.19)?' In America, some of the crazy making games going on today are 'love and hate, liberalism and conservatism, automobiles and credit cards, golf, and girls' basketball (AMWAC p.19).'

Here, we could easily understand Vonnegut's hopelessness on religion and socialism; in his opinion 'Socialism' is no more an evil word than 'Christianity.' Socialism no more prescribed Joseph Stalin and his secret police and shuttered churches than Christianity prescribed the Spanish Inquisition. Therefore Vonnegut understood, in America Christianity and socialism is alike even today, in fact, he states, 'Prescribe a society dedicated to the proposition that all men, women, and children are created equal and shall not starve (p.20).'

The statement has also entitled many in this country to say that socialists are anti-religion, are anti-God, and therefore absolutely loathsome. Such suppression of religion was supposedly justified by Karl Marx's statement that 'religion is the opium of the people (AMWAC p.20).'

When Marx wrote those words, by the way, Americans hadn't even freed themselves yet.

Vonnegut observes that in America; 'most of our critics are products of English departments and are very suspicious of anyone who takes an interest in technology (AMWAC p.21).'

So, anyway, Vonnegut studied chemistry as a major, but he is always winding up as a teacher in English departments, so he tries to bring scientific thinking to literature.

Besides being a writer someone decreed that he was a science fiction writer. But he did not want to be classified as one, so, he wondered in what way he would offend that he would not get credit for being a serious writer. Vonnegut decided and came to the conclusion that it was because he wrote about technology, and most fine American writers know nothing about technology. Then he understood and said 'I got classified as a science fiction writer simply because I wrote about Schenectady, New York (There are huge factories in Schenectady and nothing else)'. However 'I and my associates were engineers, physicists, chemists, and mathematicians (p. 23).' And when he wrote about the General Electric Company and Schenectady, it seemed a fantasy of the future to critics who had never seen the place. Therefore, he thought that 'novels that leave out technology misrepresent life as badly as Victorians misrepresented life by leaving out sex (AMWAC p.23).'

In the chapter three, Vonnegut demonstrates us three popular stories to elevate modern American life, especially the pathetic condition of men and women. In the first story, he narrates the life of Cinderella (A fictional young girl who is saved from her stepmother and stepsisters by her fairy godmother and a handsome prince.) to tell us post-modern women's (girl) life in America. In the second story, he tells us the life of Gregor Samsa (cockroach) (Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*) who is the best example for modern man's estrangement and torment very relevant to today's American society. In the third story, he tells us the tragedy of Prince Hamlet (Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) who is, 'neither a borrower nor a lender be.' But what else is life but endless lending and borrowing, give and take (AMWAC p.36)?

In a Quite a difference, Vonnegut said that Hamlet or Cinderella or Kafka's cockroach? 'I don't think Shakespeare believed in a heaven or hell any more than I do.' And so we don't know whether it's good news or bad news. He just demonstrated to us that 'Shakespeare was as poor a storyteller as any Arapaho (p.37).' But there is a reason we recognize *Hamlet* as a masterpiece: it's that 'Shakespeare told us the truth, and people so rarely tell us the truth in this rise and fall here (p.37).' The truth is, we know so little about life, and we don't really know what the good news is and what the bad news is. And if we die, God prohibit; 'we would like to go to heaven to ask somebody in charge up there, 'Hey, what was the good news and what was the bad news (AMWAC p.37)?'

Though Vonnegut wanted to file a suit against the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Company, manufacturers of Pall Mall cigarettes, for a billion bucks! Starting when he was only twelve years old, he has never chain-smoked anything but unfiltered Pall Malls. And for many years now, right on the package, Brown and Williamson have promised to kill him. But he says, 'I am now eighty-two. Thanks a lot, you dirty rats. The last thing I ever wanted was to be alive when the three most powerful people on the whole planet would be named Bush, Dick and Colon.' American government's got a war on drugs. That's certainly a lot better than no drugs at all. That's what was said about prohibition (AMWAC p.41).' Therefore, he says 'when does the American

government realize that from 1919 to 1933 it was absolutely against the law to manufacture, transport, or sell alcoholic beverages, and the Indiana newspaper humorist Ken Hubbard said, 'Prohibition is better than no liquor at all (AMWAC p.41).'

But, in America the two most widely abused and addictive and destructive of all substances are both perfectly legal. One, of course, is ethyl alcohol. And President George W. Bush, no less, and by his own admission, was smashed. As Vonnegut recalls, 'was powered, as are almost all means of transportation and other machinery today, and electric power plants and furnaces, by the most abused, addictive, and destructive drugs of all: fossil fuels and the industrialized world was already hopelessly hooked on fossil fuels, and very soon now there won't be any left (AMWAC p.41).'

On the other hand, Vonnegut wanted to talk about irresistible whoopee? He said, 'it's a booby trap (p.42).'

And the first oil well in the USA, now a dry hole and Fossil fuels too, so easily set alight! Yes, and we are presently touching off nearly the very last whiffs and drops and chunks of them. All lights are about to go out. No more electricity. All forms of transportation are about to stop and 'the planet Earth will soon have a crust of skulls and bones and dead machinery (AMWAC p.42).'

Still, we have squandered our planet's resources, including air and water, as though there were no tomorrow, so now there isn't going to be one.

Being a writer, Vonnegut wanted to tell the truth. He means this isn't the TV news is it? Here's what he thought the truth is: 'We are all addicts of fossil fuels in a state of denial. And like so many addicts about to face cold turkey, our leaders are now committing violent crimes to get what little is left of what we're hooked on (AMWAC p.41).'

What was the beginning of this end? Therefore, Vonnegut seeks several solutions to solve this problem. Some might say Adam and Eve and the apple of knowledge, a clear case of entrapment. He says (it was Prometheus, a Titan, a son of gods, who in Greek myth stole fire from Zeus and gave it to human beings). 'The gods were so mad they chained him naked to a rock with his back exposed, and had eagles eat his liver. 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' And it is now plain that the gods were right to do that (AMWAC p.42).'

**Abbreviations:** AMWAC: *A Man Without a Country* (2005).

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