

Toward Ecological Humanism:
Decoding the Animal Images in Kurt Vonnegut's Fiction

走向生态人文主义

——解码冯内古特小说中的动物意象

李素杰◎著

 中国人民大学出版社

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序（一）

库尔特·冯内古特是当代美国最重要、最具代表性的后现代主义小说家之一，也是曾经就读于康奈尔大学的文坛怪杰之一。他的作品经常借科幻小说的叙述模式讲述人类的未来或者遥远的外星球的故事，读来荒诞离奇、滑稽搞怪，致使很多人误以为他只是一个卖点高但无深意的流行小说家。实际上，冯内古特骨子里是一个传统的人，固执地坚守着家庭、爱情、正义、公平等价值观念，真诚地倡导人类社会的真、善、美。只是后工业时代的美国社会现实令他感到失望，使他对人性也充满讥讽与挖苦。而且，他敏锐地发现传统的艺术手段已经无法打动日益冷漠的读者，必须采取“非正常”的叙述手段才能形成足够的刺激，唤醒读者对现实的清醒认识。

李素杰的专著《走向生态人文主义——解码冯内古特小说中的动物意象》正是对冯内古特的这一独特的艺术特色和他的人道主义思想所做的深入研究。她指出，在冯内古特嬉笑怒骂的小丑面具背后，其实掩盖着一颗真诚、正直、深怀责任感的心，在他荒诞不经的故事里蕴藏着对美国当代社会的关切和对人类未来的忧虑。更为重要的是，李素杰选取了一个迄今为止无论在国内还是国外的冯内古特研究中都尚无人问津的全新视角——动物意象。运用动物研究这一新兴理论，通过大量认真仔细的文本研读和细致深入的分析，她向我们展示了一个鲜为人知的冯内古特小说中的动物世界。这些动物形象，并非传统意义上的为了增添语言表现力和丰富性所采用的修辞手段，而是小说家始终如一的强烈的人道主义关怀的有机组成部分，是具有鲜活生命力的重要角色。小说中关于各种动物在人类社会中的种种遭遇的描写对于冯内古特有效地表征其人性主题发挥了非常重要的作用。以此为切入点，李素杰大胆地提出了自己的观点：冯内古特的人文主义具有

不同于传统人文主义的特质，是一种更加深刻、更具包容性、能更好地引导人类走出后工业时代的生存困境、克服人类中心主义、走向人与自然和谐共生的人文主义，即生态人文主义。

李素杰的这一发现，为解决评论界长期以来关于冯内古特所表现出来的对人类既恨且爱的矛盾态度的理解困境提供了一种可能的出路，并且提出了一个极具推广意义的命题，即人文主义的生态转向。近半个多世纪以来，传统人文主义所蕴含的人类中心主义已经越来越充分地暴露出来，因其导致的人与自然的对抗不仅造成了人类生存环境的急剧恶化，而且也严重地危害了自然界无数生命的生存安全，使地球这个美丽的星球面临严峻的生态危机。如果人类再不悬崖勒马，改变对自身的生态定位，不仅人类的前途堪忧，整个地球生态系统的未来也会受到影响。李素杰结合自己对生态批评、动物研究以及人文主义的当代演变的研究，总结出了生态人文主义的基本概念，指出了人文主义的生态转向的必然性与紧迫性。而且，她通过详实的论据和令人信服的论证，阐明了冯内古特对重塑人类作为生态共同体中的普通公民身份的倡导，这在当下具有非常重要的理论价值和现实意义。

李素杰的这部专著是在她的博士论文的基础上拓展而成的。当初她决定这个选题时我心里着实为她捏着一把汗。首先，尽管冯内古特的有些作品有时看似轻松诙谐，其实他的大部分作品晦涩艰深，在文学评论界他是难读、难懂、也难写的后现代主义作家之一，是一块不好啃、难消化的硬骨头。要真正读懂冯内古特实属不易，这也是国内研究他的人不是很多的原因之一。另外，动物研究是一个刚刚起步的研究领域，在国外尚处于理论建构时期，国内关于这方面的研究更是凤毛麟角。能否成功、合理地运用动物研究理论实现对冯内古特的新解读是件很冒险的事。事实也证实了我的担忧。素杰的论文撰写过程非常艰辛，有效的参考资料的匮乏，可资借鉴的研究范式的缺位，冯内古特古怪荒诞的表达方式，以及动物意象在他小说中若隐若现的边缘地位，所有这些都是她不止一次对我诉说的困难，甚至产生过对于这一研究课题是否可行的怀疑和因担心无法驾驭而放弃这一选题的念头。但是，令我欣喜的是，她没有被这些困难所吓倒，而是顽强地坚

持下来,以极大的毅力,凭借扎实的基本功和深厚的学养积累,终于完成了博士论文的撰写。所有论文评阅专家和答辩委员会委员都一致认为,她的这篇论文选题大胆新颖,具有突出的创新性,对于冯内古特研究和动物研究都有填补空白的作用。而且,论文论点正确、思路清晰、逻辑严谨、文笔清新自然、语言准确顺畅、写作规范,大家一致认为这是一篇高水平的博士论文。

作为素杰的导师,我很为她的成绩感到骄傲,也深知这成绩得来不易。身兼母亲、女儿、妻子、教师、学生等多重身份,她在读博期间承受了巨大的压力,但是她最终完成了学业,并且取得了出色的成绩。现在,经过认真修改、拓展,她的专著也即将出版,实在是一件可喜可贺之事。我相信,历经了博士求学过程的磨练,经历了这样一篇难度极大的论文的撰写,未来的她一定会更加成熟,更加稳健。在冯内古特研究和动物研究以及生态批评研究等方面,相信她一定会取得更加令人欣喜的成绩。

应素杰之邀欣然为其即将付梓的专著命笔,是为序。

北京外国语大学 郭棲庆

2013年7月于北京

序（二）

欣闻李素杰的专著《走向生态人文主义——解码冯内古特小说中的动物意象》即将出版，我很高兴为她作序。

早在两年多前李素杰就和我谈起过她的论文选题，寻求我的建议。我当时认为，从动物意象入手研究冯内古特的小说视角非常新颖，但基于我对冯内古特的了解，动物意象并非他小说中的主角，单从这一角度出发恐怕难以支撑起一部十万字的博士论文。

没有想到，两年以后，李素杰把一本厚厚的博士论文交到了我的手上，请我审阅并参加她的论文答辩。我被她论文里呈现出的冯内古特小说中的动物世界惊呆了。我曾经以冯内古特为题撰写我自己的博士论文，之后也发表过多篇学术文章，但是，直到我读到李素杰的博士论文，我才意识到冯内古特的世界里游走着如此众多的动物精灵，而且它们表达了作者如此深刻的人文主义思想。我不仅为她成功地完成学位论文而高兴，而且自觉受益匪浅。现在，李素杰在博士论文基础上修改而成的专著即将问世，我很想在这里谈一谈我对她的研究的理解和评价。

在我看来，专著《走向生态人文主义——解码冯内古特小说中的动物意象》有两个重要创新点。第一、就是前文提到的动物意象的研究视角。虽然关于文学作品中的动物意象的讨论久已有之，但是以往的研究基本上都是把动物作为一种修辞手段，解读它们关于人类世界的象征含义或隐喻意义，很少有人关注动物自身的生存状况。李素杰的研究则不同。她基于自己对生态批评的前期积累，并主要结合新兴领域——动物研究的理论视角和研究方法，把动物视为真实的、有血有肉、有感受苦痛能力的生命体，细致检视了冯内古特小说中关于人与动物关系的描述，特别是人类的食肉习惯、人对宠物的依赖和虐待

以及人类社会普遍存在的物种歧视等方面，从而深刻揭示了人类在日常生活中的文化再现中对待动物的方式所蕴含的伦理、文化和政治意义。这不仅仅提出了冯内古特研究的一个全新视角，而且在当下生态危机严重，人与自然，特别是人与动物的关系不断紧张的背景下具有重要的现实意义。

第二、该专著有力地论证、建构了冯内古特作品所表现的生态人文主义思想。虽然从冯内古特作品中发现、整理出众多的动物意象并发掘出它们的意义已属不易，但是李素杰并没有停留在简单的文本细节堆砌和单纯的动物意象的解读，也没有像很多动物权利保护主义者那样仅仅看到动物的利益，而是把对动物的关怀与对人的关注有机地结合到一起，提出对冯内古特人文主义的新观点，即生态人文主义。

该专著首先清晰地阐释了生态人文主义的概念，认为生态人文主义既有对传统人文主义中自鸣得意的人类优越论，特别是对理性的崇拜和科学主义至上思想的批判，同时也主张发扬传统人文主义中的进步理念，例如解放、平等、正义等，并把这些理念拓展到非人类的动物世界，实现所有生命体的完全解放；生态人文主义还提倡重新定义人类在宇宙以及生态共同体中的身份，以体现从征服到关爱的转变。以此为立论依据，专著将生态人文主义理论的探讨与冯内古特小说文本的分析紧密结合，以科学的研究方法论证了如下观点：冯内古特通过对人类食肉行为的描写暴露人性中非人性的一面；通过表现人类从宠物身上寻找人际亲密关系的替代来表现后工业时代人类所忍受的孤独、冷漠和主体安全感的缺失；通过将人“动物化”的描写来批判物种歧视主义，强调人作为生物共同体成员的意识；通过描写人回归动物王国，主张人与自然的和谐统一，创造人在大自然中与其他成员共同享受的和平、满足、和谐共存的生活。这些观点和结论具有重大的学术价值，有很大的创新性。

据我所知，李素杰的这部专著是国内第四部研究冯内古特的专著，但它是第一部从动物的角度研究冯内古特的专著，同时也是国内目前为数不多的以动物研究为理论依据的文学批评专著。因此，毫不夸张地说，该作具有重大的理论价值、学术价值和重要的现实意义，

起到了填补空白的作用。

此外，李素杰的语言功底非常深厚，文笔流畅自然，表述准确细腻优美，是近几年来读到的英语写作水平较高的博士论文之一。

当然，该研究中还有一些不太成熟的地方，有些表述过于绝对，对文本的解读也有值得商榷的地方。不过，我仍然认为这是一部值得推荐的著作。而且我相信，假以时日，李素杰会有更成熟、更全面、更深入的研究成果问世。

陈世丹

2013年7月于中国人民大学

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Introduction

Kurt Vonnegut (1922—2007) was one of the most important post-WW II American writers and an active public spokesman. In his literary career of fifty-seven years, he published fourteen novels, four plays, four short-story collections (two published posthumously in 2010 and 2011), six collections of essays, speeches, and interviews, and a large body of uncollected short fiction and nonfiction. A humorist in the strain of Mark Twain, Vonnegut made witty and incisive criticism about modern warfare, the reign of scientism, Eurocentrism, environmental destruction, and the degeneration of humanity as a whole. His novels and short stories were adapted to the screen as well as the stage. Many were long-standing *New York Times* bestsellers. They were taught in college courses and enjoyed tremendous popularity with the young people. For great lengths of his life, Vonnegut was vice president of the P.E.N American Center (since 1972), vice president of the National Institute of Arts and Letters (now the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters) (since 1973), and honorary president of the American Humanist Association (since 1992). For his active engagement in public affairs, sharp critique of American culture and politics, and his unconventional innovation of artistic expression, Vonnegut had been widely acclaimed as one of the greatest American writers, an outspoken social critic, and an immensely influential cultural guru.

Even death did not put him into oblivion. New studies on him continue

to appear after his death. Harold Bloom's 2009 edition of *Kurt Vonnegut* in his "Modern Critical Views", Peter Freese's monologue *The Clown of Armageddon: The Novels of Kurt Vonnegut* (2009), Jerome Klinkowitz's *Kurt Vonnegut's America* (2009), and Gilbert McInnis' *Evolutionary Mythology in the Writings of Kurt Vonnegut* (2010) are all examples of sustained enthusiasm in Vonnegut. In 2011 and 2012, the Library of America released two volumes of Kurt Vonnegut's works, *Kurt Vonnegut: Novels and Stories 1963—1973* and *Kurt Vonnegut: Novels and Stories 1950—1962*. A third volume is to follow. It is an important sign of official recognition of Vonnegut as "a member of the pantheon of the greatest American writers". In 2011, the first authorized biography was published, *And So It Goes: Kurt Vonnegut: A Life* (Charles J. Shields, Henry Holt and Company). Another biography, chronicled by Vonnegut's novels, *Unstuck in Time: A Journey Through Kurt Vonnegut's Life and Novels* (Gregory D. Sumner, Seven Stories Press), came out in 2012. These publications will predictably generate a new rise of interest in the late author.

However, Vonnegut's way to fame did not start smooth. It was indeed one of frustration and fluctuation. For the first twenty years after he quitted his job with the General Electric and started his writing career in 1949, Vonnegut stayed in virtual obscurity, neglected by most critics, in spite of the publication of five novels, forty-six short stories, and two short-story collections and the growing popularity with the youth. His preference for the science fiction narrative mode made mainstream critics reluctant to regard him as a serious writer. It was not until 1969 when his sixth novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, came out that Vonnegut began to receive serious attention and wide acclaim. It actually started a decade of Vonnegut vogue among both the critical circle and the popular reading public. As Klinkowitz noted, Vonnegut became "the most talked about American novelist since Ernest Hemingway" (qtd. in Merrill 1990: 1).

The 1970s vogue, however, did not secure Vonnegut's establishment

as a major writer once and for all. In the following decade, he underwent a subsequent decline and was constantly attacked for being pessimistic and insincere. Even though the 1990s saw a revival and steady rise of his reputation, scholars and critics found much to disagree with among themselves. It took much controversy and contention for critics and scholars to arrive at a consensus that, beneath the mocking mask of a clown and despite his relentless satire and vehement criticism of humanity's faults and follies, Kurt Vonnegut is an adamant humanist who persists in seeing goodness and beauty in humanity and tries to maintain hope against a world that is basically absurd and despairing.

Again, even in this consensus, there is disagreement. Whereas many critics have noticed that Vonnegut's humanism differs from the classic humanism, they find it hard to nail it down with an appropriate name. Terms such as "postmodern humanism" (David 2006), "postmodernist humanist" (Chen Shidan 2010), and "misanthropic humanism" (Tally 2009) are all such attempts. They each have achieved some understanding of the uniqueness of Vonnegut's humanism, yet all seems inadequate to capture the complexity of the love-hate sentiments Vonnegut holds for humanity.

This book is to participate in the engagement from a different perspective—the study of animal images. Animals abound in Vonnegut's fictional world, but they have long been ignored. Through an investigation into their roles, decoding their enigmatic messages in relation to Vonnegut's predominant humanistic concerns, the book is to reveal that the animal images, be they real or imaginary, realistic or metaphorical, are more than linguistic tropes used to increase forcefulness and richness of expression, but are integral parts of Vonnegut's humanitarianism and significantly contribute to his themes of humanity. In effect, they point to a tendency in Vonnegut's thinking that has long evaded critical attention—a tendency toward ecological humanism.

I. Vonnegut in the Critical World: Controversy and Concurrence

In the preface to *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.* (1972), one of the earliest book-length studies on Vonnegut, Peter Reed states, “Professional literary people seem to be the most divided over Vonnegut” (20). This division of opinions has persisted for over five decades. Various labels have been prescribed to Vonnegut: fabulist, fantasist, absurdist, humorist, black humorist, satirist, postmodernist, pessimist, moralist, and most frequently, science fictionist. As Leonard Mustazza observes, “[Vonnegut] has probably been subjected to more critical name-calling than any other contemporary American writer” (1990: 15). This remarkable diversity of evaluation shows, on the one hand, the complexity and ambivalence inherent in Vonnegut’s fiction, inviting different and even contradictory interpretations, and on the other hand, the multifaceted talent and idiosyncrasy of Vonnegut as an artist who deliberately resists easy and singular labeling.

Discussions on Vonnegut’s fiction can be roughly grouped into two categories: the formal and the thematic. As this book is primarily a thematic study of the author, the focus is mainly on the review of the latter group. Of all the controversies over Vonnegut’s themes and philosophy, the central questions are: Is he a mainstream writer or a popular science fiction writer, and in what way is he either? Is he a humanitarian moralist or a deterministic nihilist? Or, is he a pessimist or an optimist? What morals is he teaching? Or, is he teaching any moral at all? The following review is organized in a manner to show different perspectives and approaches to these questions.

In spite of Vonnegut’s persistent protest against being labeled as a science fictionist, the abundance of science fiction elements in his novels, the extraterrestrial visits, the time travel, the fantastic projection of a future

world, all make the discussion of the science fiction question unavoidable in the study of Vonnegut, either in regard to his art or his philosophy. In the critical world, science fiction has long been synonymous with “unrespectability”, regarded as popular “pulp”. It is largely due to this understanding that Vonnegut suffered critical neglect for twenty years. As he complained later, “I have been a soreheaded occupant of a file drawer labeled ‘science fiction’ ever since, and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal” (*WFG* 1). Leslie Fiedler’s favorable comment in 1970 did not do him much favor in this respect. He praised Vonnegut’s art of science fiction as a means of sentimentality, a leading feature of the emergent school he named “New Romanticism”, and saw him as “a transitional figure” from High Art to Pop culture, from Modernism to Post-Modernism. Nevertheless, Fiedler also portrayed him as a writer painfully struggling with his “two minds”: “On the one hand, [Vonnegut] has lived from the beginning by appealing to the great Pop audience on its own grounds, and yet something in him has always yearned to be a ‘serious writer’, to win the respect of those professors [...]” (9). In this sense, the transitional role that science fiction had won Vonnegut was not self-fulfilling at all.

Supportive scholars were generally reluctant to name Vonnegut a science-fiction writer. Donald L. Lawler preferred to consider Vonnegut as a “science-fiction writer in sheep’s clothing”, meaning that the science fiction technique was not ends, but means, an “enabling form” for Vonnegut to make criticism of profound questions such as the meaning of life and the direction of history. Science fiction helped cloak such serious issues with irony and burlesque^[1]. There were also critics who saw positive functions of the science fiction device. Willis E. McNelly defended Vonnegut as a science fiction writer. He based his argument on Robert Scholes’ definition

[1] See the two articles by Lawler, “The Siren of Titan: Vonnegut’s Metaphysical Shaggy-Dog Story” and “Vonnegut in Academe (II)”, in *Vonnegut in America*, eds. Jerome Klinkowitz & Donald L. Lawler (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1977) 188, 84.

of science fiction as “fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that world in some cognitive way”. For him, science fiction was utilized by Vonnegut as an “objective correlative” to distance readers from the present reality so as to reinvent ourselves and understand the world better^[1]. Sallye Sheppard brought together the notions of human values, science, progress, and myth in his study of the Vonnegut’s critique of the inhuman value system of American society’s “technological mindset” (qtd. in McInnis xiv). The understanding broadened the scope of discussion from science fiction to the roles of science and technology in general and opened more space for interpretation.

Besides science fiction, humor is another essential feature of Vonnegut’s narrative that has caused much controversy. Scholars generally agree that Vonnegut is a superb humorist, but they disagree as to whether there are serious messages behind the mocking voice. Earlier critics were especially doubtful about this. Whereas C. D. B. Bryan was among the earliest critics to call attention to Vonnegut, assessing him as “the most readable and amusing of the new humorist”, he complained that Vonnegut “takes very little seriously”, and believed this prevented the author from being a major satirist on the order of John Barth (31). Likewise, Robert Scholes called the black humorists—Vonnegut among them—“fabulators” instead of satirists, because they lacked “the rhetoric of moral certainty” that readers expected from satire (“Kurt Vonnegut and Black Humor” 74). In his later *New York Times* Book Review of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, though, Scholes became more affirmative. He succinctly summarized the moral taught in *Slaughterhouse-Five* as “Be kind. Don’t hurt” and lauded the healing effect of Vonnegut’s humor, ranking him among the “stoic Comedians” (“[History as Fabulation]: *Slaughterhouse-Five*” 37).

[1] See Willis E. McNelly’s article, “Kurt Vonnegut as Science-Fiction Writer”, and his talk in the seminar “Vonnegut in Academe”, both in *Vonnegut in America*, eds. Klinkowitz & Lawler (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1977), 87-96, 193.