

# 走向艺术

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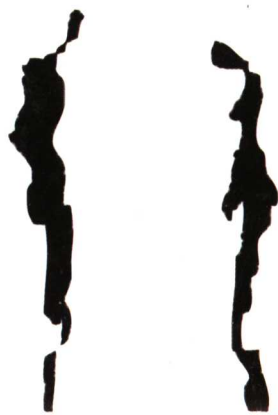
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Art and Creative Imagination: A Critical Interpretation  
of Kurt Vonnegut's Novels

Written by Shang Xiaojin

上海大学出版社



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# Abbreviations

America	Vonnegut in America: An Introduction to the Life and Work of Kurt Vonnegut
BC	Breakfast of Champions
BTT	Between Time and Timbuktu
CC	Cat's Cradle
Chronicles	The Vonnegut Chronicles
CWKV	Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut
DD	Deadeye Dick
GBYMR	God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater
KV	Kurt Vonnegut
MN	Mother Night
PS	Palm Sunday
SF	Slaughterhouse-Five
ST	The Sirens of Titan
WFG	Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons

# 中文摘要

库尔特·冯内古特是美国当代文坛上颇具影响的作家，其创作生涯跨越了大半个世纪。然而，就文学地位而言，冯内古特似乎多少显得有点不尴不尬。从20世纪50年代起，冯内古特就拥有广泛的读者群，1969年发表的《五号屠场》正式奠定了他在小说界的地位，此后，他的小说更是跻身畅销书的行列。但除《五号屠场》获如潮好评外，评论界对冯内古特的反应似乎总是温而不火，而“黑色幽默”这一标签仿佛成了对作家及其作品的全部概括。总的说来，目前评论界对冯内古特的研究还不够全面、系统，尤其是国内的冯内古特批评仍停留在一种笼统、模糊的印象上。本文旨在提供一种新的解读途径，以便在前人研究成果的基础上，更深入地发掘冯内古特小说的丰富内涵。本书将冯内古特的作品置于后现代主义文学创作的大背景中，以艺术与想像力这一视角为切入点，指出艺术与想像力是冯内古特小说创作的一个重要主题，通过对包括《五号屠场》在内的七部小说的解读，详细考察作家对于艺术与想像力的深入思考。

在导论部分，本文作者明确了艺术在作家生活与创作中所占据的重要地位，大致梳理了作家艺术和美学观点的演变脉络，并简要介绍了本书的整体布局。全文分四章进行论述。第一章阐释作家为人类生存困境所设计的救赎模式，通过对《泰坦的海妖》和《猫的摇篮》的评析，指出面对荒诞、冷漠的宇宙，人类惟有转向内心，转向与生俱来的想像力和创造力，通过艺术的创造与想像，才能走出后现代精神危机，达到对生命意义与人类主体地位的肯定。《泰坦的海妖》实际上嘲讽了人类试图从宇宙中寻求意义、真理的企图，指出超道德的宇宙内并不存在任何固有或先验的价值体系，在此基础上，冯内古特隐晦地表达了人类必须回归内心的观点。《猫的摇篮》继续阐发了这一主题，强调面对上帝缺



席的宇宙，虚无主义于事无补，只会加深悲观绝望的情绪，而艺术想像的活力则赋予人类生存以无限丰富的意义和可能性。小说的中心意象“挑绷子游戏”即象征了人类从虚无混沌中构建意义和形式的潜质。

第二章以艺术的虚构本质为着眼点，分析作家对于虚构与现实互动关系的探讨，指出艺术虚构往往是其主人公获得精神慰藉的有效手段，同时剖析现实对于虚构无所不在的侵蚀作用以及虚构对于现实的必然影响和反作用力。从这一角度出发，该章对《猫的摇篮》继续进行探讨，指出圣·洛瑞泽（San Lorenzo）岛屿实际上是作家在文本内有意识建构的艺术空间，旨在考察以博考农教为代表的虚构、谎言对身处困境中的人们所起的精神支持作用，同时通过圣·洛瑞泽岛屿与现代文明社会的对照，揭示事实与谎言的辩证关系。本章第二部分着重分析《五号屠场》一书，指出小说中所蕴含的三重艺术空间，即存在于主人公毕利意识深处的“特拉法马多尔”星球、主人公所生活的故事世界以及作家冯内古特身处其中的现实世界，也就是20世纪60年代的美国社会。本文作者所力图证明的是，冯内古特—毕利—“特拉法马多尔”星球这三者实际上构成了两组相对应的关系，如果说“特拉法马多尔”星球故事是主人公艺术想像的产物，是他有意识运用想像力对抗精神病患的努力，那么，毕利的人生经历同样是作家艺术虚构的成果，是他自觉通过小说创作来影响人们思想观点的尝试。这两组艺术想像活动充分展示了作家对现实与虚构互动关系的深入思考。

第三章着重阐述作家对于艺术功用所持的观点。本章分三部分论述。第一部分首先探讨作家的写作方式，考察了冯内古特总是将自我置于生活中心，直接面对生活写作的策略，指出其作品中的自省意识和侵入式叙述技巧不仅仅起到打破小说幻像、揭示艺术虚构本质的作用，更重要的是，它促使作家在对艺术创作过程的关注中，转向探讨艺术或想像对于现实的建构与重塑的作用。换言之，作家通过自身的创作提出了一种鲜明的艺术主张，即把艺术作为一种重塑和建构现实的力量，通过艺术想像介入生活，重塑生活与自我。《神枪手迪克》全面阐释了作家这一艺术主张。小说主人公以自传的形式追溯了自己从精神分裂逐渐走

向精神康复的过程，明确指出只有将想像力作为建构现实的有力媒介，在积极、自觉的艺术创造过程中，才能获得精神的再生和艺术自我的完善。本章第二部分通过对《冠军的早餐》的分析梳理作家艺术观的另一层面，即作为文化力量的艺术，或者说，艺术所承载的文化和教化使命，这也决定了冯内古特对于艺术指涉功能的坚持。在《冠军的早餐》中，冯内古特着重强调“观念”（ideas）对人们的不可忽视的影响力，由此指出作为“观念”的灌输者和传播者，艺术家，尤其是作家，对社会负有不可推卸的责任，因而，艺术家必须承担起其文化使命，通过其艺术的感召力和启迪作用，唤起人类的良知，提出建设性的意见和主张，丰富并完善文化和价值体系，并督促人们以更为合理的方式重建社会。在此基础上，本章第三部分分析冯内古特在《蓝胡子》中表达的美学观点，阐释作家所倡导的美学观，即艺术不应仅限于指涉自身，只具备内在的美学价值，作为一种有效的文化力量，艺术应具有教化意义，能够指涉现实、反映生活，并且起到影响和改变社会现状的作用。

本书第四章主要讨论冯内古特的最后一部小说《时震》，并由此分析作家对后现代状况下艺术和文化危机的关注。作为一名老艺术家，冯内古特敏锐地意识到，由于电视电脑等现代传媒技术的巨大冲击，现代人的想像力日趋贫瘠，传统艺术形式日渐式微，艺术家们已逐渐失去往日的精英地位，沦落为社会的边缘人。不难看出，在这部小说中，冯内古特对其艺术主题的探讨已从个人写作的角度上升到对艺术家群体和共同使命的思考。

结论部分就冯内古特自20世纪70年代以后受关注不多的原因尝试性地做了一点分析。本文作者认为，这在很大程度上与他的艺术观点有关，在后现代小说家纷纷转入文本内部，沉迷于文字游戏时，冯内古特对小说传统功能的强调使他多少显得有点不合时宜。但随后现代实验小说的落潮，人们或许会重新审视冯内古特的后期作品，理解他在一个特定文化气候下的苦恼、无奈甚至尴尬。但愿，这并不是过于乐观的预言。

# Abstract

Kurt Vonnegut (1922 - ), active in the later half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, rose to fame with the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), the sixth of his 14 novels. Though a well-known and widely read writer, Vonnegut continues to occupy a somewhat ambiguous place in contemporary literary scene and his works, especially the later ones, still wait for more comprehensive and systematic assessment. The book will approach Vonnegut as a self-conscious artist in the hope of contributing some new insights to the ongoing Vonnegut criticism. Based on a concentrated study of his seven novels, the author of this book argues that as a self-conscious artist, what Vonnegut has always been trying to explore is the possibilities of art and creative imagination in man's confrontation with an intrinsically meaningless universe and the function of art and role of artists in a postmodern world as well.

The introduction points out that art has always been at the center of Vonnegut's life and fictional creation and it also briefly traces his family heritage and personal experience that seem to have affected his artistic vision. The body of this book, divided into four chapters, tries to offer a relatively complete view of Vonnegut's artistic beliefs, theories and aesthetic principles. Chapter One offers a careful discussion of *The Sirens of Titan* and *Cat's Cradle* in order to examine Vonnegut's determination to transcend cosmic void through art and human imagination. In *The Sirens of Titan*, the author parodies man's futile and absurd attempt to search for

meaning in an indifferent universe and accordingly, he proposes that a more positive response to the existential crisis is to turn inward and assert man's own meaning and truth through the naturally endowed creative power. The theme of artistic affirmation is further developed in *Cat's Cradle*, in which Vonnegut advocates a free play of human imagination as an effective way to assert man's role as a sub-creator.

Chapter Two begins with an interpretation of Vonnegut's understanding of the fictitious nature of art, then, on the basis of which, probes into the interplay between fiction and life as is demonstrated both in *Cat's Cradle* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*. As is argued, though suspicious of the deluding power of artistic lies, Vonnegut nonetheless perceives fiction as life-sustaining force for the psychologically wounded and a dynamic shaping influence on our everyday life. Interestingly, this gives birth to a self-reflexive awareness in the author, and therefore, the fiction-making process, either by himself or by his characters, is always kept under close scrutiny. To evaluate both the efficacy and inadequacy of artistic lies, Vonnegut, in these two novels, carefully and painstakingly constructs a self-contained world of art, which is then juxtaposed to the demands of everyday reality. As a result, a sustained tension is born of the continuous interaction between life and art, between man's fiction-making desire and the irresistible intrusion of life and reality. The interplay between life and fiction is unfolded in *Cat's Cradle* through the juxtaposition of the modern civilized world of science and the fictive island of San Lorenzo. Then, *Slaughterhouse-Five* explores this matter in a much more complicated manner since it involves three levels of ontologically different reality, namely, the art world of Tralfamadore, the fictional world the protagonist moves

in and the realistic world Vonnegut himself lives in.

Chapter Three, divided into three sections, gives a detailed analysis of Vonnegut's evolving theory of art. The first section concentrates on how human imagination may function as a mediating and restructuring force both in private life and in the process of art. It first offers an investigation into the metafictional strategies frequently employed in Vonnegut's novels, arguing that the marked self-reflexive awareness shown in Vonnegut's novels springs largely from the author's strong desire to interact with reality through the transforming process of art. Then, it goes on to demonstrate, through the example of Rudy Waltz in *Deadeye Dick*, how artistic imagination, when fully exercised as a mediating force, may help bring about spiritual regeneration in a schizophrenic soul. The second section of this chapter examines Vonnegut's understanding of art as a cultural force. *Breakfast of Champions* articulates the author's firm belief that art is never a pure aesthetic activity but always functions as a dynamic cultural force. Based on a close reading of *Bluebeard*, the third section points out that it has always been Vonnegut's aesthetic principle that art should both "be" and "mean".

Chapter Four examines Vonnegut's sense of artistic crisis as is revealed in *Timequake*, his farewell novel. On the basis of textual analysis, the chapter clarifies that major threat to traditional art, as Vonnegut believes, is posed by the rise of new mass media technology and the general application of computers as well. Thus, a discerning and dedicated artist, Vonnegut makes his swan song an urgent plea for the preservation of the time-honored tradition of art and culture in the country.

The Conclusion suggests a tentative explanation to Vonnegut's

relatively dimmed later career in light of his own aesthetic opinions. And it also ventures a prediction about a more elevated place of the author in the future.

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# Introduction

In 1997, with the publication of *Timequake*, Kurt Vonnegut professed his fatigue with the novel form and declared it to be the last of his fourteen novels in a long writing career spanning over half a century, which also includes two plays, two collections of short stories and three volumes of non-fictional writings. Active nearly for fifty years in his artistic interaction with American life, Vonnegut constitutes a dynamic voice of the country's cultural makeup in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Humorous, irreverent, whimsical yet sincere, the familiar voice both attracts a large following among the general reading public and elicits sustained critical interest in the academic circles. At this date, almost three decades removed from his initial success and the peak of fame, Vonnegut finds himself the subject of a growing body of literary criticism, including a dozen book-length studies, and a much read author whose fourteen novels all remain in print, a rare achievement indeed for anyone in that profession. Though it is always hard to evaluate a living author, these signs are promising enough to suggest Vonnegut will survive as major voice in contemporary American literature that no future literary historians can afford to ignore.

A cursory examination of Vonnegut criticism reveals that the author simply defies easy categorization in his innovative mix of genres and iconoclastic merging of high and pop arts. He is characterized at various times in his career as a science fiction writer, a satirist, a black humorist, and a postmodernist. So far,



much scholarly ink has been spilt over the author's fatalism, black humor, apocalyptic satire and his severely challenged but never compromising humanism. In more recent study, valuable new insights have also been gained by a number of distinguished critics, the best of which include Lawrence Broer's psychological reading and Leonard Mustazza's myth study of the author. Though a sustained endeavor, Vonnegut criticism follows a course of ebb and flow, emerging in the late 1960s, culminating around the 1970s, with diminishing but more discriminating interest continued into the next two decades. Taken as a whole, the body of criticism sheds more light on his earlier works than the later ones, more illuminating with individual books than with his complete canon. Admittedly, no critical study on a living author can be conclusive, nor should one expect so. With all his 14 novels now in sight, however, a reevaluation of Kurt Vonnegut may be blessed with a more balanced vision of the author's literary evolution and the hindsight of a settling movement of postmodern innovation, and therefore, is likely to generate a more systematic view.

Critics have copiously commented on Vonnegut's middle-class heritage, his Midwest roots, his war experience and his educational background in science and anthropology, yet, few seem to have recognized his affinity with art, or approached him as a self-conscious artist. As a matter of fact, art and artistic imagination have always been at the center of Vonnegut's fictional world; the function of art and the role of artists have been a perennial concern in his exploration of and confrontation with an apparently absurd universe. Therefore, to approach him as a self-conscious artist would not only be conducive to new critical insights but vital to a better understanding of his artist creation. As a tentative probe in this