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“Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*: A Game of Dystopian Strings”

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Abstract

Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963) is a critique of 20th century's veneration of science, worship of technology, proliferation of destructive weapons, and dominance of politics. Furthermore, it challenges the belief that abstract earthly religious philosophical ideas can control human thought and offer solutions for world's problems and enigmas.

People worldwide have observed prevalence of injustice, corruption, and folly in their societies. This led to a desire for an utopian system where they can coexist in a perfect ideal community. Whether such a society is attainable or not is a central question explored in many of Vonnegut's works. This research will seek a compelling answer to this query through the dystopian chaos of San Lorenzo, which often exacerbates problems without providing solutions.

This research aims to examine *Cat's Cradle* in relation to dystopian concepts. It emphasizes dystopian occurrences and actions within the novel's complementary settings: Ilium, New York, and San Lorenzo. The research unveils failure of science and technology to deliver a better life, sheds light on role of mundane religious philosophy in misleading society, and discusses inability of various economic systems to generate material prosperity. Additionally, the paper offers a symbolic analysis of novel's title in relation to its central theme.

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رواية "مهد القطة" للكاتب كرت فونكت: لعبة ذات خيوط من الواقع المرير.

لجين يوسف ذنون يونس

الملخص:

كتبت رواية "مهد القطة" (١٩٦٣) للروائي كرت فونكت كنقد للقرن العشرين في الشاء على العلم وعبادة التقنية وانتشار الأسلحة المدمرة و هيمنة السياسة . بالإضافة إلى ذلك فهي ضد الاعتقاد أن افكار الفلسفة الدينية الوضعية المجردة يمكن أن تهيمن على تفكير البشر ويمكن أن تفهم وتحل مشكلات و الغاز العالم.

لقد لاحظ الناس حول العالم سيادة الظلم والفساد والحقاقت في مجتمعاتهم. وشعروا بالحاجة إلى تخطيط نظام المدينة الفاضلة (يوتوبيا) للعيش معا في مجتمع نموذجي كامل. فيما إذا كانوا يستطيعون الحصول على هكذا مجتمع أم لا هي المسألة الأساسية الموجودة في العديد من روايات فونكت. سيقدم البحث جواب لهذا التساؤل من خلال فوضى عالم الواقع المرير (الدستوبيا) في سان لورينزو والتي غالبا ما تجلب مشاكل إضافية ولا تعد بأي حل.

الهدف من هذا البحث هو دراسة رواية "مهد القطة" فيما يتعلق بمفاهيم عالم الواقع المرير (الدستوبيا) . والتأكيد على أحداث ووقائع عالم الواقع المرير (الدستوبيا) في بيئتين روائيتين تكمل احدهما الأخرى: اليوم، نيويورك وسان لورينزو. ويكشف البحث فشل العلم والتكنولوجيا في توفير حياة أفضل. و كذلك يسلط الضوء على دور فلسفة الأديان الدنيوية في إضلال المجتمع. ويناقش عدم قدرة الأنظمة الاقتصادية المختلفة على خلق الازدهار الاقتصادي. بالإضافة الى تحليل رمزي لعنوان الرواية فيما يتعلق بالفكرة الرئيسية للبحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية : كرت فونكت , مهد القطة, الدستوبيا

Introduction

Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* was a very successful literary work. It was praised by famous authors like Graham Greene, who regarded it as the best novels of that year. The American writer and critic, Terry Southern, said in an article in the *New York Times* that : “*Cat's Cradle* is an irreverent and often highly entertaining fantasy concerning the playful irresponsibility of nuclear scientists.[I]t is a work of a far more engaging and meaningful order than the melodramatic tripe which most critics seem to consider "serious".”¹

Cat's Cradle was produced at the rise of the Cuban missile crises and the Cold War arms race.² Yet, as Peter J. Reed thinks: “World War One or World War Two serves as either implicit or explicit back-ground” for the novel . He also adds “self-fulfillment is threatened by an essentially dehumanized and dehumanizing world.... in which machines often threaten to replace humanity”.³

Kurt Vonnegut (1922 - 2007) was a humanist. He was the honorably president of the American Humanist Association. In his words, humanism means “any outlook or way of life centered on human need and interest.”⁴ “And throughout the novel, we are aware that Vonnegut's concern is centered upon humanity, upon its nature, upon the events and the ideas which arise out of the human condition”.⁵

Cat's Cradle concentrates on man's capacity to destroy life on earth and in the same time man's disability to change the bitter reality of life. Man tries to improve his life through science and to create a utopia through the technological progress but the result is only the destruction of his life. The characters of Kurt Vonnegut's narratives are full of dreamers who failed in their attempts to convert the world into utopia. Finally, most the utopian dreamers turned to be dystopian creators. “The technological advancement without a concurrent progress in ethical awareness lead to annihilation of the human race”⁶. The question is what ideals govern the system of human world can truly mean if human beings continue to have the ability to kill millions of people through technologies like the atom bomb or *ice-nine*! An effective quotation written in the “Fourteenth Book of Bokonon”, which entitled “What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?” The content of this book is one word: “Nothing” [p. 19]. Donald E. Morse, in his book *Kurt Vonnegut*, believes that:

“*Cat's Cradle* , which examines the human capacity for greed and duplicity that leads inevitably to the destruction of the world and which takes as pessimistic a view of humankind as the Latin satirist, Juvenal, did in his justly famous Tenth Satire, "On Prayer" or, in its most famous translation, "On the Vanity of Human Wishes"”⁷

The two settings of the novel present a dystopian vision of land. First is the realistic city of science, Ilium, New York, “a world of materialistic absolutism in which scientists create in amoral vacuum”⁸. Second is the fictional island of San Lorenzo, “a tyrannic and hopelessly impoverished island nation in which the religion of Bokononism has been created to provide "a dynamic tension" that will distract the people from the oppression and materialistic suffering that mark their lives”.⁹

Cat's cradle, the game:

Cat's Cradle gains its title from a children's game called cat's cradle which is an old game demands using the fingers of the hands to thread strings into various shapes, the first shape looks like cat's cradle. As Vonnegut declares, "For maybe a hundred thousand years or more, grownups have been waving tangles of string in their children's faces"¹⁰ to form "nothing but a bunch of X's between somebody's hands" [165-16]. The cat's cradle is a very complicated symbol. The emptiness of these X's represents an emptiness at the heart of humanity: As Newt informs John, there is "No damn cat, and no damn cradle"¹¹. It also symbolizes how all of human truths and ideas are actually based upon lies. So that some characters lie to themselves pretending to find happiness in scientific progress or earthly religious philosophical belief, like a child pretends to see the cat and the cradle as he enjoys the game. The cat's cradle position as the initial shape of string in the game suggests that humanity is still in its first position too. Progress is just an illusion, humanity is basically the same as it ever was and ever will be. Cat's cradle, as a game, needs imagination and skillfulness. Hence it is an analogy to human's increasing scientific imagination of experimentation. So science becomes a game to play.

Dystopia:

Dystopia, as a literary concept, attracted the attention of a great deal of authors, critics and writers who reflect various views on dystopia in fictional societies that parody reality. As it was "written many centuries before the concept "dystopia" existed in Dante's *Inferno* in fact includes most of the typical characteristics associated with this genre – even if placed in a religious framework rather than in the future of the mundane world, as modern dystopias tend to be."¹²

According to Oxford English Dictionary, a "dystopia" is: "An imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible."¹³ The dystopian community is characterized by "tyrannical governments, environmental disaster, the dangers of science and technology, of social inequality, of corporate dictatorship, of Nuclear war."¹⁴ All these dystopian characteristics can be seen in the world of *Cat's Cradle*: the tyrannical government of Ilium, the environmental disaster of "ice nine", the dangers of science and technology represented by General Forge and Foundry Research Laboratory, the social inequality visualized clearly by the economical difference between the richness of Ilium, New York, and the impoverished Republic of San Lorenzo, The corporate dictatorship of "Papa" Monzano, and finally the Nuclear war started with Dr. Felix Hoenikker invention of the first atomic bomb.

Dystopian community is characterized also by restriction of independent thought, information and freedom, worshiping a concept or a figurehead, fearing the outside world, living in a dehumanized state, conforming to uniform expectations, and believing in an illusion of a perfect world. The dystopian government devotes all its efforts to the production of ever more powerful and destructive weapons, and is ruled by a dictator¹⁵. Almost all of these dystopian features exist in the fictional community of Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*. Margret Atwood's emphasizes that the dystopian tradition equals many of Vonnegut's ideas concerning the critics' attempt to define him and his fictional works. Atwood's saying is convenient for *Cat's Cradle's* setting:

“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”.¹⁶

There are many ways used in dystopian fiction to control the dystopian society and make it live in the illusion of perfect society. From these is the technological control, hence society is controlled by technology. In a sense science is fiction, as Thomas Kuhn writes in “The Structure of Scientific Revolution”: “Science is another existential attempt to make meaning out of meaninglessness”¹⁷. This is very much obvious in the society of Ilium, New York. Another is religious or philosophical control, the worshiping of a concept or a figurehead. So society is controlled by earthly religious philosophical ideology usually enforced through a dictatorship or oppressive government. This is exactly the way used by Monzano, the dictator, and Bokonon to control and delude the society of San Lorenzo .

Science and technology:

Cat's Cradle shows how science is used in more cruel ways as terrifying humanity. It discusses how scientists are forced to fulfill the requirements of politics, and how these scientists and politicians use lies and artificial speeches in an attempt to create a destructive and widely dehumanized population¹⁸. Scientists actually unable to react towards others with empathy, compassion, or ethics. So Vonnegut asks “the reader to think from different angles what a human is, or, more urgently, what a human should or should not be”¹⁹. He criticizes the scientific community for its inhumane behavior and rigid objectivity which by the end of the novel transforms the whole world into stone. His criticism is also directed to the military technology which plays a great role in destroying the environment and creating a great deal of damage to humans on earth.

In Vonnegut’s novel, the politicians and scientists, united sometimes or separated others, try to determine the end of the world. Politicians are driven by their greed and love for dominance. In an interview, Margaret Atwood shows her fears behind her controversial dystopia. She respects science as a whole but says, “the bad thing is making all science completely commercial, and with no watchdogs. That is when you have to get very nervous”²⁰. The scientists follow blindly the principles that govern the practice of science like rationality, empiricism and objectivity to “provide people with better and better lies”. These lies prevent them from seeing the truth of their life which “was as short and brutish and mean as ever” [78]

John, the narrator of *Cat's Cradle* begins to write a book entitled “*The Day the World Ended*”, which intended to be “an account of what important Americans had done on the day when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan” [p. 4]. John wants to interview the inventor of the atomic bomb to know his feelings and thoughts on the date of the Hiroshima bombing (August 6, 1945). John starts his connection to Dr. Hoenikker’s family through his relation with Hoenikker’s son, Newton. John reads a letter from Newton tell that the latter's father, Dr. Felix Hoenikker was playing

absentmindedly with a string and lacing it through his fingers, shaping what is known as cat's cradle. The string that Hoenikker used has been wrapped around a book written by a prisoner:

“Father took the string from around the manuscript of a novel that a man in prison sent him. The novel was about the end of the world in the year 2000, and the name of the book was *2000 A.D.* It told about how mad scientists made a terrific bomb that wiped out the whole world.” [p. 9]

Newt informs that his father knelt on the ground to play with him and to sing a song about a cat. He was terrified by his father's face coming near him, and he escaped from the house crying. Then John discovers that Dr. Felix Hoenikker is, in Kermit Vanderbilt words :

“An amoral scientist and unloving husband and father whose legacy to his three children was an illusory hand trick called 'cat's cradle' and, more nihilistically, a catalytic 'seeds' called '*ice nine*'. The chemical was intended to freeze the ground for slogging-through –the –mud America marines. It can also freeze the entire world.”²¹

Dr. Felix Hoenikker, the inventor of the atomic bomb and *ice-nine*, appears as a scientist without any morality. When John visits the research laboratory, in order to meet Dr. Hoenikker's colleagues . He discovers that most of the people in Ilium remember Dr. Hoenikker as both: “one queer son of a bitch” [p. 6] and a creative scientist. Miss Faust reinforces the idea that there was something basically inhumane about Dr. Hoenikker specifically his lack of sympathy. Dr. Hoenikker's unconscious toward the results of creating the atomic bomb can be acknowledged when Newton informs John that: “[a]fter 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?’” [p. 17]. Dr. Hoenikker's ingenuous questioning to his colleague unveils his extreme lack of human morality. He was totally engaged with scientific examination and invention to the extent that he forgot about how human feels and so lost his humanity.

Todd Davis believes that: “Hoenikker represents Vonnegut's greatest fears:”²² “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” [p. 64]. In *Cat's Cradle*, scientists are unable to see their negative effects on the environment around them. They cannot recognize the bad results of their stupid inventions. Sandra reads an article written by Dr. Hoenikker. She meditates that “the trouble with the world was,” she said with hesitation, “that people were still superstitious instead of scientific. He [Dr. Hoenikker] said if everybody would study science more, there wouldn't be all the trouble there was.” [p. 12]

The scientists of the “General Forge and Foundry Company” in Ilium claim that they are able to create a utopian world and make the life of their people better. Actually they

are deluded to moral basis; their eyes are blinded to see clearly because of their deep faith in science as “magic that work” [p. 83]. Science becomes an overruling ideology neglecting any respect to humanity. The faith in science is considered the only truthful faith and the most materialistically beneficial faith to fall into in this city.

“I’m sick of people misunderstanding what a scientist is, what a scientist does...Here and shockingly few other places in this country, men are paid to increase knowledge, to work toward no end but that.”
“That’s very generous of General Forge and Foundry Company.”
“Nothing generous about it. New knowledge is the most valuable commodity on earth. The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become”. [p.41].

An obvious evidence for the politicians' exploitation of scientists and scientific institutions is the ironic contrast within Dr. Breed's sayings, and the contradiction between these sayings and that of his son. When John interviews Dr. Breed, the latter insists that the experiments done in the lab are totally guided by "pure research" [p. 42]. Afterward, he contradicts himself as he admits that the military government ordered Dr. Felix Hoenikker to start the atomic bomb experiments. Dr. Breed's son, whom John meets in a bar, explains that he was an employee in the General Forge and “he was quitting his job in the Research laboratory, said anything a scientist worked on was sure to wind up as a weapon, one way or another. Said he didn't want to help politicians with their fugging wars anymore”. [p. 26]

The general tendency to gain wealth, the communities lack of moralistic approach and neglecting the humanitarian empathy encourages the creation of destructive technology. Preceding his engagement in the creation of the atomic bomb, Dr. Felix Hoenikker was charmed by turtles. Yet, there are several things which derived him to leave the turtles to the atomic bomb: the urging of General Forge, the desire for wealth, the politicians' pressure in addition to his inner lack of empathy. When Dr. Felix Hoenikker “got so interested in turtles that he stopped working on the bomb,” the manager of General Forge removed the turtles:

“So one night they went into his laboratory and stole the turtles and the aquarium. Father never said a word about the disappearance of the turtles. He just came to work the next day and looked for things to play with and think about, and everything there was to play with and think about had something to do with the bomb”. [p. 16]

Dr. Hoenikker was incapable to recognize the difference between the game cat's cradle and playing with turtles from one side and the bomb and *ice-nine* from another .

A static character referring to Dr. Hoenikker wondered “if he wasn't born dead. I never met a man who was less interested in the living” She then adds, “that's the trouble with the world: too many people in high places who are stone-cold-dead” [p.68]. In *Kurt Vonnegut: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, Susan Farrell writes, “it is fitting then that the 'stone-cold' Felix Hoenikker develops the doomsday device that will eventually reduce the whole to ice and the human beings who ingest it to stone”²³. John understands what Dr. Hoenikker could not even recognize when he invented and experimented *ice nine*. The limited scope of his own world of scientific inquiry makes him unable to see the connection of all the water in the planet. When John goes to General Forge and meets Dr. Breed he knows from him about *ice nine*, he understands that the moment *ice nine* touches water, it freezes all the water in that place. So, John begins to inquire about the results of using *ice nine* in the real life. Dr. Breed answers:

“If the streams flowing through the swamp froze as *ice nine*, what about the rivers and lakes the stream fed?’ ‘They’d freeze. But there is no such thing as *ice nine*’ ‘And the oceans the frozen rivers fed?’ ‘They’d freeze of course,’ he snapped. ‘I suppose you’re going to rush to market with a sensational story about *ice-nine* now. I tell you again, it does not exist!’ ‘And the springs feeding the frozen lakes and streams, and all the water underground feeding the springs?’ ‘They’d freeze, damn it!’ he cried.” [p. 49]

John's insight is in complete contrast with Dr. Breed's blindness. Breed does not show any kind of responsibility for the environment. He is unconcerned about the destruction of the environment. *Cat's Cradle* introduces the scientist as comes at Dr. Breeds tongue, “that scientists are heartless, conscienceless, narrow boobies, indifferent to the fate of the rest of the human race....” [p. 35]. Dr. Hoenikker is intelligent enough to be “one of the chief creators of the [atomic] bomb”[p. 5]. Yet does not remember any information about his dead wife as Newt remembers: “I remember one time, about a year before he died, I tried to get him to tell me something about my mother. He couldn’t remember anything about her” [p. 14]. There is also an unforgettable episode of Dr. Hoenikker about leaving his wife a tip after a good breakfast. During a dialogue between Dr. Hoenikker and Miss Faust said: “God is love”. “What is God? What is love?” [p. 55] answered Dr. Hoenikker. Not knowing God is a crime and not knowing love is another. Bokanon's poem is suitable here:

“A lover's a liar
To himself he lies.
The truthful are loveless,
Like oysters their eyes!” [p. 233]

Felix Hoenikker is incapable of human feeling towards his wife, his children or even to any of the people around him. Hoenikker represents the "loveless" state of a "truthful"

scientist. Persons unable of love can be hurtful and damaging. Hoenikker's three children suffer from psychological damage as a result of their father's indifference to them. The three use their possession of *ice-nine* to buy either love or position in society. So the end of the world comes from children's lack of love of unloving father. The lack of love appears in another episode when Minton's wife wrote "Americans...are forever searching for love in forms it never takes, in places it can never be ". [p. 71] The American Ambassador in San Lorenzo protests to this saying considering it as treasonous to regard Americans as not loved wherever they go. He thinks that is better to recognize hate than to expect love. He believes that all kinds of people are hated in all types of places. Donald E. Morse admits that the "bitterest satire occurs in *Cat's Cradle*, where the purpose of human beings, 'to love whoever is around to love', is completely thwarted"²⁴. On the day the world ended, the questions left are: "Who is left for me to love? " and "How can I, in this now empty world, 'find some neat way to die, too?' " [p. 190].

The narrator inquires : "What hope can there be for mankind, . . . when there are such men as Felix Hoenikker to give such playthings as *ice-nine* to such short-sighted children as almost all men and women are?" [p. 93]. Bokonon's answer is there is no hope. Dr. Hoenikker invented *ice-nine* at the demand of an American Marines general who needs a substance that helps in freezing mud so the soldiers could walk easily . After Hoenikker's death, his three children: Frank, Angela and Newton inherit *ice-nine* . Each one use his share to realize his dream either in love, status or wealth. Angela Hoenikker informs John that she has bought her "tomcat husband" by the price of *ice-nine* so the material becomes in the hands of the United States Government. Newton has put *ice-nine* in the hands of the Soviet through an affair with an Ukrainian midget. Franklin puts *ice-nine* in "Papa" Monzano's hands to buy a position. Hoenikker's children own the destiny of the life on earth and the whole human race as well through inheriting *ice-nine*. They carelessly destroy and end the world because they are unable to love or make themselves part of the community. "Having the world's destiny in their hands, as their father did before them, the Hoenikker children drop it leaving all the world and each person frozen in isolation."²⁵

John's other contact with Dr. Hoenikker's family happened when he traveled to the island of San Lorenzo where he found Franklin Hoenikker (the older brother). Franklin, who inherited *ice nine* from his father, brought this deadly substance to San Lorenzo, the most unfortunate place in the world of the story. Being Dr. Hoenikker's son, Frank was given many preferences. He was economically privileged in comparison with paupers and slaves of San Lorenzo, whom John considered as the "miserable folk of another race" [p. 83]. He owned a ship known as "the pressure craft" which enabled him to move freely. The dictator "Papa" Monsano appointed Frank as "Major General Franklin Hoenikker, minister of science and Progress in the Republic of San Lorenzo" [p.79] admitting that "science is the strongest thing there is" [p. 56]. He also appointed Franklin the next president of San Lorenzo and justified this absurd appointment denoting to

Frank as the “*blood son* of Dr. Felix Hoenikker” [p. 81]. Frank emphasized this reasoning as he confessed that after meeting Monzano and affirming his relation to Dr. Hoenikker, he continued “since that moment, every door to opportunity has been opened to me” [p. 83]. Frank inherited the desire for power and tendency to control from his father and this had its root in his childhood. As his brother, Newton, remembered the day that his father's bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Frank was outside with a tablespoon and a jar full of bugs: “what he was doing spooning different kinds of bugs into the jar and making them fight...they won't fight unless you keep shaking the jar. And that's what Frank was doing, shaking, shaking the jar” [p. 14]. When Angela saw him, he justified his hostility towards these insects using the scientific term “experimenting”. In a letter to John, Newton wrote “that's what Frank always used to say when people asked him what he thought he was doing. He always said 'Experimenting'” [p. 14]. Frank believed that scientific devices justify cruelty. As Dr. Hoenikker's game 'cat's cradle' has its connection with scientific thinking, Frank's battle of bugs in a jar connected game play with scientific method.

Opposed to the stupidity and grimness of Hoenikker's children, Vonnegut produces a positive example of Horlick Minton who introduces himself and his country to the international history. Horlick Minton differentiates between those who die for patriotic sacrifice, and other simple people who enjoy and appreciate life then die in wars not as martyrs but “murdered children... lost children... we might best spend the day despising what killed them; which is to say, the stupidity and viciousness of all mankind” [p. 170]. The scene of the Mintons, who are good and loving, freeze by *ice-nine* because of those who are stupid, lonely and greedy, is part of what Vonnegut means by “the idea of Ice-9 had a certain moral validity ... even though scientifically it had to be pure bunk”²⁶

Vonnegut warns the world from the destructive results of getting excessively fond of science and technology which are used by irresponsible authority. In his study on the nuclear age, Joel Kovel states:

“That the atomic age has sounded the limits of the dream of technological progress does not imply an abandonment science and technology or a return to Paleolithic conditions. To abandon science is to abandon human power as it has evolved over millennia. The antinuclear struggle is a fight for human power. Why sacrifice so much of the goal in advance? What we are against is not human power, but power over humanity, the machine as an instrument of domination. Therefore the goal is not to abandon science but to rescue it from technocracy”.²⁷

Monzano becomes “the first man in history to die of *ice-nine*.” [p. 237] “Papa” suffers from severe cancer, so he commits suicide by tasting ice-nine and immediately turns into an a statue solid as iron. He says: “now I will destroy the whole world” [p.

236). His dead body falls into the sea resulting in the end of the world. Ironically, The island that is intended to be a utopia has become a dystopia. Inevitably, by the end of the story, the island has become the most unhappy and miserable place with the frozen dead bodies everywhere. John, with some other survivors, dreams of “climbing Mount McCabe with some magnificent symbol and planting it there” [p. 108]. This fatalistic end of the novel is prophesized by John on the first page of his book:

“The book was to be factual.
The book was to be an account of . . .
It was to be a Christian book [it] was the book I never finished,
the book to be called *The Day the World Ended*” [pp. 3-4].

John feels as if “somebody or something has compelled me to be in certain places at certain times” [p. 3]. John's feeling reflects man's inability to control over his fate and destiny in spite of all his illegal efforts of exploiting science, economy, and religion. *Ice-nine*, which is invented to save the land and reduce the harm of natural mud, brings in death and doom to the whole world. In fact, *Cat's Cradle* shows how the political, economic and social reality may create violence of action and language, and how this violence will lead to universal destruction. Vonnegut sees “the heartbreaking necessity of lying about reality, and the heartbreaking impossibility of lying about it” [p. 107]. As claimed by Chris Hedges:

“human discourse and thinking are run by 'crisis rhetoric' that is assisted by our innate 'utopian thinking'. Both 'crisis rhetoric' and 'utopian thinking' contribute to our sense of desperation, to our seeing failure at every turn; the world in reality simply can never fulfill our idealized hopes, so leaving us always in crisis”.²⁸

Actually, science is used by irresponsible politicians to complicate the world's problems, and left too limited chance for science to help preventing these problems. Peter J. Reed concludes that:

“[S]cientific knowledge cannot provide the answers to essentially human problems, but that people all too often think it can; that science is frequently exploited to create human problems, while scientists do too little to prevent this; and that the scientists may put his incomprehensible truths before other people, but turn away from the human truths life may present him. The metaphor for all of this is Hoenikker's thrusting his "cat's cradle" under the nose of Newt, who can see only a handful of string_ "no damn cat, no damn cradle.”²⁹

Economy:

The government in Ilium, New York, spends great funding on General Forge and Foundry Research Laboratory, which is the main source of military experiments and technology. The government's policy influences the economic and social rank of people. Vonnegut uses Dr. Hoenikker's wealth to demonstrate the difference between the rich and the poor in Cape Cod and San Lorenzo. For inventing the atomic bomb Dr. Hoenikker awarded the Noble Prize which enables him to get a house in Cape Cod. A secondary character refers to Dr. Hoenikker's money as "dynamite money" [p. 65], referring to the inventor of dynamite, Alfred Noble, who is namesake of the prize. This irony reveals the importance of the military technologies in the universal politics through connecting the founder of Noble Prize to Dr. Hoenikker. So the two receivers of the prize are inventors of destructive weapons. This demonstrates "the economic impetus. And the resulting social validation, for the invention of weapon"³⁰. Vonnegut also criticizes the foolishness of San Lorenzo's leaderships who are largely ineffective in developing the economic lives of the islands' inhabitants.

"During the idealistic phase of McCabe and Johnson's reorganization of San Lorenzo, it was announced that the country's total income would be divided among all adult persons in equal shares. The first and only time this was tried, each share came to between six and seven dollars." [p. 94]

Another opinion is for Jane Donawerth who says "Dystopias are often filled with pessimistic views of the ruling class or a government that is brutal or uncaring, ruling with an "iron fist". Dystopian governments are sometimes ruled by a fascist or communist regime or dictator"³¹. "The novel also gives evidence that Vonnegut believes that the capitalist society in which he lived could be considered a dystopia because it was founded upon this same, equally unhealthy principle."³²

So whether the world is dominated by communist or capitalist regime, or ruled by fascist or dictatorship, they all fail in creating a typical system for organizing and ruling their communities. In addition, these regimes lead to disastrous results in widening the gap between the levels of society increasing the wealth of the controlling people beside the impoverishment of the low status people. Howard P. Segal concentrates on the economy of dystopian societies declaring that:

"The state often controls the economy; in which the centrally controlled economic system has indeed made material abundance plentiful but deprived the mass of humanity of meaningful labor; virtually all work is menial, unsatisfying and only a small number of the small group that achieves education is admitted to the elite and its work."³³

He also adds that:

“The majority of Earth's population on the surface lives in poverty with little access to health care and are subject to worker exploitation and police brutality, while the wealthy live above the Earth in luxury. Fictional dystopias are commonly urban and frequently isolate their characters from all contact with the natural world.”³⁴

Religion:

The name of the narrator, John (call me Jonah) , parallels the religious story of Jonah who prophesies the destruction of Nineveh that repent and is saved by God. At the very beginning of its plot, *Cat's Cradle* is expected to follow the title of John's book “*The Day the World Ended*”. Then it turns out to be a book about how to transform The Republic of San Lorenzo into utopia. San Lorenzo, is seen as a small fictional island located in the Caribbean sea. It is one of the poorest and saddest countries on earth without valuable resources. It is occupied and dominated by America. An apparently religious figure called Bokonon invents a new religion so that most of the Caribbean islanders become Bokononists expecting a better life through their new beliefs. “The first sentence in *The Books of Bokonon* is this: "All of the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies"”[p. 5]. John discovers that Bokonon, the originator of "Bokononism", himself is Johnson. Whereas, "Papa" Monzano, a United States marine deserter, becomes San Lorenzo's ruler and dictator. Seeing the people hopeless and without direction, Johnson and Monzano try their best to make the island of San Lorenzo a utopia through a utopian project.

“But Bokonon had been there, too, had written a whole book about Utopias, *The Seventh Book*, which he called "Bokonon's Republic." In that book are these ghastly aphorism:
The hand that stock the drug stores rules the world.
Let us start our Republic with a chain of drug stores, a chain of grocery stores, a chain of gas chambers, and a national game. After that, we can write our Constitution”. [p. 285]

When Bokonon and "Papa" Monzano arrive at San Lorenzo, they determine to control and govern this island by themselves. “When Bokonon and Monzano took over this miserable country year ago.... they throughout the priests. And then Bokonon, cynically and playfully invented a new religion” [p.172]. But then the dictator Monzano threatens people from practicing any religion except Christianity, and any person do the opposite will be punished by the deadly Hook. Yet gradually` all the inhabitants of San Lorenzo devout themselves to Bokononsim, and the conflict between the government and the religion entertains them and keeps them alive.

“Well, when it became evident that no government 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 people, because the truth was so terrible, so Bokonon made it his business to provide the people with better and better lies” [p. 172].

Bokononism proves the failure of Monzano and Bokonon's to improve the life of San Lorenzo. For the Bokononists, Bokononism becomes one way of understanding life, which is built on the idea that all the things around are very bad and there is no hope for man to make them better. Bokononists say “as it was meant to happen”. So Bokononism is built around the idea that there are incomprehensible powers which determine our lives. Because Bokonon himself admits this principle noticing that coincidences play a great role in forming his movements and travels. For the Bokononists, science also is a collection of lies “*foma*”. A Bokononist expression of this is “Busy, busy, busy,...is what we Bokononists whisper whenever we think of how complicated and unpredictable the machinery of life is” [p. 51]. Bokononism, as a religion, pretends that by its rituals and lies may enable man to inform himself that he understands without actually presenting any real explanation.³⁵ Bokonon's view toward understanding science, religion and politics is summarized in this poem:

“Tiger got 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” [p. 124].

This religion contrives to make lies appear as truths and he unashamedly confesses doing this. As John thinks: “Anyone unable to understand how religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book either” [p. 14]. Ironically, one thing is true about Bokononism; that is his respect to man's thinking especially man's satirical view of the world. Bokononism expose man's follies as Julian Castle declares in the novel “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”. He also adds “I couldn't possibly run that hospital of mine if it weren't for aspirin and ‘*Boko-maru*’” [p. 177]. The scientist, Dr. Von Koenigswald, admits that “I agree that all religions, including Bokononism, are nothing but lies!” [p.238]. Yet after Papa's death, he adds: “I will do anything to make a human being feel better, even if it's unscientific” [p.248]. Peter J. Reeds comments on that saying:

“Bokononism sets out to enable man to tell himself he understands, While really not explaining anything. All its explanation, it confesses, are lies, and disclaims having any remedies. Unless, that is, offering something people can pretend to believe in is a remedy, or unless Bokononism itself can be laughed at and the laughter proves a remedy.”³⁶

Bokonon codifies the new religion in *The Books of Bokonon* that include this satirical calypso:

“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.” [p.90]

Hidden in the novel are Vonnegut's earnings for an ideal love, a nostalgia for the mundane paradise, and a hope for a real utopia. From Harold Bloom's point of view, “Bokononism is certainly more an ironic humanism than it is a spirituality”³⁷. The mystery of *karass*, lies in the belief “that anyone can belong to one's soul-family. Ye must love one another” [p. 23]. Ironically, the island is transformed into dystopia instead of paradise. The directionless, hopeless people of the dystopian San Lorenzo stands for mankind as a whole and the government programs represent the mindlessness and absurdities of the real politics all over the world. The end of the world of the novel by *ice nine* pictures Vonnegut's negative views of the world. When all the waters on earth turn into ice, John and Mona survive to discover later that a lot of Bokononists committed suicide by tasting *ice-nine* frost water. John sees Bokonon whose one of few survivors. Bokonon gives John a paper on which he writes the last sentence for *The Books of Bokonon*:

“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” [p. 287].

Vonnegut always warns from self destruction and ruin. So John's narrative that carried the title of “*The Day The World Ended*” by which he started the novel is verified

at the end and becomes literally true. All the people of San Lorenzo die, without any consideration to how good those people are and what religion they believe in. They are all doomed to failure and death. San Lorenzo, in the novel, is shown as the most useless and unsuccessful place on earth. It is pictured as a typical dystopian place, a place that all people fear and avoid. The people there are very miserable without any motivation. They do not care about whom will rule them because they are sure he is going to fail, "Everybody was bound to fail, for San Lorenzo was as unproductive as an equal area in the Sahara or the Polar Icecap" [p. 133].

Here, Vonnegut shows his concern with the idea of apocalypse. He explains how once at home he has imagined the modern view of apocalypse: "I myself once staged the end of the world on two pieces of paper -- at a cost of less than a penny, including wear and tear on my typewriter ribbon and the seat of my pants. Think of that"³⁸ (*Palm Sunday* 163). He uses the image of apocalypse as the end of time, or the end of human history on earth. So that, the linear movement of history is visualized to end in this novel.

Conclusion:

In *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut criticizes science, economy and religion and shows how politics misuses these as tools to deceive and dominate over people. Robert Scholes concludes Vonnegut's point of view on science and religion in this wonderful statement: "As the scientist finds the truth that kills, the prophet looks for a saving lie."³⁹ Actually, the obvious principle in *Cat's Cradle* is a contradiction between science and religion. This is shown in a sort of battle-like controversy between different characters. Science is introduced as creative progress, yet leads to total destruction (starting with first use of the atomic bomb and ending with the end of the world caused by *ice-nine*). Whereas mundane religion, one like Bokononism, cannot save the lives or solve the problems of poor people of The Republic of San Lorenzo, which is controlled by artificial peace and compelled by the "*foma*" of Bokononism.

Implicitly science and mundane religion are in complete agreement with each other. They united to control people by lies. All the leaders of San Lorenzo seemingly against Bokononism, as Papa Monzano who deceptively declares to execute every islander leaves Christianity and converts to Bokononsim. In fact, he is elected to protect the traditions of Bokononism planning to keep the islanders in a state of submissiveness so it becomes easier to control them through what is known in the novel as the "Dynamic Tension"[p. 101]. In his essay "Comic Irony", James Lundquist declares that:

"Bokononism and science work against one another in the book to create dynamic tension of another sort.... The import of the book that

there are two kinds of cat's cradle__ scientific model (the lines, angles, and frame of string game suggest this) and philosophical and religious systems. Both are artificial representations of reality".⁴⁰

Vonnegut's fictional society is provided with lack of purpose, with a horrible vision of man's irresponsibility and with what John R. May calls "our insane pretensions, both technological and religious".⁴¹ Vonnegut trenchantly warns humanity for their urgent need for a truthful human community and actual human unity against the forces of destruction. "The universe that is destroyed is one which corresponds with considerable sociological, religious, and logical precision to the universe which exists in reality for most of mankind"⁴². As a result, all the attempts have been done to make San Lorenzo a utopia, lead it to be a dystopia. As reaction to the disastrous end of the novel, Schulz writes:

"*Cat's Cradle* is a novel about the varieties of truth available to man: scientific, religious, political, social, economic, and humanistic. Ultimately, in its presentation of the open-ended, unconformable dilemma of human knowledge and wisdom, the novel sardonically blurs veracity and falsehood, treating them as interchangeable for all practical human purposes."⁴³

Donald E. Morse affirms that "If human being are so hell-bent on their own destruction, then, suggests *Cat's Cradle*, no one or nothing can stop them, and all the novelist can do is warn against the impending disaster". He also adds that: "The plot of *Cat's Cradle* is itself the ultimate joke in which all life on earth perishes thanks to the greed, stupidity, and shortsightedness of that part of life called "human beings"". ⁴⁴

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