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Writing after the Apocalypse(s):

Utopian Paradox and Historical Narrative in

Vonnegut's *Galápagos*

Fumika Nagano

Almost sixty years have passed since World War II ended in apocalypse with the dropping of two atomic bombs, and the number of surviving witnesses of these and other atrocities of the era has shrunk precipitously. Yet representations of the end of humanity informed by images of Hiroshima and the Nazi death camps remain prevalent in American culture—as they have been since the end of the war—from Hollywood movies like *Dr. Strangelove* (1963) to the political discourse of the Cold War, as embodied in Ronald Reagan's SDI.

The end of the world, however, not only invites representation but resists it as well: representations of apocalypse inescapably embody a chronological contradiction, in light of which they might be described oxymoronically as afterimages of the future. In his study of the phenomenal profusion of apocalyptic representations in postmodern American culture, James Berger argues that the senses both “that the conclusive catastrophe has already occurred” and that “the crisis is over” inform the “pervasive post-apocalyptic sensibility” of the late twentieth century (xiv). We live in the world after the end of the world, having witnessed the apocalypse at the close of World War II.

Thus, Donald E. Pease argues that while the atomic bombing of

Hiroshima provided a powerful argument in support of American Cold War nuclear policy, it has also emerged as a referent of a possible future that Americans anticipate even as they sense that it has already occurred:

As a national spectacle, Hiroshima had turned the entire U.S. social symbolic system into the afterimage of a collectively anticipated spectacle of disaster, a self-divided (rather than self-present) instant, that had always not yet taken place (hence always anticipated) but had nevertheless always already happened (in the lived experience of anticipated disaster). (565)

Appropriated into the national system of representation, Hiroshima has been severed from the specific event it signifies in history (the bombing of Hiroshima), and has emerged as a free-floating signifier of the post-apocalypse.⁽¹⁾ This is the message of Hiroshima's apocalyptic narratology: we are awaiting the end that we have already experienced.

Kurt Vonnegut has offered expressions of this sensibility in many of the post-apocalyptic novels he has produced in the course of his career, including *Cat's Cradle* (1963), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), and *Deadeye Dick* (1982), yet his later novel *Galápagos* (1985), comprises a variation on the typical American representation of the post-apocalypse that merits closer consideration. Whereas his earlier novels deal with characters who experience the apocalypse and survive to narrate their stories, it is narrated by a ghost—that of a Vietnam war deserter who died before the story begins and functions only to observe humanity from a detached viewpoint.

In *Galápagos*, the few survivors of a world catastrophe that occurs in 1986—which entailed famine, financial crises, non-nuclear wars, and a virus that eats the eggs in human ovaries—evolve on the Galápagos archipelago over the course of a million years into innocent, seal-like creatures

with tiny brains. The descendent of a genetically mutated Hiroshima victim contributes to the outcome of this evolutionary process by passing on her silky, pelt-like skin to her descendants. Through natural selection, the inhabitants of Santa Rosalia achieve physical and behavioral characteristics that finally allow them to enjoy perfect harmony with nature for the first time in the history of humanity (or post-humanity) in the year 1,001,986 A.D.

Given the diminished intellects of these seal-people, the ghost, Leon Trout, is the sole “surviving” character capable of bearing witness to the million-year post-apocalyptic history of humanity. Leon celebrates the death of Old Humanity with its big brains (and penchant for self-destruction) as well as its succession by New Humanity with its peaceful life in an earthly paradise. However, while Leon applauds the extinction of the brutal social systems and technology of our age, he reproduces and perpetuates the image of Hiroshima as an expression of a general human condition through his own omnipresence in time.

While America was lying stuporous under the cultural amnesia of Reaganism (Berger xiv)—and one month after Vonnegut attempted to kill himself, or experience his own life’s end ⁽²⁾—the author attended the May, 1984 International P.E.N. Congress in Tokyo. In a paper he delivered at a forum entitled, “The Place of the Literature in the Nuclear Age: Our Motivations,” Vonnegut argued that we would not survive the nuclear age without the help of literature—that simply abolishing nuclear weapons would not be enough.⁽³⁾ *Galápagos*, published the following year, illustrates Vonnegut’s understanding of the dangerous desire to give voice to eschatological self-narratives, as well as his pride as a writer in his need to continue writing all the same.

1. Subverting Dichotomies

Critics of *Galápagos* have been divided on the question of whether the survival and evolution of New Humanity should be viewed as a positive (if not progressive) development in the novel or a negative one—of whether the novel represents a new utopia or a familiar Vonnegutian nightmare.⁽⁴⁾ On both sides of the question, however, critics have largely assumed the reliability of the narrator Leon Trout and his narration. Yet the distinction between the position of the writer and that of this naïve and complacent narrator merits scrutiny, particularly in view of Vonnegut's comment, in reference to his novels, "You understand, of course, that everything I say is horseshit" (Allen 77).

Before considering this issue, however, let us first examine the events of the novel, focusing on the Darwin-subverting evolution of New Humanity as narrated by Leon. As the apocalypse is unfolding in 1986, a ship called the *Bahía de Darwin* (Spanish for "Bay of Darwin") or the "new Noah's ark" as Leon calls it (215) leaves Guayaquil with ten people aboard: Mary Hepburn, a school teacher; the alcoholic Ecuadorian captain Adolf von Kleist; James Wait, a former male prostitute; Selena, a blind American girl from a wealthy family; Hisako, a young Japanese woman in late pregnancy; and six native-Ecuadorian Kanka-bono girls. Due to Captain Adolf's incompetence, the ship runs aground on Santa Rosalia Island, leaving passengers marooned. As the sole surviving members of the human race, they and their descendants remain on the island, evolving over the next million years into creatures with seal-like pelts, flippers instead of hands, streamlined skulls, and much smaller brains than their forebears.

The happiness of these denizens of the surrealistic, imaginary world of the distant future certainly represent the fulfillment of Leon's earnest desire for a better world, and by contrast also supports his dark views of

twentieth-century society. According to Leon, the problem with modern human beings is that our brains are too big: "Even at this late date, I am still full of rage at a natural order which would have permitted the evolution of something as distracting and irrelevant and disruptive as those great big brains of a million years ago" (174). It is those "great big brains" that invented human slavery, warfare, and quiet desperation. In Leon's view, evolution has provided a solution to this problem: "[H]ow could you ever hold somebody in bondage with nothing but your flippers and your mouth?" (176). The new seal-like people do not deceive each other, nor do they worry about vague anxieties. These happy creatures laugh and giggle often, and their thoughts are concerned mainly with food. In Leon's view, nature has performed a "repair job" on humanity (291) with complete success: "I remember [the events and circumstances of the story] as though they were queerly shaped keys to many locked doors, the final door opening on perfect happiness" (233).

The felicitous evolution of Leon's narration, however, is spurred by an accidental mutation passed down through Hisako from her mother, a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Hisako gives birth on Santa Rosalia to a girl named Akiko who has "a fine, silky pelt like a fur seal's" (58). This furry pelt is inherited by Akiko's children and their successors, and because of its utility in swimming and fishing, all of humanity comes to possess the trait through natural selection over the next million years. In this sense, human evolution is stigmatized by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and as the descendent of a nuclear holocaust survivor⁽⁵⁾ and conduit of humanity's successful evolution, Akiko must be viewed as the most important character in the novel. As such, Akiko must furthermore be reconsidered in light of her origins: her mutation arose because her grandmother was contaminated by the radioactive fallout of the atomic bombing, the most horrible crime of the twentieth century.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that Akiko can be regarded as a “freak.” In nineteenth-century America, extremely hirsute people were featured in freak shows; such performers, furthermore, were drawn from different ethnic groups than their white audiences and commodified as “curiosities” against the backdrop of colonial expansionism (Bogdan 106). Among such performers two woman freaks were particularly famous: Julia Pastrana (d. 1860), a native-Mexican billed as “the Ugliest Woman in the World”; and Krao “the Ape Girl” (1876-1926), who was born in Thailand. Influenced by Darwin’s law of natural selection (which was inspired by his exploration of the Galápagos Islands), contemporary scientists adopted a discourse of exoticism to explain ethnic Others like Pastrana and Krao; claims that such Others were intermediate hybrids of human and beast were typical of contemporary discourse concerning “the place of human beings in the great order of things and the relationship of the various kinds of humans to each other and to baboons, chimps, and gorillas” (Bogdan 106). Thus, Pastrana was once billed as the “Bear Woman,” and Krao was called not only “the Ape girl” but also “Darwin’s Missing Link.” Vonnegut’s Akiko is similar to Pastrana and Krao not only as an ethnic Other vis-à-vis whites—she is Japanese—and a hairy, indeed furry, woman, but also because she is well-read and fluent in several languages⁽⁶⁾; as the only shipwreck survivor who is “fluent in Kanka-bono as well as English and Japanese” (264), Akiko thus serves as an interpreter for the Kanka-bono girls among the survivors. In view of these similarities, circus freaks like Pastrana and Krao may be viewed as Akiko’s precursors.

In addition to Akiko, the Kanka-bono girls also serve as key agents in the evolution of New Humanity: artificially inseminated with the sperm of Captain Adolf (called “the New Adam”) by Mary Hepburn via the crudest method imaginable, the Kanka-bono girls (“the New Eves”) bear children, one of whom becomes Akiko’s husband. Like the hairy Akiko, the native

Kanka-bono girls also bear striking similarities to historical freaks: they are “cannibals” (161). Moreover, they “choked her [Akiko’s dog] with their bare hands, and skinned and gutted her with no other tools than their teeth and fingernails” (243); at the turn of the century, Indians and Filipinos were exhibited as dog-eating missing links at the Chicago World’s Fair, and their consumption of dog meat—to which Western people remain averse—exemplified their Otherness. Like these turn-of-the-century Indians and Filipinos, who were objectified and publicly displayed as members of “inferior” or inhuman races (Bogdan 52), Akiko and the Kanka-bono girls are ethnic freaks. As characterized by Leon’s narration, these mothers of New Humanity invoke the beastly images of the Other that were prevalent in the age of Darwinism and nineteenth-century American colonial expansion.

Such images arose as Darwinism was popularized and coopted by the then-dominant ideology of racial superiority: people came to believe that the most successful in society were the fittest and that their race was superior. Moreover, “[this] new perspective was accompanied by the rise of the eugenics movement, a vicious use of Social Darwinism which cautioned the nation that because modern societies protected their weak, the principle of survival of the fittest was not working” (Bogdan 62). Those who were regarded as inferior—like the freaks in American circus spectacles or the Jews in Europe—were attacked simply because their existence was seen as a degenerate influence that needed to be eliminated to allow society to evolve.

Moreover, the marginal existence of such Others in America as “necessary cultural complement[s]” paradoxically gave shape to “the acquisitive and capable American who claims the normate [*sic*] position of masculine, white, non-disabled, sexually unambiguous, and middle class” (Thomson 64). This dynamic of dichotomous social definition has contin-

ued to hold sway, as reflected in wartime propaganda that portrayed the Japanese as apes to justify the atomic bombing of Hiroshima,⁽⁷⁾ or in the advice in Alan Nadel's reminiscence of his childhood in the 1950s of the Cold War on "how to be 'normal' Americans": "[a]lthough I was officially born in the United States to US citizens, that faith in normality [the normality of anti-communism and gender roles] provided me my unofficial citizenship" (x). Nadel's advice illustrates how the American identity was redefined in terms of the threat of the USSR after the defeat of the evil empires of Nazi Germany and imperial Japan. The dichotomous oppositions of this social dynamic are clear: masculine/feminine, white/non-white, able/handicapped, hetero-/ homo-sexual, and Western/Eastern⁽⁸⁾; because the dominant side of each of these binary pairs is defined in contrast to the other, the acquisition of *normality* necessarily entails an attack on *abnormality*. As conceptual constructs, freakish people thus reinforce the non-freakish status of the dominant, in relation to which their own status is inescapably peripheral.

Yet the existence of freaks also embodies a subversive, dynamic power. As Thomson explains, the transgressive bodies of people like Akiko and the Kanka-bono girls menace the dominant cultural ideology, as "Pastrana's body [. . .] violated the male/female and the human/animal dichotomies, two of our most sacred cultural constructs" (73). Because their bodies imply the violation or hybridization of dichotomies, Akiko and the Kanka-bonos, like Julia Pastrana, emerge as ontological threats to modern society, and for this reason are necessarily relegated to marginal existences.

In *Galápagos*, however, they become great mothers, the centers of their "extended family" on Santa Rosalia—which comprises the entirety of the human race—in spite of their freakish features. The shift of the traditionally marginal to the center of human society is enabled, to some degree,

by Kamikaze, the son of a Kanka-bono woman who marries Akiko. In treating Akiko well, Kamikaze—who “had [. . .] copulated with sea lions and fur seals when he was younger” (287) —embraces a perverse sexual orientation. Rather than alienating Akiko as a transgressor of the animal/human dichotomy, the behaviorally deviant Kamikaze accepts her as a lover and an equal. Their happy life together constitutes a severe subversion of the dichotomized cultural fabric that gave rise to the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and the Cold War.

The deaths of millions at the hands of German Nazis who embraced eugenics must also be seen, in Vonnegutian terminology, as a failure of the “great big brains,” and Vonnegut personifies this failure in captain Adolf, whose name, of course, refers to the most infamous dictator in modern history. Like the Nazi *Führer*, Captain Adolf is prejudiced both racially and against the physically infirm:

And [Adolf] was determined not to reproduce, since he felt that there was still a good chance that he could pass on Huntington’s chorea. Also, he was a racist, and so not at all drawn to Hisako or her furry daughter, and least of all to the Indian woman who would ultimately bear his children. (264)

It is ironic that Adolf’s sperm is stolen by his white sex partner Mary to impregnate the “ugly” colored girls whom Adolf refuses.

Moreover, the harmful ideas of Captain Adolf fail to influence Akiko, who grows up to become a kind, clever woman. With Kamikaze as her mate, she is the matriarch of the human family, and it is her pelted descendants who evolve into the innocent, seal-like creatures who live in prosperity and peace in the distant future. The narrative of *Galápagos* thus suggests that the prejudicial social system of dichotomies is no more than a

cultural construct: it can be subverted, as history itself testified with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, four years after the novel was published.

2. An Unreliable Specter/ Spectrum

As we have seen, the tenor of Leon's narration in *Galápagos* reveals his utopian view of a primitive way of life from which harmful ideologies and technologies are absent. The utopia Leon describes is largely successful: gone is the rhetoric that enabled genocide in the twentieth century, and gone is what Zygmunt Bauman calls the "moral sleeping pills" of modern bureaucracy and technology, which enabled the bombers of Hiroshima and Dresden, as well as the administrators of the Nazi death camps, to kill their victims "at a distance," without seeing their faces (25-26). As Michiko Shimokobe explains, the spatial and temporal distance between victimizer and victim is intrinsic to the ordered processes of modern technology and bureaucracy, which divide the course of killing into numerous separate units of work, the discrete performance of which entails no overt moral consequences for any individual worker (233-34).

The portrayal of devolution to a stone-age society in *Galápagos* aims specifically at abrogating such processes as it denounces modernity. Leon emphasizes the relationship of this utopia to the extinction of the "only real villain" in the story, "the oversize human brain," which drove humankind to self-destruction (270). He allows no room for compassion for these "big brains," referring to them as utterly subject to "mere opinion":

Darwin did not change the islands, but only people's opinion of them. That was how important mere opinion used to be back in the era of great big brains. [M]ere opinions, in fact, were as likely to govern people's actions as hard evidence, and were subject to sudden reversals as hard evidence never could be. So the *Galápagos*

Island could be a hell in one moment, and heaven in the next [. . .].
(16)

In this passage, Leon reflects on the insubstantiality of the ideologies (“opinions”) of Old Humanity—of how they were subject to shift at any time. It was not Darwin himself, but people’s opinions about Darwin—or Darwinism—that gave rise to the genocidal discourses of the twentieth century. And it is due to the loss of the capacity to hold such “opinions,” resulting from the well-deserved extinction of those great brains, that the utopia Leon describes arises.

Yet this image of a happy life in an earthly paradise reflects utopian aspirations which could themselves result in genocide. As Michael Ignatieff asks, “What could be more beautiful than to live in a community with people who resemble each other in every particular? [. . .] What could be more seductive than to kill in order to put an end to all killing?” (125). A utopia is an ideal state that is separate from all other states, and a necessary condition for a utopia is the absence or elimination of all Others. Indeed, “genocide is a utopian project” (Gordon 205). In this regard, Leon’s utilitarian account of the destruction of old evil, and the isolation of the survivors on Santa Rosalia, paradoxically follows the same narrative course as Nazi or American utopianisms of the twentieth century, which he condemns explicitly.⁽⁹⁾

Moreover, New Humanity in its villain-free paradise resembles a uniformly homogenous society—that is, a society predicated on the exclusion of the Other: after a million years of natural selection, every member of humanity has a streamlined head, flippers, and a furry pelt. This brings to mind an ideological shift that occurred in the predominant discourse of American utopian writings between the colonial and republican periods as reflected in two texts: John Winthrop’s sermon “A Model of Christian

Charity" (1630), wherein Winthrop claims that if the Arbella successfully reaches New England, it is a sign that God has ratified the covenant and sealed its commission; and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), in which Hawthorne records his fascination and ultimate disappointment with the social reformation experiment at Brook Farm. In both instances, utopianists first excluded the Other in order to execute their plans for constructing idealistically homogenous communities.

In addition, the manner in which Leon employs scientific discourse to explain the course of natural selection is similar in important respects to how the Nazis justified their eugenics program or the Americans their decision to drop atomic bombs on the Japanese "apes."⁽¹⁰⁾ Notwithstanding the scientific plausibility of *Galápagos*—Vonnegut has asserted that the novel is technically "A+," and Stephen Jay Gould opines that "the fur-covered baby [in *Galápagos*] was a good mutation, that it was a common one. So it's reputable scientifically" (qtd. in Allen 252)—it must be acknowledged that once explained by means of Darwinian discourse, Leon's ideology will be naturalized. But is it right because it is scientifically plausible? — this is the question Vonnegut has asked time and again in his career as a novelist.

Hence, the paradise portrayed in *Galápagos* must be reassessed with a particular focus on the narrative perspective of Leon, who betrays his own utopianism even as he decries the utopian ideologies of Nazism or American expansionism. As a narrator, Leon holds a privileged viewpoint that represents a departure from Vonnegut's earlier novels, in which the story is introduced by the author writing in his own voice, then taken up by a fictional first-person narrator whose perspective is limited.⁽¹¹⁾ In *Galápagos*, Leon is as omnipresent and omniscient as the Tralfamadorians of *Slaughterhouse Five*: though he finds voyeuristic enjoyment in observing human life, he is detached from it. Furthermore, he possesses an emotional inertia that renders him dispassionate even in the face of death: in

assessing his reaction to an incident in which he killed an old woman in Vietnam, he observes that he “hadn’t felt much of anything” (294). Leon also shares with the Tralfamadorians an appreciation of the Darwinian perspective that death is everywhere⁽¹²⁾; it is Leon who rationalizes the brutal course of humanity’s future evolution in Darwinian terms, reductively explaining human extinction as a result of self-destruction and natural selection. But the question must be asked: is Leon a reliable narrator?⁽¹³⁾

Oliver W. Ferguson argues that Leon’s narration of the events of future history and evolution must be distinguished from his narration of his own life, and concludes that Vonnegut’s apparent yearning for a saurian utopia cannot be taken at face value. In Ferguson’s view, Leon “comes to identify with his father” (237), whom Leon describes as “Nature’s experiment with cynicism” (82). In a related but distinct argument, Peter Freese points out a significant contradiction in *Galápagos*: “satisfaction about Nature’s successful ‘repair job,’ [. . .] can only be felt and expressed by somebody who has remained ‘unrepaired’” (169). Considering these arguments, Leon cannot be accepted as a reliable narrator.

In this light, Leon’s framing of the story of the shipwreck survivors as a family romance is revealing of his own desire for familial love, which indeed sets in motion the course of events that positions him as the narrator of the story. It was his mother’s leaving his father that led to Leon’s enrollment in the Marines, and after experiencing a crisis of conscience, he sought political asylum in Sweden. Subsequently, Leon took a job there as a welder helping construct the *Bahía de Darwin*; after being accidentally decapitated while working, he decided to haunt the ship.

Ferguson argues that Leon’s travels amount to a search for his familial love (139), and indeed the depiction of the “mothers” on Santa Rosalia apparently reflects them. Though her status among the survivors is low as because of her mutation, Akiko acts to draw the survivors together with her

innocent goodness—as Leon exclaims, “this was a truly saintly woman” (287). Yet Akiko is nonetheless treated like a helpless little girl by her two mothers, Hisako and Selena, who spoke to her “in baby talk long after she had become such a robust and capable woman” (284-5).

Leon’s depiction of Akiko as a saintly girl “who had put up with [this treatment] for an awfully long time” is similar in important respects to Norman Cousins’s advocacy of the 1950s Hiroshima Maidens project in the *Saturday Review*. Christina Klein argues that this project, which attempted to aid the atomic-fallout-deformed “maidens” of Hiroshima, relied rhetorically upon the assertion of a familial relationship between the U.S. and its newly recognized ally Japan. In the series of essays promoting the project that ran in the *Review*, Cousins depicted these girls not as “apes” but rather as “innocent virgins” in terrible need of help from the global family (150). Cousins’s was a utopianism of “a hybrid, all-encompassing family, that could tame previously threatening differences by incorporating them rather than by containing them” (151). This utopianism appealed to many Americans, who gave generously to the project in order “to expiate [their] guilt” (152). Like Cousins’s efforts to end nuclear war, which functioned to expiate the guilt of the nuclear war-making nation, Leon’s sympathy for Akiko must be viewed with ambivalence, for in sentimentalizing the descendent of a Hiroshima bombing survivor within a hybrid utopia, it amounts to a dialectical solution to the dichotomy of human brutality/goodness, even as the narrative inscribes the history of human atrocities on the bodies of their inheritors.

The unreliability of Leon’s narration of *Galápagos* thus foregrounds his own particular utopian ideology. The question of whether to view the society of New Humanity as a utopia or a dystopia that has divided critics reflects an intrinsic tension in the narrative: this tension cannot be resolved, for Leon’s utopianism self-reflexively signals its own ideological indeter-

minacy, reminding us that the act of judgment necessarily entails ideology. Indeed, *Galápagos* is composed so as to remind us that the act of judging is itself informed by our own ideologies.

3. Perpetuating the Historical Narrative

Leon's claims that evolution is the product of "random genetic material" (272) appears reasonable at first glance: the particular composition of the group that is shipwrecked on Santa Rosalia to found a new human race arises by chance. Granted that ideology informs any utopianism, however, a Darwinian explanation of the evolution that transpires in *Galápagos* based on random coincidence merits reconsideration.

In Freese's view, the role of Darwin is quite unnecessary in the novel, for evolution takes place in nature without explanation (165). Moreover, Vonnegut himself seems cognizant of the danger of Darwinism leading to utilitarianist or otherwise farfetched rhetoric. Indeed, it is not the events and circumstances of the novel that represent "queerly shaped keys to many locked doors" (233); rather survival and narration/narrative—linked by images of apocalypse—are the two keys to the significance of the novel.

Two apocalypses appear in the novel: Hiroshima, as stigmatized on the bodies of Akiko and her descendants; and the fictional catastrophe which humanity experiences at the end of the twentieth century. The meaning of the Galápagos archipelago in the novel must consequently be approached in view of the novelist's concern with how we survive such apocalypses—or rather, survive to narrate them.

As a setting, Santa Rosalia provides an isolated locus for the utopian condition under consideration—much like the islands in *The Tempest* (1611-12), *Utopia* (1616) or Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*. On such islands, there are no enemies, although there may be natives to conquer or accommodate, and hence utopian ideals can be explored without genocide as cor-

rectives to societal disasters such as the Third Reich or Cold War America. In the story of a new Eden in *Galápagos*, Adolf von Kleist, as a new Adam, is forced to participate in the course of the utopian evolutionary experiment on Santa Rosalia when his sperm is stolen to inseminate the Kanka-bonos. That is, Adolf must participate in the new society despite having decided as a matter of eugenic principle not to reproduce. In a sense he is a Christ-like figure, sacrificed to save all of humanity. Given his aversion to the Kanka-bonos—cannibals whom he suggests would eat even Adolf Hitler if he were alive (116)—his forced interbreeding with them is not far from heroic, entailing as it does the profound humiliation of his personal ideals.

Another reason for setting the narrative in the *Galápagos* is that survival is the emblematic imperative of the island group after Darwin. In this regard it is notable that despite a shared utopian subtext, *Galápagos* differs from *Cat's Cradle* not only in that the survivors shipwrecked on the island bear no guilt for the apocalypse, but also in that they succeed in reproducing.⁽¹⁴⁾ Indeed, the evolution of New Humanity is the direct result of their survival; the perpetuation of life is its only and absolute condition. Thus, Mary is not unlike Prospero as she attempts the magic of artificial insemination to impregnate the native tribeswomen.

It is noteworthy here too that Mary's efforts constitute a human intervention in evolution, for they lead to the birth of Kamikaze, through whom Akiko passes her genetic mutation on to future generations. Thus, the evolutionary success of Akiko's mutation emerges as artificially contrived in two senses: first, the mutation itself is the result of Hiroshima's entirely man-made disaster; and secondly, Mary's intervention is essential to the transmission of the mutation to future generations. In both senses, evolution progresses through the intervention of the "big brains" of Americans.

Finally, it is noteworthy that everyone who physically reproduces on

the island in the early years is a survivor of some apocalypses preceding the one which they experiences at the end of the twentieth century: Akiko is the granddaughter of a Hiroshima victim; the Kanka-bonos have long been regarded as extinct after the colonial invasion (119); and Captain Adolf is apocalyptically self-destructive, incompetent even in his failure not to reproduce despite his eugenicist ideals. Notwithstanding Leon's frequent assertions that the shipwreck survivors came to the island by chance, furthermore, Mary—"Mother Nature Personified" (95)—selects the host-mothers for her artificial insemination attempt carefully, choosing from among Hisako, Selena, and the Kanka-bonos. She excludes Hisako, who is busy raising Akiko, and Selena, an American girl helping Hisako to raise the child. Ultimately, it is those who have been personally stigmatized by apocalypses who succeed in reproduction, and whose descendants come to constitute the entirety of humanity. The effective selection of reproducers in the world of the novel must be understood to reflect the preservation of memories of apocalypse.

The role of mutation in evolution bears directly on our understanding of *Galápagos*. Vonnegut himself explains the relationship of mutation and evolution in reference to Gould's notion of punctuated equilibrium: "What the record shows is that [major evolutionary] changes are quite sudden. New models have all suddenly appeared in fossils, rather than with a whole lot of easy, rather imperceptible, steps" (Allen 252). Elizabeth Grosz observes that Darwinism changed our ontology and our conception of time, presupposing a present that has no necessary cause in the past. The evolutionary explanation of life must be retrospective but can accommodate no teleology. Darwinian knowledge proceeds, like evolution, in jumps, and its description unavoidably invites parallels in psychoanalysis and historical analysis. Yet social Darwinism is inherently flawed in its fundamentally prescriptive or deterministic nature, which is at odds with the essential

unpredictability of Darwinian evolution. “Natural selection” (Darwin 131)—Darwin’s term for the “preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations”—emerged as a common discourse for asserting “natural” courses of human progress from the perspective of dominant ideologies, yet it must be noted that not only social Darwinism but evolutionary Darwinism as well constitutes an ideology, informing discourse and transforming our concepts of being.

In *Galápagos*, Vonnegut explains the missing link—the defining leap in evolution that leads to New Humanity—as a mutation, but it is Leon’s narrative of the subsequent million years that conveys our understanding of this leap. It is also the retrospective view of the ghost that clarifies the interventional roles of the Hiroshima genocide and the artificial inseminations on Santa Rosalia in spurring the leap in humanity’s future evolution.

Ultimately, the omnipresent and omniscient perspective of Leon Trout differs significantly from that of the Tralfamadorians in that Leon understands death to come only once. With the exception of Leon’s father, who returns a million years after his death to invite Leon to join him in the afterlife, the dead in *Galápagos* do not return to life; in contrast to the members of the first and all subsequent generations on Santa Rosalia who depart the story definitively upon death, Leon “survives” indefinitely. He is “nature’s experiment with insatiable voyeurism” (82), driven to endure by his curiosity about human life. And although the irreversible current from life to death forms the course of history, only Leon—who alone resists death out of his interest in life—delivers the narrative of history. However ideologically unreliable his narrative may be, it testifies convincingly that only retrospective narration preserve the memory of lost lives.

The nature of Leon’s alliance with Darwin emerges clearly in view of his status and function as narrator: Leon, witnesses the course of history from the observer’s viewpoint. The distance between the life story of the

Santa Rosalians and Leon's narration delineates the limits of historical narrative: Leon narrates the life he never lived and the apocalypse he never experienced. The trauma of apocalypse victims cannot be appropriated by others; it can only be viewed from a distance—the distance of the observer living his/her life—and this is finally the most intimate concern of the novel.

Revealingly, Leon sheds tears only once in the course of the story, throughout which he is otherwise emotionally paralysed. When a doctor he met in Bangkok praised his father Kilgore Trout, a failed novelist, Leon rediscovered his father, who up to that moment had been completely forgotten by the entire world; Leon began to cry like a baby (294-95). His tears demonstrate that familial love is a link to life, of course; but they also mark the affecting discovery of a person, the doctor, who “remembered” once lost stories. The personal experience of this discovery encourages Leon to write about the world after the apocalypse, as well as to preserve the memory of Hiroshima.

It is thus fitting that Leon's story is a work of writing that is always at risk, the destruction of his narrative co-occurring with its creation: Leon proclaims, “I have written these words [the narrative of *Galápagos*] in air—with the tip of the index finger of my left hand, which is also air” (290), and without the expectation of a reader (257). Yet by distancing himself from those whom his narrative concerns, and by deconstructing his own ideology, Leon's retrospective narrative of history re-fixes images of the Hiroshima genocide—which America has continually represented as an afterimage of impending apocalypse—inscribing memories of Hiroshima on the bodies of humanity's descendants, bodies that require no explanation from either Leon or Darwin.

Conclusion

In an early draft of the paper he delivered at the 1984 International P.E.N. Congress in Tokyo mentioned above, Vonnegut comments on his own work as a novelist as follows:

William Blake said, "Go love without the help of anything on Earth." I say we will continue to do what we have always done, which is to go write without the help of anything on Earth. You need beg nothing from anybody but yourself in order to create a book (qtd. in Nakano and Sodei 103)

Although the ideological conflict between East and West in the shadow of nuclear deterrence may affect the production of literature, Vonnegut repudiates its influence. In *Galápagos*, too, Vonnegut portrays the ideological narratology of the post-apocalypse as devolutionary, carefully subverting modern technologies of mass destruction even as he foregrounds the innate unreliability of utopian projects by throwing Leon's narrative into question. With Leon's entry into the afterlife at the end of the story, Vonnegut's earnest desire to do away with ideology is finally fulfilled. Yet the narrative could only have been told by someone like Leon, or Vonnegut himself—survivors who have experienced an ending in the past, rather than someone waiting for such an ending in the future. Consequently, the end of the world that humanity witnessed in the twentieth century must not be understood teleologically to signal our future destiny: as Leon's narrative shows, we can only live to remember apocalypse as a past event, preserving the stories lost in the ideological manipulation of its images. This is the Vonnegutian narratology of history: writing *after* the end.

Notes

- (1) One of the first critics to analyze the textuality of nuclear war, Jacques Derrida argued that since Hiroshima marked the end of traditional warfare, and nuclear warfare had never before been experienced, "[t]he terrifying reality of [. . .] nuclear conflict can only be the signified referent, never the real referent (present or past) of a discourse or text" (23).
- (2) Vonnegut attempted suicide in the spring of 1984. Although the circumstances of his suicide attempt remain unclear, the novelist has explained the incident undramatically as follows: "I was carted off to the Emergency Room of St. Vincent's Hospital in the middle of the night to be pumped out. I had tried to kill myself. It wasn't a cry for help. It wasn't a nervous breakdown. I wanted 'The Big Sleep' (Raymond Chandler). [. . .] I wanted *out* of here." (*Fates* 181; Emphasis original)
- (3) Vonnegut's argument, typically far from straightforward, touches on both the difficulty of writing novels in the shadow of the conflict between the US and the USSR, and the potential for political leaders' lack of literary imagination to bring about World War III at any moment. See "To Hell with World War Three" 81-86.
- (4) Leonard Mustazza, Marc Leeds and Donald E. Morse regard the future evolution portrayed in *Galápagos* as positive, reflecting not only Vonnegut's pessimism over modernity but also his ultimate hope for human nature and art. In contrast, Lawrence Broer suggests that it may be a product of dementia, dismissing Leon's story as "escapist fantasies of putting down [. . .] weapons" and "the hallucinated vision of a very sick man" (157).
- (5) In "To Hell with World War Three," Vonnegut expresses profound sympathy for the victims of nuclear bombardment: "And I acknowledge openly [. . .] that I am a member of a tiny delegation from the only nation ever to have used nuclear weapons on human populations [. . .]. I assume that I was invited here by Tokyo P.E.N. because I was thought to be an especially humanized American, since I had been a witness to the firebombing of Dresden, and had written a book about that. I am in fact a quite ordinary American in my disgust with wars of the past and my dread of World War Three" (86).
- (6) As Drimmer notes, "She [Julia Pastrana] had a sweet voice, great taste in music and dancing, and could speak three languages" (313). Drimmer further describes Krao as follows: "A well-read person who spoke several languages, Krao was one of the stars of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus" (144). Both Pastrana and Krao were popular in Europe as well

as in America. Pastrana gave birth to a hirsute baby who died immediately after birth; the furry skin that the baby inherited was advertised as “proof” of Pastrana’s authenticity as a primitive.

- (7) Ronald Takaki suggests that whereas the firebombing of Dresden was motivated by revenge for German attacks on civilians in England, “Japan had not engaged in the massive and indiscriminate bombing of American cities” (29). Rather, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki originated in racial prejudice, in Takaki’s view. The Japanese enemy was represented as savage, subhuman, and bestly, and one periodical, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, printed a cartoon of an “ape [representing Japan] staring blankly upward at an exploding atomic bomb” (71).
- (8) Donald E. Pease argues that the great binary opposition of the virtuous US and the “evil empire” of the USSR long provided a basis for the suppression of diversity in America, constructing the American national image of the Cold War: “Throughout its forty-five year rule, the cold war’s binary organization of the ideological differences between the U.S. and the USSR depended upon the successful repression of a multiplicity of internal differences between heterogeneous social groups but also within individual citizens” (558).
- (9) Even in his ambivalent mode of explanation, Leon clearly asserts that the self-destructive weapons of humanity’s past “no more left permanent injuries, *except for the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, than did the *Bahía de Darwin* as it slit and roiled the trackless sea” because of humanity’s ability to heal so quickly (233; emphasis added). In the same vein, a character who mistakes Mary Hepburn for a Jew tells her, “You Jews sure are survivors” (236). Among all the atrocities which have been enacted upon a particular people, the narrator sees the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Holocaust as exceptionally significant.
- (10) See n.7. Takaki is careful to note that this type of wartime propaganda was not exclusively an American phenomena: “both Japan and the United States, respectively, had racialized the enemy” (71).
- (11) Klinkowitz describes major changes in the narrative structures Vonnegut has employed over the course of his career. Beginning with a new edition of *Mother Night* in the 1960s—when Vonnegut was writing his autobiographical novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*—the author started to employ prefaces in which explains the background, context, and underlying issues of the story in his own voice (111). According to Klinkowitz, these prefaces function as “public spokespersonship” that provides introductions both to the autobiographical nar-

ration that follows in the novels that employ them, as well as to the writer's life. Vonnegut continued to use this device until *Deadeye Dick* (1982), doing away with it in *Galápagos*, which, as Klinkowitz maintains, "finally allows the author to speak by means of and within his narrative, without having to build a platform for it" (126).

- (12) The protagonist Billy Pilgrim relates the lesson that the Tralfamadorians learn from Darwinism as follows: "The Earthling figure who is most engaging to the Tralfamadorian mind, he [Pilgrim] says, is Charles Darwin—who taught that those who die are meant to die, that corpses are improvements" (210). Similarly, Vonnegut writes in the introduction to *Slaughterhouse-Five*, "there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre" (17).
- (13) Satomi Nakayama points out that the ostensibly transcendent viewpoints of the Tralfamadorians are informed by America's expansionist ideology (76). See Nakayama 66-81.
- (14) After ice-nine destroys the world in *Cat's Cradle*, Jonah sympathizes with the seventeenth-century Tasmanian natives who "found life so unattractive" that they "gave up reproducing" after their genocide at the hands of white colonists (176). Jonah and Newton are unable to mate with any of the young women on the island, and their respective sexual urges diminish after the apocalypse. It is suggested that they will simply die, leaving no more humans on Earth.

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