



Andrei Simuț

## Elements of Science-Fiction and the Fascination with the Post-human Gaze in Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos*

### ABSTRACT

Our paper examines the functions and uses of science fiction strategies, the structure of the apocalyptic narrative and the post-human perspective in Kurt Vonnegut's prose, especially in his comic bio-apocalypse *Galápagos*. We also analyze the functions of the "post-human gaze" for the representation of an impossible event, namely the end of human species and its replacement with an inferior humanoid species, also to be compared with other bio-apocalypses.

### KEYWORDS

Science Fiction; Kurt Vonnegut; Bio-apocalypse; Post-human.

### ANDREI SIMUȚ

Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca,  
Romania  
andrei.simut@gmail.com

Kurt Vonnegut's novels could serve as the best example of the intersection between dystopia, science fiction and apocalypticism, making use of satire and black humour very often in the direction of anti-utopianism. His humour received critical praise, but he was also placed in the tradition of satire, compared to Swift (*Galápagos* can be compared both with *A Modest Proposal* and with *Gulliver's Travels*), mainly because he never abandoned his intense pessimistic view on humanity and its future. This scepticism is considered by Kathryn Hume a limitation to his emotional and intellectual parameters of his work, since it prevents him from finding premises different from his presuppositions (Hume, 12). Robert Tally prefers to call it "mysanthropic humanism", a term that could also be a proper description for other bio-apocalypticists such as Michel Houellebecq. Tally also detects in *Galápagos* a new element of hope, in contrast with Vonnegut's previous novels (Tally, 113). It has often been noted that Vonnegut's novels tend to end without offering any solution to their central dilemmas, and that is also the case with *Galápagos*, a novel which envisages the extinction of *homo sapiens*, its replacement with a humanoid species, devoid of reason. The questions that could puzzle the reader are:



do we really have a pastoral utopia based on the disappearance of the most dangerous species on Earth as the narrator urges us to believe? Can we seriously consider it a solution? What does the disappearance of the human race stand for? Before we get to answer these questions, which will lead us to the core of our reading of *Galápagos* as a comic bio-apocalypse, we shall discuss briefly the relation between Vonnegut's novels and science fiction.

#### A science-fiction author?

There are a lot of reasons why this label never left the critical discourse about Vonnegut, since he began as a typical science fiction author, writing for magazines, being a "paperback writer", but mostly the fact that his inspiration sprang from his fascination with the "fantastic changes in the world" (Reilly, 1980, 13). These fantastic changes in the world have proved to be Vonnegut's core of inspiration and fuelled his literary energy. This phrase suggests both the science fictional drive of his stories to concentrate upon the "fantastic dimension" of our environment and the historical turning points that the author has witnessed, often bearing apocalyptic energy and significance, from the financial breakdown of 1929 to the coming of the new Millennium, and the continuous expansion of technology.

This is the second great concern that the prose of Kurt Vonnegut shares with a large amount of science fiction, namely the technophobia vision that informs many of his writings since his first novel, *Player Piano*, an extended expression of his concern regarding the replacement of the humans by the machines, a concern also present in *Galápagos*, but in a less dystopian and more familiar representation. The best example is Mandarax, a device whose

description could entail comparison with our contemporary devices (the smartphone, for instance), whose main functions were to translate from many languages and to offer the correct medical diagnostics. However, it is soon revealed that the device exceeded its precise scientific functions and offered random quotations for each situation when requested (thus becoming a favourite literary device for mocking intertextuality), and also capable to suggest options for ikebana decoration.

Vonnegut's novels bear some thematic and structural resemblances with science fiction literature, including the author's most cherished character and alter-ego, Kilgore Trout, author of science fiction novels, who almost received autonomous existence<sup>1</sup>. These shared affinities could include: his scepticism towards the un-ethical and unlimited uses of science, with the auxiliary presence of the „mad scientist" (Felix Hoennicker in *Cat's Cradle*); the fact that the catastrophes featured in almost all of his novels are always caused by man and by his unlimited desire to play with the dangerous results of technological progress; the prevalence of the ideas over characters, who are quickly sketched for the benefit of the novel's overarching theme (Vonnegut has been compared with Swift as a writer of "moral bleak fables"); author's tendency to confront his characters with the *novum*, Darko Suvin's term for the essence of a science fiction novel, the result of this encounter being a total reconsideration of their worldview, lives and beliefs (Simmons, 136). To put it differently, the characters exist only for and because of the apocalyptic changes they witness.



### Vonnegut, the apocalypticist

However, all these features briefly named here could as well serve as arguments for considering Kurt Vonnegut as the quintessential apocalyptic writer. Even though the term “science fiction” was coined recently<sup>2</sup> as compared to the long tradition of apocalyptic writings, it has become just as vague and general as the latter, blurring the boundaries between high/ canonical literature and popular culture, commercial and cult films/ novels, often indistinguishable from fantasy, in spite of the theoretical effort spent in order to expand its tradition, define its specificity and delineate a list of canonical SF works (Darko Suvin, Fredric Jameson, Tom Moylan, Patrick Parrinder, Carl Freedman and so on). In some cases, science fiction becomes completely interspersed with contemporary utopias, as in the case of Ursula K. LeGuin.

The generic question here is if the apocalyptic novel is a subgenre of science fiction, or, the latter is only a strand of the apocalyptic literature, becoming dominant with the advent of technology and science in the post-1945 period? The apocalyptic novel written in the Cold War era exists in and outside the (fragile) boundaries of SF genre. The category of the non-SF apocalyptic novel is less clear delineated as compared with the apocalyptic strand of science fiction, but the apocalyptic quality of some novels written by Thomas Pynchon, Mario Vargas Llosa, Umberto Eco, Paul Auster, José Saramago, Gabriel García Márquez is certainly striking. Although Kurt Vonnegut belongs to this list of critically acclaimed mainstream apocalyptic authors, his canonical status was not so self-evident as it appears today, and one of the reasons was his intense use of science fiction tropes, at a time when

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science fiction was generally considered paraliterature. Vonnegut himself pointed this peculiarity of his relation to mainstream literature in his blunt style: “I have been the sorehead occupant of a file drawer labelled ‘science fiction’ ever since (my first novel), and I would like out, particularly since so many critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal”<sup>3</sup>

His novels display the fruitful combination of science fiction and apocalypticism, an original *mélange* in the American literature of the Cold War period. His apocalyptic narratives such as *Player Piano*, *Cat’s Cradle*, *Slaughterhouse Five*, *Timequake* or *Galápagos* all rely on a structural feature of both the apocalyptic novel and the “critical” science fiction: “the dramatization of the historicity of the present in relation to the future” (Freedman, 50), and their indebtedness to the historical novel. Both the apocalyptic narrative and the science fiction stage a historical difference between the empirical present of the reader and the alternative time, a radically different history (Freedman, 54). Another functional approach to Vonnegut’s apocalyptic novels is to integrate them in the trans-genre category of “impossibility fictions” based on the strategy of extrapolation, a metonymical extension of the ends of reality, a satirical distortion of the real contemporary world (Littlewood, Stockwell, 5).

However, each of Vonnegut’s apocalyptic novels (*Sirens of Titan*, *Slaughterhouse Five*, *Cat’s Cradle*, *Galápagos*) stands for a different version of the apocalyptic scenario: the traumatic event represented as the “witnessed apocalypse”, namely the bombing of Dresden (*Slaughterhouse Five*), the postponed end (*Sirens of Titan*), pre-apocalypticism and annihilative hermeneutic, the final end with no survivors and no life on Earth (*Cat’s Cradle*), the viral and progressive extinction of humanity in its actual shape in *Galápagos*. We will seek to



demonstrate that Vonnegut is not a science fictional writer in the general acceptance of the term, but he employs the tropes and strategies of this genre for different structural purposes.

#### De-dramatizing the end of human race

*Galápagos*, among other novels following *Slaughterhouse Five*, a turning point in his career, was another result of his attempt to reinvent himself and also one of the most concerned attempts of the author to speculate a scientific plausible hypothesis. His readings of Stephen Jay Gould's books for preparing his novel and his correspondence with the Harvard biologist stand as a proof for his desire to be scientifically accurate (Tomedi, 97). One point in his scientific demonstration was to prove the randomness of the natural selection, and he was confirmed by Gould, who described *Galápagos* as a "roman a clef about evolutionary theory" (Tomedi, 98). *Galápagos* was also considered the moment when Vonnegut turned to "real science fiction" (Tally, 117).

The overall suggestion of the novel regarding the total end of human race in its actual biological condition is that it cannot be avoided, it is irreversible, ineluctable, but not catastrophic. The disappearance of the twentieth century humans is rather necessary for the purification of a dying Earth, a condition for regaining the lost equilibrium of nature. The human extinction is the equivalent of the paradise regained. This is of course the conclusion that other well-known bio-apocalypses reach at the end: *The Last Man* by Mary Shelley represents a total extinction of the human race caused by a global pandemic, also present in *Galápagos* in a more toned-down version, namely a virus that cause infertility to most of the planet's female population, except the survivors

of Santa Rosalia. If one compares the discursive presence of this ending with other Vonnegut versions of the end will be struck by the difference. The representation of the actual cause that terminates man's existence on Earth could almost get unnoticed: the virus gets a quick mention and it spreads from the Frankfurt Book Fair, a small bacteria that infects the women's ova, a „de-dramatization of the end" that is concordant with other bio-apocalypses as well, from *The Last Man* to Michel Houellebecq's *Possibility of an Island* (2005). This total extinction of the human race sets the novel apart from those bio-apocalypses, where the possibility of the Adamic rebirth of humanity is left open, and becomes the purpose of the quest in the final part of the novel, the quest for other survivors, led by "the last man" as in Shelley's novel or in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*.

The virus, the main agent usually employed in a bio-apocalypse, is the perfect metaphor for a chain reaction and for randomness, illustrating once again a main theme of Vonnegut's prose, the central role played by chance in human history and to its apocalypse. *Galápagos* very much resembles *Cat's Cradle* in the fact that it is a narrative constituted by chance events, haphazard entanglements of causes and effects that eventually lead to the final end of the world as we know it, both isolating a small group of survivors on a remote island (Santa Rosalia in *Galápagos*, san Lorenzo in *Cat's Cradle*) due to haphazard circumstances, both having a similar and discreet "doomsday device" (the virus in *Galápagos*, the crystal that freezes all water on Earth – Ice 9 in *Cat's Cradle*).

Even though the end is clearly a global-scale disaster, like in *The Last Man*, Vonnegut maintains an ambiguity regarding the clear unfolding of the events, displaying limited information about the real cause of



the disaster: a big financial crash, the scarcity of food, infertility, and a war spread to the entire planet. Like in *Cat's Cradle*, the end is brought about by a storm of accidents in a progressive succession from a minor incident to the final catastrophe. Chance governs the radical mutation undergone by humanity, reduced to a handful of survivors, and then allowed to start a new chain of evolution.

Vonnegut, a declared atheist, is mocking the idea of predestination and eludes the religious dimension of the apocalypse, showing that man is the only god-like creature that failed, generating cosmic-scale disastrous practical jokes. No character in this novel seems to be able to foretell or interpret the signs of the impending disaster. This hermeneutic incapacity of the humans to understand the perils of their own situation is a permanent source for amusement both for the narrator and the reader, and also an attempt to render the pre-apocalyptic scenario completely unpredictable. There is one singular character who seems to have developed a sense of the forthcoming disaster, Captain von Kleist. The emphasis is however comic: in the midst of a bombardment, he interprets the falling bombs as a “meteorite shower”, the apocalyptic scenario he had expected to happen all his life. The apocalyptic event cannot be grasped and escapes the rational understanding.

There are other discursive strategies in the text which are employed in order to elude the apocalyptic Event, which divides the book and the narrated time, it is suggested by the narrator, but it is only described in the chapters 34 to 38. In fact the information about the Event is dispersed throughout the entire novel, from the first page to the last, concordant with the author's intent to prove that the real causes for the end cannot be grasped, but they reside in the humanity of the twentieth century,

especially in their “oversized brains”. This repetitive phrase is also meant to certify the utterly problematic condition of the human being, and its self-destructive nature, visible through the most common or the most exceptional situations.

Strictly connected to the „oversized brains” is the scenario of a *psycho-apocalypse* that has triggered the downfall during the last days. All this chain reaction starts with Jesus Ortiz, a waiter and an ardent admirer of the rich, who is shocked by the inhumanity and greediness of the billionaire Andrew McIntosh, who feeds his dog with an exquisite meal, when the whole population of Galápagos (including his family) was starving. Jesus Ortiz suffers a breakdown, decides to leave the hotel and cut its electrical power. Siegfried von Kleist, the manager, who sees Jesus Ortiz leaving, suffers a seizure, an outburst of his latent Huntington's disease, also the perfect illustration of a psycho-apocalypse, namely a mental breakdown which announces the imminent end of all. Mary Hepburn, a biologist and teacher, almost commits suicide during the same day, alone and desperate in her hotel room, a scene reflecting the same paradoxical self-destructive nature of the “oversized brains”.

Vonnegut represents the downfall of humanity as a double, simultaneous and concordant process, an inner, psychological breakdown caused by inequalities, solitude, accidents of misfortune and its externalized version, with its messengers of doom: financial crisis, ecological catastrophes, viral diseases and global wars. Adolf von Kleist is the character who illustrates this externalization of the apocalypse, interpreting the bombs fallen upon Galápagos as meteorites (a natural disaster), projecting the apocalypse upon the events he witnesses according to his traumas, mirroring the very same process of externalization of a traumatic event experienced by Vonnegut himself (his



mother committing suicide, the bombing of Dresden etc). Vonnegut's style almost dismisses the ambiguities regarding the interpretation of its symbols and metaphorical concordances: the ship *Bahía de Darwin* and its irresponsible, drunk and inexperienced captain Adolf von Kleist are the image of the world on the brink of disaster, with its mindless leaders.

The setting of this psycho-drama is the Galápagos islands, more precisely the capital Guayaquil and the island Santa Rosalia, and this space is transfigured and becomes the centre of the world, the metonymical image of it as in other apocalyptic novels (Canudos for Llosa's *The War of the End of the World*, Macondo – *One Hundred Years of solitude*, New York for Pynchon's *V* and for countless other apocalyptic novels and films). In the first part of the novel, Galápagos was a completely unattractive tourist destination, but in the second part, it becomes literally the centre of a new world, where man is no longer at the top of the evolutionary scale. His brilliant demonstration typical for the bio-apocalyptic pattern is that every unimportant human trait will become crucial after one million years, and every important human feature will become irrelevant after the end.

It has often been noted that the genius of Vonnegut's art lies in his narrative technique: thus *Galápagos* switches permanently between flashbacks and flash-forwards anticipating the deaths of nearly all his characters, the end of civilization, technology, and human race. The narrator is Leon Trout, the son of the famous science fiction writer Kilgore Trout and already dead by the time the story begins. One of the main narrative strategies is to postpone the story of humanity's last day, the disjunctive point when the „realistic“, plausible history meets the (im)-possible void of its end. Although Vonnegut has a few bombs falling upon his characters, the differences between the

cataclysmic spectacle of destruction represented usually in a nuclear apocalypse and the de-dramatization of the bio-apocalypse are obvious: the apocalyptic Event cannot be isolated in its pure manifestation, but only through its consequences (the disappearance of humanity), and thus it can never be represented as a performative process (as the apocalyptic film so often does). The narrator adopts a neutral scientific style and enumerates the possible causes, often emphasizing them illustrating the satirical dimension of Vonnegut's prose.

Some critics have insisted that the apocalypse is represented in *Galápagos* as a gradual regression of human species into animalism (Freese, 170). According to Douglas Robinson's terminology, the novel is a mixture of the continuum hermeneutics (the survival of the human species, but in a different form: the possibility of a new beginning; the perfect conservation of the natural habitat) and the annihilative hermeneutics (the end of the world as we know it) (Robinson, 2000). A proper example for what Klaus Scherpe and Brent Peterson has termed as „de-dramatization of the end“ (Scherpe, 122) is *Galápagos*, where one of Vonnegut's intention was to contradict with its representation of the end the expectations of the contemporary reader imbued with Cold War fictions of disasters, dominated by the nuclear fears. The case of Captain von Kleist's is again very relevant here: he mistakes the bombs of a World War III for a “meteorite shower” because he considers it to be a more poetic, aesthetic version of Armageddon. Compared with the other characters of the novel, von Kleist is a solitary figure with his apocalyptic projections, and Vonnegut's implicit irony towards his character is clear enough. His attempt is to construct a different version of the end, devoid of its poetic potentiality, in order to underline the long path of man's devolution.



Why has Vonnegut imagined a total end to humanity?

One of the possible answers is that the attempt of his thought experiment was to block all possible cyclic reversals of humanity's historical errors by imagining a complete regression of the human species to a non-cerebral, vegetative state, devoid of any possibility of re-taking the path towards an advanced state. In this respect, Walter Miller's portrayal in *Canticle for Leibowitz* of a humanity endlessly repeating its historical errors receives a paradoxical and satirical solution in *Galápagos*, where its radical devolution blocks all the endless repetition of its past horrors.

#### **Humanity goes extinct: equilibrium is restored**

Vonnegut remains a pre-apocalypticist, even though his description of a post-human world is one of the most radical renditions, portraying as it does a humanity deprived of art, religion, reason, etc, comparable only with *The Last Man*, where humanity becomes literally extinct. The titles of the two parts of the novel ("The Thing Was" and "The Thing Became") are an ironic résumé of any apocalyptic scenario, containing both the pre- and the post-apocalyptic dimension. The extension of the first part underlines the pre-apocalyptic dimension of Vonnegut's writing. However, the five acts of a bio-apocalyptic pattern are all present, as in *The Last Man* (here the story of a new species replacing humans is missing), Houellebecq's *The Elementary Particles*, *Possibility of an Island* or Atwood's *Oryx and Crake: the tribulation*, the big chain of haphazard events – the financial crisis, the virus, the Nature Cruise of the Century (1) leading to the *apocalyptic event* – the extinction of humanity on all the continents except the small island of Santa Rosalia (2), resulting in a

small group of survivors, also chosen by chance –the passengers of *Bahía de Darwin*, resulted from the chaos of the last day (3), in a new world, described as a natural paradise restored – the island of Santa Rosalia, but indirectly, the entire Earth, devoid of its main predator, man (4), with the final survival of the humans, in a new form, as a new humanoid species, reduced to animalism, resembling the sea-like creatures, having the single purpose of survival (5). As in the previously mentioned bio-apocalypses, chance and science (namely genetic mutations) plays the central role of selection, replacing predestination, depriving man from his god-like status.

The differences are notable: the science involved is not genetic engineering as in the case of Houellebecq's and Atwood's novels, written after the discovery of the human genome in 1999, but an indirect result of the atomic bomb, which has generated the mutations. The main anti-utopian aspect of this novel refers to the programmatic reversal of each human contemporary feature regarding the consequences of his endowment with reason, from the products of science (technology, weapons, pollution, and ruthless exploitation of nature) to his intelligence which often results in his unexplained self-destructiveness. The excess of reason is eliminated, after having been reduced to absurd by its apocalyptic consequences. Houellebecq will operate the same reduction in his portrayal of the last men and the new humanoid species.

There are two main narrative devices employed by Vonnegut in order to render the utter decadence of contemporary human race: through his characters and through a distanced anthropological perspective. Each character illustrates one negative or degenerative human feature: Selena – blindness, Jesus Ortiz – fascination with the rich; Leon Trout – cynicism, James Wait – greediness, Hisako Hiroguki – depression. Again Vonnegut



uses a metonymical portrayal of humanity itself. James Wait also summarizes all possible degenerative and decadent features; he is a criminal, child of incestuous parents, homosexual and former prostitute. Captain von Kleist is physically the forefather of the new humanity although he does not possess any quality of a new Adam (the allusions to the biblical figure are frequent). He is also a comic and degraded Noah, unable to sail his ship, but because of his inability he generates the new beginning, contributing with his errors to the birth of the new race.

Vonnegut's irony is also directed against the new beginning of an evolutionary cycle, against what "the thing Became" with a new species devoid of the most important human physical features (hands, brains), and having as genetic parents the most peculiar human specimens. The ship *Bahía de Darwin*, the "Nature Cruise of the Century" is a reversed Noah's Ark, gathering not the fittest but of the weakest, the physical and psychical debilitated human specimens. The paradisiacal features of the island Santa Rosalia are dubitable from the reader's perspective, and here Vonnegut fulfills his science fictional, apocalyptic experiment: the cognitive estrangement is brilliantly accomplished, since he describes a post-human world, in the absence of man as a creature endowed with reason, a post-historical world, where any transformations are blocked and no possibility of evolution exists, a world inhabited by human descendants which do not resemble man at all. The equilibrium is completely and forever restored.

### **The post-human gaze**

Another instance of Vonnegut's narrative genius is the narrator: Leon Trout narrates an impossible event, the extinction of humanity with no survivors, without using the motif of "the last man". The first thing about *Galápagos* that strikes the reader is the narrated time span, also a matter of critical praise regarding the novel<sup>4</sup>: "The thing was: one million years ago, in 1986 A.D, Guayaquil was the chief seaport of the little South". One essential function of this temporal void of one million years after the historical recognizable world of 1986 is to construct a distanced, post-human perspective over contemporary human situation and, most importantly, to gain the effect of estrangement, considered by Darko Suvin to be a structural feature of science fiction. These are the main coordinates of the post-human gaze located in the first person narrator of *Galápagos* who chooses to situate himself after the human race has become extinct, after the end has occurred. Douglas Robinson has noticed how rare the apocalyptic novel represents the total end of the world and how often makes use of the metonymical extension of a local and partial ending, and mainly because of its narrative difficulty (Robinson, 2000).

Vonnegut has ventured two times in this direction, one time in *Cat's Cradle* and the other in *Galápagos*. In order to configure a credible narrator who could narrate an impossible event, he configures an ambiguous ontological status for Leon Trout, who reveals repeatedly that he had been killed during the construction of the ship *Bahía de Darwin*. He is the most unusual narrator: a spectrum, a posthumous entity, caught between two worlds and prolonging this uncertain, yet God-like privileged position for





one million years. Here we come to the main questions of our article and of the novel itself: why the fascination with the disappearance of man, with the total end of the world? Is *Galápagos* a conventional apocalyptic narrative or does it imply a wider significance? Is this complex narrative solution only a matter of artistry or does it point to more complex contemporary condition, both of the cynical subject and of the spectator?

In the Seventh chapter we are offered a series of essential details that could serve as an answer to all these questions. Kilgore Trout demands his son to choose between the realms of the living and the other world, asking why he has chosen this uncertain and miserable condition and Leon Trout points to his pure fascination with voyeurism, with the condition of an omniscient observer of humanity's last moments. He has also been the spectator of his own accidental death, attended his own funeral, and accepted the disintegration of his own physical body. This is precisely what Lacanian theory has termed as the "impossible gaze", namely when the subject witnesses impossible events (Žizek, 2010; McGowan, 2007).

In the case of *Galápagos*, the narrator not only witnesses the disappearance of man, but also the end of human civilization, the demise of technology, the end of man as a force of nature and a cause of its disasters. This is the point when the apocalyptic narrative meets the technophobic vision of science fiction. Leon Trout becomes the single entity in possession of all the human knowledge (and who cannot use it in destructive purposes) and the only one who possesses the perfect distanced anthropological perspective, being able to deliver a scientifically accurate (yet sarcastic) diagnosis on the "late" humanity, as Houellebecq's post-human narrator will also do in *Possibility of an Island*. Leon Trout's traumas relate to disintegration and dissolution (of the family,

social relations, systems, environment and in the end, the world itself), also the main themes of Vonnegut's life and fictions.

The act of viewing the spectacle of dissolution could restore the world's unity for one privileged moment (that of the gaze) and free the subject of his traumas. It is also the desire to perceive what no one can witness, the world devoid of human presence, and this explains Leon Trout's one million year linger among the remnants of a lost world. But the post-human gaze cannot be reduced to a fascinated look upon the post-human world, it also implies a horrified look at the impossibility of regaining human art and thought, to ever re-conquer man's grandiosity. It is the appalling perspective of the void: Leon's text, written on air, will never encounter any reader or reception, and the story about the end of man will remain unknown, as in *The Last Man*.

### Conclusions

According to Darko Suvin, the fundamental axis of science fiction as genre is cognitive estrangement. As we have already noted, Vonnegut has an utmost concern with the preciseness of his scientific hypothesis in *Galápagos*, resulting in probably his most systematically scientific novel. However, the same novel serves as the best example if we are to prove that Vonnegut is not a science fiction writer, and this is mainly because of his comic drive, which functions as a counterpart to the estrangement effect. What should be the final outcome of a "serious" science fiction novel is here fragmented, punctuated and finally deconstructed by the web of anticipations (flash-forwards), acting as warning signs for the reader not to interpret seriously all the extrapolations and exaggerations constructed by the author. The science fictional tropes are present in almost any Vonnegut novel, but are



always accompanied by an irony and distance that is never present in a classic science fiction novel. *Galápagos* can be interpreted fruitfully as an apocalyptic novel: the temporal distance offers not only an apocalyptic perspective towards the contemporary human subjects, but it also offers a sense of estrangement to our contemporary world.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Philip Jose Farmer had the idea of writing a "Kilgore Trout book", which would become an upsetting and annoying problem for Vonnegut later on (Reilly, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> The term was coined in 1929 by Hugo Gernsback.

<sup>3</sup> Ironically enough, this quotation appears on the frontispiece of Darko Suvin's *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction*, one of the critical works that legitimated science fiction as serious literature.

<sup>4</sup> The author and especially this novel has been praised for their narrative inventiveness.