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NEW FRONTIERS IN THE 1960s: REDEFINING AMERICAN IDENTITY THROUGH FICTION

SUMMARY

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Introduction: Aim of Research

The present thesis **aims** at checking and proving the contribution of texts and authors in the 1960s to the reinterpretation and the evolution of new frontiers at a time when America was undergoing considerable change. **A major aim** of the current research is to investigate the significance of Ken Kesey, Kurt Vonnegut, John Barth and Thomas Pynchon, icons of American culture and to assess the cultural matrix of the sixties, to identify new frontiers and ways in which they can be transcended in some of the novels that were published at the time. New frontiers of the 1960s are associated with political, social, war, space, technological and intellectual challenges of one of the most productive and innovative decades of the 20th century. All these inspired everyone, including writers, to create fiction dynamically engaging with the realities of the sixties largely based on their experiences, thus contributing to the ongoing active process of American identity construction.

The frontier, part of the ideological patterns of American exceptionalism, the process of difficult change, of transcendence of social, political, cultural and global boundaries, represents a defining myth for American identity as well as for its new challenges and meanings. More than that, the frontier was important since the pioneer times of the settling of the United States of America. Innovation, adaptation, and invention characterized frontier life and influenced Americans and their institutions by giving them new and improved characteristics, apparently not shared by the rest of the world.

The current investigation of the complex relationship and of the vast cultural network in which American fiction contributes to redefinitions of the American frontier in the 1960s starts from John F. Kennedy's New Frontier Speech: "we stand today on the

edge of a New Frontier – the frontier of the 1960s – a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils, a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats,"[1] delivered in his acceptance speech to the Democratic National Convention at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on July 15, 1960. Kennedy's presidential rhetoric is just one of the contributions to the new cultural negotiations that would shape 1960s America, a comprehensive process in which popular and influential literary texts play a significant part, due to the impact they had on a vast audience of liberal Americans.

JFK claimed that his frontier was "a set of challenges" having to do with the expanding boundaries of science, but also with a multitude of the above-mentioned threats and opportunities that affected American society. Kennedy's presidential rhetoric, the starting point in these redefinitions has to do with Frederick Turner's theory about the American frontier as the meeting point between savagery and civilization, where civilization represents the obtained knowledge and savagery the experience that is not yet obtained. The word frontier has been broadened to include not only the geographical area that represents the outer edge of a country, but a metaphorical imaginative frontier as well. If Frederick Jackson Turner's famous *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* declared the Western frontier closed in 1893, Kennedy's famous speech is an attempt to reestablish its legacy through reinventing it and turning it into a new cultural frontier as Sharon Monteith and Martin Halliwell show in the introduction of their book on the 1960s: "Kennedy sought to re-open it by making a decade synonymous with a new cultural frontier."(Monteith and Halliwell, 20)

The first chapter of the thesis, the theoretic one, entitled The Frontier: Old and New Contexts sketches the significant cultural web against which a number of important events, texts and figures are to be examined. The undertaking starts from the perspective of the frontier's mythical and transcendental dimensions, from the story of America seen as a "City upon a Hill," watched by the world as the Puritan John Winthrop's 1630 sermon *A Model of Christian Charity* stated.

[1] An excerpt from John F. Kennedy's New Frontier Speech: "Address of Senator John F. Kennedy Accepting the Democratic Party Nomination for the Presidency of the United States - Memorial Coliseum, Los Angeles," July 15, 1960.

The 1960s was a remarkable time in the history of America, many different events and subjects that were important to American culture then being still part of something we consider contemporary even now, in another century and millenium. Being a period of political dissent, social ferment, and repudiation of the prior generation's values, the decade under consideration could be seen as an epoch in which numerous frontiers interconnected. A series of movements changed America for generations to come in terms of human rights, political diversity, war strategies, and social realities.

John Kennedy's New Frontier Speech became a brand for his administration's domestic and foreign programs since his plans were meant to stimulate the economy, to strengthen national defense, and to improve the space program at a time when the space race had another major competitor, on the other side of the Iron Curtain, The Soviet Union.

In a grand narrative that a postmodern subject today would be very suspicious of, the new frontier formula is appropriate as well for defining the culture of limitless expectations that reigned within the large sections of the American population. But as already noted, that was both a time of great opportunities and of dramatic challenges. During that period there were significant upheavals that divided American society, caused people to develop new sets of morals and ideals, making them aware that there are several distinct groups pursuing distinct agendas, more or less hidden.

The inspiration of Frederick Jackson Turner's New Frontier represented both a real challenge to accomplish more and be more and a test to embrace new modalities and new visions. On the one hand, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner stated that "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development,"(Turner, 6) claiming that the process of western expansion made the nation and its people what they are. To Turner, the meeting point of savagery and civilization, what he liked to call the frontier, Americanized people and institutions as they adapted to new conditions.

In another speech delivered on 9 January 1961, a speech that anticipated the theme of the one mentioned in July addressing to a Joint Convention of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Kennedy reminded Americans of the famous story that became the main pillar of American Exceptionalism: "...I have been guided by

the standard John Winthrop set before his shipmates on the flagship Arbella three hundred and thirty-one years ago, as they, too, faced the task of building a new government on a perilous frontier. We must always consider, that we shall be as a city upon a hill—the eyes of all people are upon us."[2]

Using the notable phrase "city upon a hill," Kennedy deals with an ordinary terminology used in both invocations and criticisms of American exceptionalism. Still aboard the ship Arbella, Winthrop had told the future Massachusetts Bay colonists that their new community would be a "city upon a hill," watched by the world, much in the same way in which Kennedy would later see his country at the time of the Cold War.

Kennedy was obviously not the only important American leader to be inspired by Winthrop's famous words. Five decades following Kennedy's famous New Frontier Speech, Barack Obama in his Inaugural speech seems to redefine the New Frontier terms, not in the individualistic terms of Turner's 1893 thesis, but in ways which invite Americans to stand together: "Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America - they will be met."[3]

A prominent symbol of American culture, The Frontier, one of the most enduring national myths, is still contributing to the shaping of America Identity. John Tirman invites Americans to dismiss the traditional view of American Exceptionalism and its accompanying arrogance and to reinvent them in more considerate and compassionate terms: "the myth is resilient. The alternative is to reinvent it, to co-opt it, in effect, frontier symbolism from its destructive tendencies and transform it into something more vital."(Tirman, 11)

Ray Billington's 1966 book on *America's Frontier Heritage* had focused on the Turner Thesis. In the turbulent age of the 1960s many agreed that The Frontier was the source of many elements of the American character and behavior which led to American identity and uniqueness: "a commitment to hard work, an addiction to mobility, a willingness to innovate, an enthusiasm for democracy and a conviction in human

[2] An excerpt from John F. Kennedy's speech delivered to the Joint Convention of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, The State House, Boston, January 9, 1961.
[3] An excerpt from Barack Obama's Inaugural Address, Jan. 20. 2009.

equality, a habit of wastefulness, a spirit of nationalism, a leaning toward materialism, and an inclination to optimism."(Billington in Etulain, 21)

Richard Slotkin, a well-known American cultural theorist, conveys the image of the enduring myth of the frontier in a highly acclaimed trilogy: *Regeneration Through Violence, The Fatal Environment* and *Gunfighter Nation*. Examining the extensive significance of Wild West allegories on American culture and politics, Slotkin's answer was "regeneration through violence," arguing that: "In American mythogenesis the founding fathers were not those eighteenth-century gentlemen who composed a nation at Philadelphia. Rather, they were those who…tore violently a nation from implacable and opulent wilderness."(Slotkin, 6) Thus, the author chronicles how the use of violence has been integral to the construction of a distinctly American mythology.

Many important inroads into understanding tensions in the 1960s were made in the 1950s. It was precisely the "harmonious" 1950s which provided the turbulent 1960s. Being seen both as an analysis of the changing structures of American society at mid-century and as an investigation of the transformations affecting minds and personalities of many Americans, the sociological study published in 1950, *The Lonely Crowd* by David Riesman was part of a course of writing on trends in American social spirit and character.

Producing his bestsellers *The Affluent Society* (1958) and *The New Industrial State* (1967), Ken Galbraith, the economist and one of the leading exponents of 20th century political liberalism stated his critique of consumerism from a position of authority which his being a member of Kennedy's liberal White House administration allowed.

According to Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, two respected historians of American politics working today, the 1960s can be compared with that tumultuous decade of the American Civil War, one hundred years before: "It was a time of intense conflict and millennial expectations." (Isserman and Kazin, 7)

Depending on an individual’s political values, race, origin, gender, sexual orientation or musical taste, one could definitely affirm that there were many sixties. In his study of the sixties that situates the turbulent era in the tradition of American radical history, Dominick Cavallo, late professor of history at Adelphi University, draws

attention to the fact that the decade goes on having an impact on much of America today: "whatever one's values or connections to the sixties, it is impossible to ignore either the extraordinary changes wrought by the decade's numerous movements or their continuing impact on nearly every feature of American life."(Cavallo, 251)

The cultural revolution of the spirit of the 1960s that will come to be called Postmodernism, had its origins in such challenging artistic attitudes as the Beat Movement and the changes taking place in the rebellious decade. Postmodernism as a cultural paradigm put everything into question, interrogated philosophies, strategies and world views in a time when anger, skepticism, uncertainty and alienation prevailed. Thus, as a philosophical, social, political and artistic set of phenomena, Postmodernism can be seen as a catalyst that provided the impetus of the exploration of new frontiers.

Meaning to explain the novel form and its need to change in order to survive in an age which proclaims its death, John Barth wrote *The Literature of Exhaustion* in the decade under consideration which would be followed by *The Literature of Replenishment(1980),* thirteen years later. Both essays became reference critical texts in postmodernist fiction theory. Much like the American settlers who have reached the last physical frontier of the Far West in the 19th century, Barth is trying to transcend the frontier of Modernism.

The literary theorist Ihab Hassan saw a definite boundary separating modernism and postmodernism, determined by a change of the entire cultural paradigm. He expressed his views in his *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: toward a Postmodern Literature,* published in 1971. To this effort of new definitions and redefinitions of cultural and literary boundaries, a number of French theorists made an important contribution.

Ihab Hassan's vision was completed by Jean-Francois Lyotard, who stated that postmodernism, by opposition with modernism, is the declaration of a new type of society: late capitalism, based on information, by opposition with classical capitalism, based on labour and capital. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*(1971) Lyotard puts an emphasis on problems of communication, computerization and technologization in the context of cultural criticism dealing with the progress of history, the possibility of obtaining knowledge by means of science, and the

possibility of absolute freedom in a time that required change and reconsideration of values: "I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives."(Lyotard, xxv)

The same invitation not to take things for granted is made by a Frenchman that came to influence cultural studies everywhere in Europe as well as America, Michel Foucault, who published in 1961 *Madness and Civilisation* in which the philosopher "examines ideas, practices, institutions, art and literature relating to madness in Western history."(Torrey, 303) In his venture "to think otherwise," Michel Foucault constantly explores whatever is foreign to our ways of thinking and acting. His writings on power, knowledge, and discourse have been widely influential not only in academic circles. According to Foucault the role of discourses, imaginary figures, political and economic developments, society, history all play a role in organizing the relationships between people, power, and knowledge.

Even Derrida, the wandering deconstructionist Jew that would influence American academics in the early 1970s, had a message that can be understood within the context of the 1960s. His statement that everything is textualized ("il n'y a pas de hors texte") from *Of Grammatology*(1967) draws attention to the dynamic construction of meaning, where contradictions and reversals become more frequent than ordered systems and clearcut dichotomies, which means that things do not exist by themselves if they are not culturally constructed. The 1960s no longer took everything for granted, important personalities and common people challenging established codes and values, recreating the world in their own terms.

The Sixties remain unique in terms of social, political, economic approaches, of intellectual and cultural ways of thinking, an age that calls almost everything into question. Authors define their positions as active individuals, reacting against the general conformism provided by the "Combine" which tries to regulate their lives. Some influential literary texts become cult books, the readers sharing the same experiences, values and anxieties with the author.

The literary corpus to be herein investigated comprises the following novels: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut, John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*.

Thus, important literary texts such as those mentioned-above raise many of the issues that saturated the era, engaging in memorable ways with America's realities and providing a well-deserved location on the map of American culture for their authors in terms of postmodernism thinking. Whether we refer to novels or novelists this thesis investigates, one cannot help having in mind their contribution to the redefinition and the development of new frontiers in the long journey of the shaping of American identity.

Using the framework of interdisciplinary cultural studies in order to reveal the contribution of important literary texts and authors to the redefinition and the emergence of new frontiers in the 1960s, I permanently had in mind the large picture of American society at a very revolutionary stage. Novels such as *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Giles Goat-Boy* or *Slaughterhouse-Five* and prominent novelists such as Ken Kesey, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth or Kurt Vonnegut succeeded in using devices such as fragmentation, paradox, intertextuality, metafiction, irony, playfulness, black humor in serious texts, temporal distortion, paranoia, a parody of the quest for meaning in a chaotic world, linking them to the changes and challenges affecting society at large, a literary contribution to the crossing of thresholds and boundaries.

All along the research process, books such as *America Divided: the Civil War of the 1960s* by Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *American Culture in the 1960s* by Sharon Monteith and Martin Halliwell, *America's Frontier Heritage* by Ray Allen Billigton or *Postmodernism and the Politics of "Culture"* by Adam Katz provided me with valuable information and useful approaches to a very vast field, an area of research witnessing just as much change as the tumultuous decade this dissertation is concentrating upon.

The second chapter, Psychic Frontiers in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) comes up with an analysis of the powerful critique of American society and of the function of madness in the 1960s. Rightfully seen as a book of its time mainly due to the themes it explores: the individuality and rebellion against conformity as well as the potential of psychedelic therapy - ideas that were widely discussed at a time when the United States was committed to opposing communism and totalitarian regimes around the world, *One Flew…* rapidly became the credo for an entire generation of rebels

since the story was felt to be as personal to some readers as a diary. These fans will constitute the vast majority of the book's audience, justifying the label of cult fiction. Both as a writer and as a major promoter of the drug culture of the 1960s, Kesey succeeded in crossing the turbulent frontiers of the psychedelic Sixties, in terms of social, political, historical experience.

Through his critically acclaimed, best-selling novel, Ken Kesey sought to transcend the condition of the novelist as a detached writer, making his life a larger fiction for the better or for the worse, and became a powerful cultural figure and a proponent of a countercultural life-style, a mode of being attractive to millions of young Americans. Biographical concerns overshadowed the writing, a fact demonstrated by the existence of Tom Wolfe's biography, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* which provides some sort of guiding text for the readers, helping them to catch a glance of the psychedelic world of the Sixties.

It is significant to note that Michel Foucault's major study, *Madness and Civilisation*, was published one year before Kesey's novel. Both texts, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Madness and Civilisation* communicate the idea that society itself labels and encloses the mad. Furthermore, the places of confinement are not necessary designed to provide treatment, as to function as instruments through which power is exercised, and "sanity" enforced.

Power for Foucault is not a thing that is held and used by individuals or groups. Causing resistance to itself and producing what we are and what we can, power for Michel Foucault is a complex issue and in the same time a set of relations between different groups and areas of society that changes with circumstances and time. More than that, according to him, power is not entirely negative, working to control and repress people, it is also highly constructive.

Daniel J. Vitkus in his study *Madness and Misogyny in Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* analyses the discourse of reason against unreason and the concept of madness as an instrument of different social and political functions from Foucault's point of view, stating that: "Michel Foucault has demonstrated in his *Madness and Civilization* that by examining closely the discourses that have defined reason against unreason, we can see how the construction of madness has served various social and

political functions."(Vitkus, 64) Thus, Kesey's novel, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* matches Foucault's critique of reason due to the fact that the text represents madness as a construct that serves the hegemonic ideology of American capitalism. Taking place in an Oregon insane asylum - a very different version of Holden Caulfield 's sanitorium, "the novel deals with a man, one whose successes and failures can help us to understand the special demands of the psychic frontier."(Fick, 137) Since the one way of escaping the rigour of the jail was to simulate madness, Randle Patrick McMurphy, the protagonist of *Cuckoo's Nest*, crosses the mental rubicon, with unsuspected consequences. McMurphy teaches the inmates of the insane asylum to dare for more in order to overpass that humble and vulnerable condition they accepted to assume. The famous scene in which the group fells free during a fishing expedition represents a special form of crossing the frontier imposed by the hospital administration.

Both Ken Kesey's fictional *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and its film version, starring Jack Nicholson, had a strong effect upon attitudes among professionals as well as the general public towards "over-control" in such institutions. This is in line with Erving Goffman's sociological study of institutional care entitled *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*(1961), which was one of the first sociological examinations of the social situation of mental patients, the hospital. Kesey and Goffman attempted to demonstrate not only that patients in mental hospitals are restricted in their freedoms, losing civil liberties and their rights as citizens, but also that the institutional control seeks to change attitudes and identity in a destructive way, disabling individuals and making them more dependent than before.

Dealing with the power of madness and being influenced by Michel Foucault in a time when fiction needed to be redefined, Ken Kesey succeeded in presenting his critical vision on American society. During this complex process, he transcends new psychic frontiers of fiction and manages to turn his cult novel, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest,* in a real canvas on the 1960s realities. Kesey became rapidly a cult fiction figure due to the fact that his reputation sprang from his literary themes of rebellion against societal imposed repression which links him with the Beats, and his personal experiences as a volunteer in the U.S. government's experiments with psychotropic and hallucinogenic

drugs. Dealing with the themes mentioned-above, Ken Kesey ensured his status as a preeminent spokesperson for the 1960s counterculture.

More than ever, in the 1960s, the artists who attempted to communicate their opposition against the dominant regime had to speak in a discourse outside of abstract reason. This turned into a common strategy from the beginning of literature when the discourse of unreason has raised its voice against an unfair and confining system.

Taking into account the political, social and historical context when the novel was published, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* was acclaimed by both professional reviewers and scholarly critics, who called it brilliant, powerful, convincingly alive, glowing, authentic, a mythic confrontation, and a comic doomsday vision. Tom Wolfe asserts that the period of the 1960s will be remembered as: "the decade when manners and morals, styles of living, attitudes toward the world changed the country more crucially than any political events ...."(Wolfe, 30)

LSD has been used as a weapon as well as a ritual, a mind control drug and a mind-expanding chemical and this significant irony of LSD produced an uncommon history: a covert history, on the one hand, rooted in CIA and military experimentation with hallucinogens, and a grassroots history of the drug counterculture that exploded into prominence in the 1960s. Consequently, the two histories come together and overlap, forming an interface between the ClA's secret drug programs and the rise and fall of the psychedelic movement: "The LSD story is inseparable from the cherished hopes and shattered illusions of the sixties generation. In many ways it provides a key for understanding what happened during that turbulent era, when political and cultural revolution erupted with full fury." (Lee and Shlain, 11)

The sixties formed Kesey(DeLeon) and he is still a challenging personality since authors write or speak about him. It is the case of Mark Christensen, an American journalist and writer from Oregon and Dedria Bryfonski, the author of Social Issues in Literature series. The first recently published *ACID CHRIST: Ken Kesey, LSD and the Politics of Ecstasy***,** a multi-dimensional portrait of Kesey himself, as viewed through the prism of the author's personal narrative, a book that provides a panoramic look at a generation. And the second wrote *Mental Illness in Ken Kesey's One Flew Over Cuckoo's Nest,* a compilation of critical essays on Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest.*

According to Christensen: "A Christ figure who quit his day job as the new Norman Mailer to deliver millennial baby boomers the psychedelic New Jerusalem, Ken Kesey's super hero career began with the biggest bang ever."(Christensen, 13)

Being influenced by the social, political, historical and cultural sixties, exploring the hidden psychic frontiers of the mind, Kesey had the power to design the most powerful early postmodernist novel of the era. The Sixties helped him a lot: it was the age of Kennedy's New Frontier, it was time for Martin Luther King to voice: "Let freedom ring…" in his "I Have a Dream" speech.[4] Michel Foucault constantly explored whatever was foreign to our ways of thinking and acting. According to him "...modern man no longer communicates with the madman."(Foucault, xxvii–xxxix) James Baldwin argued in *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961) that US writers did not have a fixed society to describe: "The only society they know is one in which nothing is fixed and in which the individual must fight for his identity."(Baldwin, 12)

The legacy of Ken Kesey's *One Flew...* consists in the fact that authoring a major American novel that signaled a rising generation's restlessness with the oppressive conventional values of the time he managed to turn the controversial experiment that took the values of his celebrated book into real-life risks. *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* speaks about the realities of the 1960s in a special postmodernist style. Ken Kesey's psychedelic mind entered the era and created the spirit of the turbulent Sixties. Consequently, one could easily state that either The Sixties made Ken Kesey's *One Flew… or* Ken Kesey's *One Flew… made The Sixties.*

In a period when American fiction needed to be redefined in order to gain identity, Ken Kesey wrote what was from the very beginning the voice of an entire generation. Through *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* the reader is introduced to the 1960s new frontiers of thinking that generated challenges and changes in everything. Madness and LSD were key words through which individuals were transformed into humans capable to survive in an epoch that required identity. Both LSD and madness served as the foundation of political, social and cultural revolution that erupted with enthusiasm and were inseparable from the hopes and illusions of the sixties generation.

[4] "I Have a Dream," Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963, in Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard, eds., *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Intellectual Properties Management in association with Warner Books, 2001, 87.

In the third chapter, War Projections in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), I tried to show how the author responded to the incredible social tensions of the late 1960s, which saw the outburst of violence in the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, and the seemingly endless acceleration of the war. Being published at one of the most critical times and having a considerable impact on readers and critics, *Slaughterhouse-Five* proclaimed its antiwar message to the countercultural generation. Vonnegut's book is not a war novel in the traditional sense, going beyond the boundaries of the genre.

Noting the special formula of the novel which in his opinion mixes "brutal realism with science fiction,"(Marvin, 113) Thomas Marvin challenges readers to make sense of a world gone mad. Performing "a duty dance with death," Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* deals with World War II and advances a strongly antiwar position which was in the tendency of that time. The novel was examined by Thomas L. Hartshorne as a fable "that may shed light on cultural and political phenomena of the 1960s"(Hartshorne, 17) alongside with Joseph Heller's *Catch-22.* Vonnegut provokes the readers to reject his claims and to look for ways to get involved, unlike his character Billy Pilgrim, who seems to accept fate as it comes to him.

Asserting through one of his characters that "here we are, trapped in the amber of this moment. There is no why"(Vonnegut, 76-77) Vonnegut seems to challenge the readers to provide their own answers. His masterpiece, *Slaughterhouse-Five* provided new frontiers of writing, undermining some of the grand narratives of history in a turbulent age, announcing in a fictional form Jean-Francois Lyotard's thesis about postmodernism: "incredulity toward metanarratives."(Lyotard in Cahoone, 259) Experience, historical and social contexts of the 1960s, as well as the need for innovative fiction in a period when novelty was a key word in everything, made Kurt Vonnegut aware of his mission as a writer and human being in creating and presenting events, characters and hidden messages in a distinctive style that it still has an impact on readers and cultures.

The schizophrenic style alluded to in the subtitle may be seen as a traumatic response to some of the most insane expressions of science and civilization, the

accompanying dehumanization, alienation, and catastrophic destruction. The book features madness as a motif, in the story of the central character's schizophrenia. Barbara Tepa Lupack places the engagement with insanity within a larger framework, followed by other significant authors of the age, such as Barth, Kesey or Heller.

Kurt Vonnegut is a novelist for the sixties and of the sixties. More than any other writer of the decade, Vonnegut uttered the fears of a generation determined to change America's course. His novels preached the nonsense of war and warned everyone about a future governed by machines, not men. And throughout his point of view was invariably that of an innocent looking out with a mixture of horror and resignation at a world gone mad.

Being seen as manifestations of man's aptitude to do evil, Vonnegut's apocalypses are parts of the 1960s American realities and through their usages Vonnegut distinguishes mankind's binary capacity for good and evil. The writer is interested in man's dexterity to be both good and evil and consequently this is the message that pours over into his writing. However, man's potential for evil most concerns Vonnegut since the evil in man leads to destruction.

Despite mankind's disposition toward impurity, hope still lives and according to Vonnegut people should treat others with tolerance simply for the sake of doing good, which in fact emphasizes his humanist worldview. Though Vonnegut did not approve of the state of America during the 1950s and up until his death in 2007, he hoped for something better. He believed that it was his duty as a writer to both point out America's flaws and to help America improve: "I like Utopian talk, speculation about what our planet should be, anger about what our planet is. I think writers are the most important members of society, not just potentially but actually."(Davis, 81)

Vonnegut's aim did not consist of condemning mankind (one of the two meanings of apocalypse being revelation), he wrote in order to divulge the change that was so fiercely needed. Through his novels he managed to provide new frontiers of both understanding humanity and reshaping fiction's identity. His goal was to write in order to inspire people to seize the hope and bring about the change necessary to avoid ultimate destruction through an apocalypse. He used humor to give his readers access to that hope.

In the final chapter of *Slaughterhouse-Five* Vonnegut proves the Trafalmadorian outlook that death is a phenomenon which happens to everyone, whether they are Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy or his own father. The novelist theory that all the new souls in the world will want morality draws upon the novel's central theme of importance in the universe since respect and morality are values that only living creatures expect and that death frees us from such expectations.

As Paul Fussell explains in *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, "When the war was over, for most of the participants there was nothing to be said. . . . [M]en of letters became silent."(Fussell, 134) The experiences Vonnegut witnessed could not be placed by any particular ideology. The success of *Slaughterhouse-Five* was mainly due to the fact that for over two decades, the novelist dug persistently to make sense out of what is most nonsensical, most absurd, in human behavior: war.

Kurt Vonnegut's joyous, entertaining, and skillfully simple technique of storytelling made his work public to a large audience and consequently it is not difficult to overlook how his fiction highlights the urgent philosophical, social and literary concerns of the late 20th century. Referring to Vonnegut's techniques in writing his work Susan Farrell admitted that: " He frequently used the techniques of metafiction (fiction that calls attention to its own artificiality) to examine questions of narrative and the relationship between art and reality." (Farrell, ix) Additionally, in a recent book entitled *Critical Insights. Slaughterhouse-Five*, Leonard Mustazza connects the novel's convoluted timeline to Vonnegut's contemporary audience. In Mustazza's view, *Slaughterhouse-Five*: " is set during one historical era but speaks to the political concerns of its contemporary audience."(Mustazza, 3)

While Vonnegut investigates the fragility of human nature and its tendency toward limits without self-control, this disaster can be avoided with the hope of goodness in mankind. His masterpiece *Slaughterhouse-Five* provided new frontiers of writing, understanding and interpreting history in a turbulent age. The novelist hopes to be the prophet of an apocalypse that will never come true, but he has already witnesses utter destruction and meaninglessness that prompts him to take action, at least by his writing, the echoes of his messages for a large audience contributing to definition of the ethos of his age.

Chapter four - Campus Life Envisioned in John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966) investigates how John Barth, seen as outstanding practitioner of postmodernist fiction and as one of its prominent theorists, succeeded in weaving together aspects of academic life, contemporary politics and timeless archetypes, replenishing them with the use of parody and metafiction. Due to its university setting, *Giles Goat-Boy* became especially popular among college and university students. Along with Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Cat's Cradle*, *Giles Goat-Boy* was quick to become an enduring cult classic with a generation that was questioning traditional values.

Barth satirizes educational practices and theoretical suppositions that lie behind them. Deeply reflecting the American campus culture of the time, *Giles Goat-Boy* is based on the perception of university as the universe. It could be described as a fictional gospel about a half-man, half-goat who discovers his humanity and becomes a savior in a university that allegorically represents the universe. Julius Rowan Raper stresses Barth's postmodernist approach, but also its relevance to the real world he was living in, all wrapped up in his extravagant university narrative.

Being conscious of new frontiers in a roaring decade which he was part of, in a critical dialogue with some of the developments of the cultural sixties, Barth managed to transcend new boundaries and get everyone to confront with the realities he experienced in atypical and confusing techniques. Like prominent writers this thesis investigates, John Barth represents one of the agents of change in a decade in which everything was being challenged, the durability of his work living precisely in the way such figure assumed his fictional mission.

The text commutes "studentdom" for mankind, "campus riots" for world wars, and "commencement" for salvation and consequently, the novelist converted erudite bureaucracy into a superior system. Religious leaders and spiritual gurus take the guise of "Grand Tutors," who offer guidance toward "Graduation" through their competing "syllabi."

Giles Goat-Boy investigates the defiant possibilities of myth and makes evident a further step in his manipulation of structure and narrative techniques as correlatives for his thematic concerns. The novel under discussion also boosts the examination of purity

seen in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and the text's political allegory awakens the investigation of the origins of American political life in that novel.

It is generally agreed that writing in the United States went through an extraordinary period of regeneration in the 1960s because of a combination of political and social factors. In a troubled world, John Barth needed to provide identity through exploring new frontiers of literature, in which the border between passing and failing exams was a real challenge. The novelist's endless inventive mind helped him reshape the 1960s period and thus, he contributed to the redefinition of the American exceptionalism.

Being planned to justify the fictional nature of Barth's narrative and to pose at the same time a parallel between this elaborate fiction and the United States of America in the early 1960s, the usage of allegory in *Giles Goat-Boy* led certainly to the enormous success of the novel. A story of a would-be Messiah, raised by goats who launches on a journey of revelation and discovery in an immense University, which is really the world in microcosm, captivated the readers of the sixties.

John Barth, in an interview given to John Enck admitted that his aim with *Giles Goat-Boy* was to produce a "souped-up Bible" or a "comic Old Testament". This souped-up Bible represented an excellent foundation for the opposition of religious, allegorical, philosophical, political, and literary notions. Myth and history provided the embryo that Barth inflates and enriches. Furthermore, speculation about the legitimacy of myth, history or fiction again plays a considerable role in the novel. In the same interview, the novelist claims: " If you are a novelist of a certain type of temperament, then what you really want to do is re-invent the world. God wasn't too bad a novelist, except he was a Realist...."(Enck, 8)

Giles Goat-Boy redraws the political map of the western world as an enormous campus presided over by a supercomputer called WESCAC. The computer performs a number of representational functions in this novel ranging from an embodiment of political power to a demonstration that the currency of the political power has shifted from capital to information.

Barth’s novel shows a strong preoccupation with the frailties of university teachers and students. He seems to write for an audience of mainly academicians. He satirizes educational practices and the theoretical suppositions that lie behind them. All

aspects of university life are subject to ridicule in *Giles Goat-Boy*. This is done from the perspective of Giles, the goat-boy who has left the farm to attend the great institution of higher learning. The protagonist strives to affirm order and meaning as he studies to a Grand Tutor at Tammany College. At the end of his studies Giles concludes: "Passage was Failure, and Failure Passage; yet Passage was Passage, Failure Failure! Equally true none was the Answer…my eyes were opened; I was delivered."(Barth, 708-709)

The use of allegory in *Giles Goat-Boy* is planned to attest the fictional nature of Barth's narrative and to offer at the same time a parallel between this elaborate fiction and the United States in the early 1960s. But the allegory is only one dimension of Barth's novel. More significant to the structure of *Giles Goat-Boy* is the typical pattern of heroic adventure outlined by the comparative mythographer, Joseph Campbell. In his 1949 study *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Campbell outlines a monomyth, in which the typical hero traces a course that leads him from initiation to illumination and eventually to disillusionment. Barth's hero conforms to this course, but it is also important to note that he often does so ironically.

Being one of the contributors in reconstructions and redefinitions of American Identity in which the challenges of the New Frontier made public by President John Kennedy in his famous speech are focal elements of an ever-changing construction, John Barth was aware of the substantial gaps that divided American society and managed to rethink a new mission and optics on his work.

The last chapter, Social Identity Reflected in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) provides an investigation of a novel that outlines the cultural Sixties. The reader can identify every concept that has ever been attributed to the set of ideas we today refer to as "postmodern". Due to this fact, the book that many describe as one of the most important post World War II novels is a challenge both in terms of techniques and content.

Both Pynchon and other black humorists, far from disorienting the readers, challenge them to put things right and to become involved. Theirs is not a rhetoric of disorientation, but an invitation to transcend frontiers imposed by the Establishment in order to break free from the prevailing ideology of the time.

Generating a work that often investigates philosophical areas of Western cultural experience, critics and readers are able to discern Pynchon's interest in individuals constantly changing into insignificant additions to the apparatus, dehumanization and depersonalization, where both postmodern conspiracies and paranoia could be understood in the artistic and cultural context of the 1960s. With *The Crying of Lot 49* Pynchon seems to be making a point about human beings' need for certainty, and their need to invent conspiracy theories to fill the vacuum in places where there is no certainty. Seen as "an exemplary postmodern text"(Castillo qtd. in O'Donnell, 21) and "an outright parody of postmodernism"(Bennett, 27), *The Crying*…draws on all areas of American culture and society of the 1960s, being an example of postmodern complexity fictional world responding to important cultural challenges of a specific age. Like Ken Kesey, John Barth or Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon has understood his mission as a writer in a period in which nothing was fixed, but uncertain. Moreover, due to his craft he has brilliantly explored new frontiers of social, political and cultural life.

Being for sure a luddite of his time, in which fabricated judgment and exaggerated uniformity offer great threats to human civilization, the writer is aware of the dangers of the Post Industrial Revolution. Thus, he deals with entropy, especially with homogeneity, which could be seen as one part of the entropic action of cosmic dissolution, the cruel tendency toward death.

Reproducing a desperately disintegrated society, *The Crying of Lot 49* exploits this explosion of cultural circumstances. The novel involves an extensive sense of cultural chaos due to the fact that it makes use of all areas of culture and society, including many of those mentioned-above. The novel ends when its main character, Oedipa Maas, sees herself abandoned and alienated from that society, having lost touch with the life she used to lead before she began her attempt to disclose the mystery of the Tristero.

Enacting a big role in this sense of isolation, the world around Oedipa seems to be a world constantly on drugs, violence and full of conspiracies and illusions. Additionally, in reading and interpreting *The Crying of Lot 49,* one should always have in mind one of the major challenges of the 1960s, the drug culture and its attributes. Though that world is exciting and new, it is also dangerous: drugs contribute to the destruction of Oedipa's

marriage, and drugs cause Hilarius to go insane. Moreover, Oedipa hallucinates so often that she seems to be constantly high, and ultimately, this brings her nothing but a sense of chaotic alienation.

Positioned at the edge of the American frontier and being some sort of testament to the exhaustion of the impulse once seen as so vital to the nation's manifest destiny, Thomas Pynchon depicts California as a location of suburban decay. The labyrinthine atmosphere of office parks, freeways, back alleys, and tract houses is echoed, at the level of form, in the novel's inclination for lists, catalogues, and circuitous narrative detours. Although *The Crying of Lot 49* satirizes the classic migratory pattern from Old World to New, its representation of California is also marked by recurrent allusions to Mexico, a place that might seem to promise alternatives to the fractured, apolitical society on the US side of the border.

Making clear a universal postmodern idea that, Pynchon shows that if individuals are incapable to connect the past, present, and future of the sentence, then they are likewise incapable to unify the past, present and future of their own biographical experience of psychic life. Thus, Oedipa seems to be suffering from a sort of identity crisis because of her inability to uncover the past. She fears that she will be unable to remember past events and therefore she will not know herself. There is the trepidation that "a life's base lie, rewritten into truth"(Pynchon, 58) is a reality in this novel.

Sharing awareness of the effects produced by modern culture in which people live nowadays, *The Crying of Lot 49* is a paradigm of a cult postmodernist novel in which social topics provided identity. The novel shows how the voices of science or media have become acutely prevailing in culture, even more than in that of the writer. The contribution of *The Crying of Lot 49* and Thomas Pynchon as well as the other texts and authors this dissertation examines is essential for the reinterpretation and the development of new frontiers at a time when America was undergoing vast change.

The novel under examination remains a challenging text due to the political, social, theoretical contexts that generated excellent postmodernist literary productions. Like most literature, Pynchon's postmodernist fiction of the 1960s reflects the views and concerns of individuals and society at large. One of the most important experimental novelists of the Sixties was challenged in his fiction to reconcile the history of single

individuals with the larger, often opposing, processes of an increasingly somber and technological society.

The thesis **New Frontiers in the 1960s: Redefining American Identity through Fiction** investigates how Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* managed to contribute to the redefinition of American identity, relating these authors and texts to relevant socio-cultural and political coordinates and their narratives of the New Frontier.

Being understood as a pivotal moment in American history and culture, the 1960s are associated with novelty, revisionism and change in every domain, in all directions, rather than with a solidary, common transgression of a succession of thresholds and boundaries in the traditional interpretation of the Frontier thesis. Denoting the complex of inter-related cultural and political orientations across the globe, The Sixties can be revisited through each available lens in order to reckon its legacies.

Kennedy's New Frontier Speech at the beginning of the 1960s marked a starting point in redefining and reconsidering of the complex cultural web in which American fiction was an important ingredient. Choosing the four novels under investigation was not a simple task since the authors involved were stunning creators. The novels under discussion represent parts of the multifarious mechanism of redefinition and reconsideration of the American identity.

The 1960s, the era which gave birth to a paradigm that postmodernism and the crisis of representation try hard to define, invited, among others, both readers and writers to transcend their limits in new narratives of the human, more specifically, American Frontier, in ways that indicated dramatic change rather than progress along traditional routes, in a permanent confrontation with new challenges, difficulties and opportunities.

The current thesis, **New frontiers in the 1960s: Redefining American Identity through Fiction**, shows that the American society today is the result of the 1960s groups and interests and that what was thought to be a homogenous society, rooted in the 1950s with all the national consumer culture, giant corporation and a general sense of conformity turned into a heterogeneous one, characterized by diversity, nonconformity,

and contradictions. Prominent writers such as Ken Kesey, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth or Kurt Vonnegut and their texts were ingredients of the complex process of redefinition and reconsideration of the American identity. Part of the intricate cultural network, in which American fiction has its own role, American new frontiers in the 1960s still influence the American society of the current millennium.

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