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**SATIRE IN THE COLD WAR ERA:
GRAHAM GREENE'S *OUR MAN IN HAVANA* AND KURT VONNEGUT'S
*BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS***

Sara Eslami

M. A. Seton Hall University, May 2021

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts

In

The Department of English

College of Arts and Sciences

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Seton Hall University
College of Arts and Sciences
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This Thesis, “**Satire in the Cold War Era: Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*,**” by **Sara Eslami**, has been approved for submission
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ENGL 7010

Dr. M. Carpentier

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Satire in the Cold War Era:

Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*

Satire is a literary mode that educates society by pointing out the ills of the present as well as creating a warning for the future. In “Theorizing Satire: A Retrospective and Introduction,” Brian Connery and Kirk Combe believe that satire “promises to tell us what we do not want to know – what we may, in fact, resist knowing. One is apt to find one’s former consciousness uninhabitable when the work of the satirist is done” (1). Thus, satire is meant to be disturbing to the reader about the subject that is being satirized, despite most satires being humorous. M. Keith Booker defines an important satiric method that demonstrates this as “*defamiliarization*: [which provides] fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable” (pp. 18-19). Another effective satiric method in evoking a similar feeling is defined in Peter Petro’s *Modern Satires: Four Studies*, as he discusses parody. To him, “parody is imitation which strives toward a comical effect [but] can be seen also as stylization with a hostile tendency, a vehicle for reinterpretation and re-evaluation, and as a catalyst of literary change” (12). In his book *Modernism, Satire, and the Novel*, Jonathan Greenberg introduces the “double movement,” which is similar to Juvenalian and Horatian satire. Greenberg explains the double movement, writing, “on the one hand, the satirist speaks for a community, exaggerating and ridiculing his target in order to urge reform; on the other, he is a renegade who enjoys the subversion of

traditional values, delights in his own aesthetic powers, even savors the cruelty he inflicts” (7). Horatian satire is more in line with Greenberg’s first point on the double method, as the subtle method was meant to be a call to action. His second point, however, is in line with Juvenalian satire, as it is much more aggressive and cutting. Despite these different methods, satirists – such as Graham Greene and Kurt Vonnegut – accomplish their goal by narrating a societal issue that ultimately makes readers uncomfortable with their current reality.

The Cold War created an unstable society, regardless of whether certain places were booming or suffering, as “[s]uccess quieted suspicion. Failure stoked it. So did uncertainty. The cold war arms race, portending a possible nuclear cataclysm, sparked diverse suspicions” (Sherry). Thus, there was always a looming feeling of unease in the air, as certain governments “[favored] a nuclear first strike on the Soviet Union or China, conducting unauthorized spy missions, or broadcasting a Christian political agenda” (Sherry). People were trying their best to live a normal life, but “[t]he Cold War offered a curious juxtaposition. The threat of war had become nuclear and therefore total in the most complete sense possible, but barring accidents or insanity it also rendered great power war less likely to occur. And, more than that, it made small conflicts less likely to escalate, though it increased the fear that they might” (Langhorne). Satirists chose to implicitly discuss the unpredictable time through their writing, as this was “an era during which the control of language became a powerful (arguably, the primary) weapon for conducting the cold war, both domestically and internationally” (Maus 2). Graham Greene’s *Our Man in Havana* and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* use different satirical styles to express the same emotions they felt during the Cold War. Greene is a Horatian satirist, as he is more subtle in his critique of the era, which is portrayed at the beginning of the novel when he writes, "You should dream more, Mr. Wormold. Reality in our century is not something to be

faced” (Greene 6). It is Greene’s understated way of documenting the current condition of the world. Conversely, Vonnegut is a Juvenalian satirist, being much more aggressive and explicit in his views on civilization. His angry tone is immediately clear, as he writes that “humanity deserved to die horribly, since it had behaved so cruelly and wastefully on a planet so sweet” (Vonnegut 18). He does not hesitate to openly blame humanity for the inherent societal issues that existed, such as racism and homophobia. Greene’s and Vonnegut’s different satiric voices are vital in understanding the unease felt during the Cold War, as they address – through their respective absurd protagonists as well as different satirical techniques – the period’s instability that may have been overlooked or blissfully ignored.

L. Adinarayana’s essay “Greene’s *Our Man in Havana*: A Study of Its Narrative Structure” delves into the satirical aspect of *Our Man in Havana*, as it emphasizes that Wormold is not a talented man in any sense, yet his literary imagination sets the events of the novel in motion. The bogus stories he invents are Greene’s Horatian use of satire at play since the object of satire becomes clear: the SIS. Adinarayana expands on this point, writing, “What the Secret Service fails to do is to face the startling reality of tyrannical facts. It is not so in the case of Wormold, though he treats the whole business of the Secret Service as a child’s play” (23). Peter Hulme’s essay “Graham Greene and Cuba: *Our Man in Havana*?” provides a more historical context on both the novel and the film adaptation, but his opinions are in line with Adinarayana’s. Hulme makes it clear that the SIS is the object of satire by emphasizing the fact that *Our Man in Havana* is a semiautobiographical novel. Greene himself was in the British Secret Service, “where he had learned about agents in Portugal sending back to Germany completely fictitious reports which garnered them expenses and bonuses to add to their basic salary” (Hulme 189). Thus, his experiences became the inspiration for his novel, revealing a sad

truth about the ineptitude of the SIS, making Greene more inclined to parody it in his novel.

While the reader is amused by Wormold's absurd use of stories and vacuum cleaners, the SIS takes it seriously, as it did with Portugal in real life. Greene's experiences in the SIS motivates him to prove that they cannot be trusted, as he creates someone like Wormold to make a fool out of them.

Though it is a satire, it is a metafictional novel as well. Greene's protagonist Wormold creates fictitious stories to please the Secret Intelligence Service and to make a stable living. Urbashi Barat's essay "Fictions about Fiction: Graham Greene's 'Our Man in Havana' and R. K. Narayan's 'Talkative Man'" explain that *Our Man in Havana* is a metafictional novel which is "closely linked to the old Western demand for 'truth' and social realism" (25). Thus, Barat believes that while Greene's characters want to escape their current reality, they also crave truth. Richard Kelly's "Greene's Consuming Fiction," addresses the desire for truth by making the argument that Greene is a romantic writer and that the "fundamental theme of Greene's romanticism [is] that a novelist can create a fiction so compelling that it consumes reality and, in turn, becomes its own reality" (53). For Wormold, fiction creates a new "truth" or reality that makes life during the Cold War easier. Barat expands on Kelly's assertion, pointing out how Greene's novels imply that "creativity [...] [is] more important than truth" (25). The fictitious stories allow for an escape from reality, as Wormold decides to create a new one. Kelly points out that Wormold is referred to as "novelist" in the story, which makes Wormold a novelist within a novel, once again highlighting the metafictional aspect of the book (55).

Vonnegut also writes a metafictional novel in *Breakfast of Champions*, as he addresses the reader directly and even appears as a character in his own book. His character is an active participant in the book, both being the victim and creator of Hoover's meltdown. Daniel Cordle's

essay “Changing of the Old Guard: Time Travel and Literary Technique in the Work of Kurt Vonnegut” focuses on the metafictional aspect of the novel by pointing out that Vonnegut is satirizing the entire genre of the novel. Cordle draws attention to Vonnegut’s writing style, as Vonnegut creates a “tension [...] [which] produces a significantly different meaning to the ‘natural’ [...] structure of stories” (176). Thus, the object of satire is not in the novel: it is the novel itself. He “[defamiliarizes] us from a form of narrative development which has become naturalized in realist prose, allowing us to see it, and the meanings produced by it, afresh” (Cordle 176). Peter B. Messent’s article “Breakfast of Champions: The Direction of Kurt Vonnegut’s Fiction” also discusses the effects of Vonnegut’s language – or lack thereof – writing, “[w]ords themselves become less important [...] [as] Vonnegut is obviously experimenting tentatively with aural-visual responses” (113). Vonnegut's inclusion of his illustrations subverts the typical idea of a “novel,” as he uses his drawings to directly address the reader. He defamiliarizes something by drawing it and using very childlike language to explain what it is. By subverting the typical notions of what a novel is, Vonnegut is satirizing it, since he creates confusion in the reader with his nonlinear (and occasionally nonverbal) narrative structure.

Despite his satirizing of the novel, Vonnegut still creates objects of satire within *Breakfast of Champions*. Donald Morse’s essay “The ‘Black Frost’ Reception of Kurt Vonnegut’s Fantastic Novel *Breakfast of Champions*” explains how Vonnegut defamiliarizes subjects, including racism, pollution, and war to point out the absurdity of them. Morse believes that “the over-all satiric effect of this childishness, naivete, and simplicity arises from the increasing comic dislocation”; thus, Vonnegut is treating his audience like aliens who are unfamiliar with the earth as opposed to human beings (146). Everything that Vonnegut writes

about becomes satire, and the “overt [...] anxiety” during the Cold War is what led him to do so (Maus 6). Rodriguez also brings up the technique of defamiliarization in her essay “The Absurdity of Suicide: The Existential Struggle Explored by Vonnegut in *Breakfast of Champions*”; however, she believes that Vonnegut is defamiliarizing human beings and, by extension, life and mortality, and he does so because the suicide of his mother led him to believe that life is meaningless. Vonnegut defamiliarizes humans by creating “a feeling of meaninglessness that is often associated with the replacement of a character by a machine. [He] countlessly refers to parts of humans as parts of machines, saying that going crazy is an example of ‘faulty wiring’ or ‘bad chemical’” (Rodriguez 1). Once again, a nihilistic view is bred from the horrors of living through personal loss, as well as living through the paranoia of the Cold War era.

Each author satirizes different subjects using different methods; however, their ultimate depiction of the Cold War unease is the same. Thus, this thesis will serve as an analysis of Greene and Vonnegut’s different satirical techniques used to highlight their critiques of the era. It will examine Greene’s Horatian and ironic satirical voice and his choice of using the Secret Intelligence Service to satirize in *Our Man in Havana*. Vonnegut’s Juvenalian mode of satire in *Breakfast of Champions* will also be examined, as well as his satirical targets, which are far less specific but much more aggressive. The juxtaposition of a mimetic narrative such as Greene’s and a metaphoric narrative such as Vonnegut’s allows for different understandings of the Cold War (Maus 2). Connery and Combe make a similar point when comparing two different satirists, writing, “[w]here other writers might use simile or metaphor, the satirist uses hyperbole – stretching the limits of possible comparison. Where other writers might use hyperbole. the satirist uses understatement to intensify through irony the sense of incongruity” (6). Greene’s

writing is more understated, while Vonnegut's is more hyperbolic. Regardless, both authors are writing about the same era, as the Cold War had the same effect on each of them. The effects of the era inspire both Greene and Vonnegut to make absurd characters to create scenarios in which each author could critique their society. Both make the ridiculous characters in each book strongly affected by fiction but ultimately worse off when faced with reality, thus making their satires a way to document history and serve as a warning for the future.

In *Our Man Down in Havana: The Story Behind Graham Greene's Cold War Spy Novel*, Christopher Hull explains the Cold War tensions evident in the novel, as "Greene's fictional account of invented intelligence not only encapsulated the period's tension and East-West paranoia, but also accomplished something far more fascinating. It managed to presage in an almost psychic manner the Cold War's most perilous event: The Cuban Missile Crisis" (2). Greene's personal experience serving in the Secret Intelligence Service led him to write the novel, as Greene "had learned about agents in Portugal sending back to Germany completely fictitious reports which garnered them expenses and bonuses to add to their basic salary" (Hulme 189). Monetary motivation convinced Wormold to take the job and fabricate his stories, making his character not too far off from what Greene himself experienced. Greene takes the false stories he experienced a step further and depicts them coming true, and Wormold's vacuum cleaner diagram displays this by wildly predicting the Bay of Pigs invasion and the subsequent Cuban Missile Crisis.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, the Bay of Pigs invasion was when "1,500 Cuban exiles unsuccessfully attempted to invade their country in order to overthrow the regime of Fidel Castro. The failed invasion took place at the Bahia de los Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) in the southwestern part of the island" (Young). The *Encyclopedia*

further emphasizes the failure of the attack, as the Cuban exiles “disguised the planes to look like Cuban military aircraft[s]. The CIA had hoped to convince the Cuban people that these were Cuban defectors who had attacked their own military. The ploy did not work, as they used planes with solid-metal noses, while Cuba’s B-26s had Plexiglas noses” (Young). Hull addresses the invasion, writing, “[h]ere was a concrete case of an intelligence organization if not fabricating then at least exaggerating a plan’s chances of success” (201). The Cuban Missile Crisis was additionally described in the *Encyclopedia* as something resulting “from a drastic misreading of the firmness of President John F. Kennedy to contain communism. As such, it was a colossal failure of intelligence analysis on the part of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and his advisers” (Murphy). With the belief that Russia had planted missiles in Cuba, Kennedy showed “a stunned nation close-up photographs of the [Russian] missile installations” which struck fear into everyone watching Kennedy’s broadcast, as they believed the country was on the brink of a nuclear war (Murphy). The missiles were not visibly hostile; however, “in order to gain better information, a U-2 flight over the island was shot down by a ground-to-air missile, apparently on orders that had been given previously. Kennedy, in order to avoid inflaming the situation, chose to ignore the loss of the plane and pilot” (Murphy). Similarly, Wormold gets rewarded instead of reprimanded for keeping the failures of the Secret Intelligence Service under wraps, as the SIS was avoiding public humiliation, much like Kennedy. Thus, Hull believes that “there was no scenario less comic,” as “it was a considerable challenge to separate rumor from fact in both fiction and reality” (208).

Both crises were just as disorganized and unnecessary as Wormold’s intelligence reports, and began due to false intelligence, as Bill Marchant and other SIS agents were the ones sharing (false) information with London and Washington prior to the invasion (203). Wormold fooling

the Secret Intelligence Service with his vacuum sketches mirrors the CIA's use of false Cuban planes. Both hoped to deceive, and both led to disastrous consequences. Greene experienced a similar invasion that began due to governmental ineptitude – much like the Bay of Pigs invasion – which was “Britain's ill-judged invasion against Nasser in Egypt five years earlier, an event that had ended in the Suez Crisis. When Marchant reflected on the Bay of Pigs [...] he concluded that the US military reverse had ‘made the Suez campaign look like a successful picnic’” (Hull 202). Hull expands on the ridiculousness of the Bay of Pigs invasion, writing that it was “a Cold War debacle that even Graham Greene's fertile imagination could not invent” (202). Greene's experience with British intelligence was “[l]ike Wormold with his book code and drawings based on an Atomic Pile vacuum cleaner, [as] there was little sophistication to British intelligence gathering in Cuba during this period” (Hull 209). *Our Man in Havana* thus brings up the unsettling point that even a bumbling salesman such as Wormold – or the CIA and the SIS – could stir enough chaos to start something like the Bay of Pigs invasion or the Cuban Missile Crisis.

On the surface, Greene's *Our Man in Havana* is the story of a single father who needs a well-paying job. James Wormold is a vacuum salesman with meager means to please his daughter Milly, which makes him inclined to accept a job offer with the Secret Intelligence Service. Wormold's general apathy towards helping an institution such as the SIS proves initially difficult. In “Greene's *Our Man in Havana: A Study of Its Narrative Structure*,” L. Adinarayana explains Wormold's difficulty in helping the SIS, writing, “Being essentially humane, Wormold is familiar with the language of human beings but not so with the language of murderers, spies and secret agents. He is now forced to enter the alien land if only to do justice” (26). Thus, Wormold resorts to writing nonsensical reports and sending them back to London to keep his

position and his salary. Wormold's only friend – Dr. Hasselbacher – encourages Wormold's dishonest reports, telling him, "All you need is a little imagination, Mr Wormold [...] With a secret remedy you don't have to print the formula. And there is something about a secret which makes people believe... perhaps a relic of magic [...] Just lie and keep your freedom. They don't deserve the truth" (Greene 58). Since Havana was not experiencing anything noteworthy to report back to the SIS, Hasselbacher gave Wormold Charles Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, which became Wormold's inspiration for his fabricated stories. The Secret Intelligence Service immediately accepted his stories as fact, and remarked, "You know our man in Havana has been turning out some disquieting stuff lately," to which Hawthorne replies "He's a good man" (Greene 79). That is enough for the SIS, and they begin to trust Wormold's stories without any skepticism. Similarly, Hull's biography states that Greene's own colleague, Paul Fidrmuc, lied about intelligence, being "figments of his imagination. His motivation was not to deceive the enemy [...] but simply to make money" (50). In fact, many agents that Greene worked with would lie about their findings, as they were posted in uneventful places where "[g]ood contacts already existed," encouraging them to make up reports that the Secret Intelligence Service would ultimately believe (Hull 47). Thus, Wormold's actions were not too outlandish, as lies were more profitable than truth in Greene's experience as a spy.

After struggling to find noteworthy events to report back to the Secret Intelligence service, Wormold decides to follow Hasselbacher's advice. Wormold writes numerous fictitious reports and is handsomely compensated for them, though he becomes increasingly stressed with coming up with stories, and is even frustrated with his recruits, thinking "that it might have been easier if he had recruited real agents" (Greene 107). One of Wormold's fictions consist of a pilot named Raul, whom Wormold "recruits" to be another agent. When Beatrice – a Secret

Intelligence Service secretary sent to assist Wormold – wishes to speak to Raul, Wormold creates a report in which Raul perishes in a plane crash. Beatrice trusts Wormold, which seals his fate. When Dr. Hasselbacher must abruptly leave to tend to a patient, he tells Wormold, “There has been an accident [...] A car has crashed on the road near the airport. A young man...” and Beatrice asks, “Was his name by any chance Raul?” (Greene 117). Hasselbacher affirms that his name was Raul, which causes Wormold to fear his own fictions. Raul’s death causes Wormold to spiral into a paranoia, as he asks himself, “Can we write human beings into existence? And what sort of existence? Had Shakespeare listened to the news of Duncan’s death in a tavern or heard the knocking on his own bedroom door after he had finished the writing of *Macbeth*?” (Greene 122). Wormold’s paranoia increases when he anticipates – and avoids – an assassination attempt, witnesses Dr. Hasselbacher’s final moments, and commits his first murder.

Hasselbacher’s death is ultimately the turning point in Wormold’s character arc, as it makes him more worldly and distrustful. For Wormold, seeing Hasselbacher’s dead body and understanding the circumstances of his murder – warning Wormold of an assassination attempt – is a sobering experience. Wormold sees “[t]he face [stare] up from the floor without expression. You couldn’t describe that impassivity in terms of peace or anguish. It was as though nothing at all had happened to it: an unborn face” (Greene 190). Out of respect for his only friend, Wormold requests that Hasselbacher be buried with the helmet from his old uniform and thinks to himself how “[i]t was odd that Dr Hasselbacher had survived two world wars and had died at the end of it in so-called peace much the same death as he might have died upon the Somme” (Greene 190). Wormold knows that he is responsible for Hasselbacher’s death, as it was Hasselbacher’s knowledge of Wormold’s attempted assassination that got him killed. After Hasselbacher’s death, Wormold becomes increasingly nihilistic, making him lose faith in his

country, as “[he] wouldn’t kill for his country. [He] wouldn’t kill for capitalism or Communism or social democracy or the welfare state [...] [He] would kill Carter because he killed Hasselbacher. A family-feud had been a better reason for murder than patriotism” (Greene 193). Greene ultimately depicts the toll it took for an agent to serve in the Secret Intelligence Service, as Wormold believes that “[a] murderer had no right to be homesick; a murderer should be a machine, and I too have to become a machine” (206). Wormold believing that he has to become a machine is a darker way in which Greene satirizes the SIS, as Wormold’s time as a spy begins with him selling machines, and ends with him believing that he has to become one due to the failings and misunderstandings of the SIS. Though Greene depicts humorous parts of serving the Secret Intelligence Service and their gullible tendencies, he also depicts the chaos and consequences that come with being a spy in a world of paranoid people. Despite all this chaos, Wormold and Beatrice are summoned back to London where the SIS has recognized Wormold’s phony stories. Wormold believes that he is going to be disciplined, but the opposite occurs. He asks Beatrice, “[T]hey are giving me the O.B.E? [...] And a job?” (Greene 227). The SIS would rather cover up their idiocy than reprimand Wormold, as their failings would become public. Corruption and lies within the SIS pushed Greene to write *Our Man in Havana*, as he witnessed similar events while he was serving in the SIS.

Our Man in Havana is a postmodern novel, like Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions*, and “postmodern literature achieves its effects through a wide range of self-reflexive, metafictional techniques and strategies that disturb the illusion of reality and always foreground the fictional character of the text in question” (Bertens). The postmodern narratives emphasize Greene’s satiric techniques; as Jean-François Lyotard explains in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge*, “Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines

our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable” (XXV). Ruben Quintero expands on this in *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, writing that “contemporary satirists also use postmodern techniques of juxtaposition and bricolage to call into question the assumptions of modern society” (473). Thus, a postmodern narrative, in addition to the use of satire, allows for a more comprehensible exposure of truth, such as Greene’s critique of the Secret Intelligence Service. Greene’s narrative is written “mainly from the single point of view of Wormold. The novel consists of five parts with three Interludes and an Epilogue. The main action is begun and dramatized in Havana. The Interludes and the Epilogue are placed in London” (Adinarayana 23). The occasional shift in setting shows a glimpse into the Secret Intelligence Service, which is the main object of satire. Lyotard also expands on the importance of narration in a postmodern text, writing, “the narratives allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within it” (19). By the brief departures from Havana, Greene depicts the other side of Wormold’s stories and how they are being received by his employers, who believe every word of his reports.

Greene’s primary object of satire – the Secret Intelligence Service – is critiqued subtly but effectively in *Our Man in Havana*. The understated way in which he ridicules the SIS is very much in line with Horace’s own definition of satire, which is explained in Dustin Griffin’s book *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*. According to Griffin, “Horace provides his own implicit theory of satire: that the satirist, speaking out freely, seeks to laugh men out of their follies. A long tradition of ‘Horatian’ satire springs from these early pronouncements” (7). Indeed, Greene does speak freely; however, he chooses his words wisely. Never in the novel does he explicitly express the idiocy that exists within the SIS, even though he had experienced it himself. Instead,

Greene establishes a desperate but inexperienced vacuum cleaner salesman who lies about his reports but has them believed anyway. Hawthorne (wrongfully) trusts Wormold, telling his superiors in London, “I think we’ll find his reports when they do come in are a hundred per cent reliable” (Greene 45). By depicting a vacuum salesman outwitting the SIS, Greene is pointing out the ineptitude of the agency that was meant to protect civilians during the Cold War.

Wormold’s reports become even more nonsensical as the novel progresses, at one point providing an enlarged diagram of a vacuum cleaner to Hawthorne, who brings it back to London. The SIS studies the diagram and believes it to be a threat, though initially asking, “It couldn’t be a vacuum cleaner, sir. Not a vacuum cleaner” “Fiendish, isn’t it? [...] The ingenuity, the simplicity, the devilish imagination of the thing” (Greene 81). Greene emphasizes the SIS’s incompetence, as initially they do recognize the diagram as a vacuum cleaner, but then dismiss the thought as too ridiculous. Thus, like Horace, Greene “is oblique rather than blunt, smiling and hinting rather than attacking directly” (Griffin 8). With the Horatian use of satire, this situation perfectly highlights that the SIS is the object of ridicule. Greene’s writing does not need to outright call the SIS idiots, because they display that themselves with their reactions to Wormold’s “intelligence.”

As Greenberg puts it in *Modernism, Satire and the Novel*, Wormold’s character is also a way for Greene to “urge reform” (7). The primary purpose of using satire – particularly during the Cold War – was not just to point out what was wrong in society, but also to expose a problem that needed to be fixed. For Wormold, lying to the SIS is necessary, as he needs the money to support his daughter, but his lies are what expose their defects. When writing his initial false report, Wormold writes “With the *Tales of Shakespeare* open before him (he had chosen for his key passage – ‘May that which follows be happy’)” (Greene 59). The passage Wormold had

chosen is deliberate, as he is truly trying to create a happier life for himself and Milly. Greenberg expands on the idea of happiness, writing, “the satirist’s moral justification for his attacks contains the possibility – at times, the inevitability – of its own undoing” (49). Greene’s depiction of the bumbling SIS is not entirely rooted in fiction, so by depicting their blind acceptance of Wormold’s stories, Greene is exposing their failings with hopes of “undoing” them, as Greenberg suggests, and creating some sort of reform. Wormold rightfully resents the SIS but associates himself with them because he is in a desperate situation. Milly is his primary motivation, as he looks at her and thinks, “He was glad that she could still accept fairy stories: a virgin who bore a child, pictures that wept or spoke words of love in the dark. Hawthorne and his kind were equally credulous, but what they swallowed were nightmares, grotesque stories out of science fiction” (Greene 73). Greene is pointing out that the SIS is just as naïve as Wormold’s teenage daughter, but that naivety is more dangerous in their hands as opposed to Milly’s. The comparison was meant to be a wakeup call and prove to the readers that the SIS was incompetent.

Quintero explains that “[d]efinitions of satire agree that it must attack someone or something, and therefore must depend on prior phenomena to parody, ridicule, or reform” (568). Petro expands on parody in satire, writing, “parody is imitation which strives toward a comical effect [...] but parody can be seen also as stylization with a hostile tendency” (12). Thus, Greene uses parody to create a comical premise that depicts an unfavorable subject. Indeed, not only is the entire story line of Wormold’s success amusing but Greene’s satirizing of the espionage genre is as well. After Wormold accepts Hawthorne’s job offer, Hawthorne quickly lists his responsibilities and ends it by telling Wormold, “if you run short of ink use bird shit,” subverting the typical notions of the spy novel by having a comically incompetent intelligence service as

opposed to a capable one (Greene 38). An equally comical situation occurs when Wormold believes he is about to be poisoned. Wormold knocks over a glass of whiskey which the waiter's dog ends up drinking instead. Chaos ensues, with the waiter's dramatic cries of "Max! [...] Max!" and Greene's mock-heroic depiction of the dog's death, where "[t]he dachshund lifted a melancholy head from where it crouched below the table, then began to drag its body painfully towards the head-waiter. [...] The dog collapsed at the waiter's feet and lay there like the length of an offal" (185). Quintero believes that "satire can work through comedy" (402), which is displayed in the scene with the dog, as well as Wormold's nonchalant reaction to it all, as he thinks to himself, "My death [...] would have been more unobtrusive than that" (Greene 185). This scene not only parodies the SIS by making them look foolish through their failed assassination attempt but it parodies the genre of espionage fiction as well. Indeed, Hull compares Greene to Ian Fleming, the author of the *James Bond* series, as "[t]he two authors both named their fictional spies James and gave each a Double 0 code name. Ian Fleming's agent was a suave James Bond, 007, who led a glamorous lifestyle and enjoyed multiple sexual liaisons with attractive women" (2). Contrastingly, Hull points out that "Graham Greene's fictional protagonist, on the other hand, is the austere James Wormold, agent 59200/5 [...] He has a limp, drives an ancient Hillman, and his only extravagance is the frozen daiquiri he drinks at a street bar every morning [...] Plain James Wormold was the antithesis of debonair James Bond" (3). By creating a quasi-spy in his protagonist, Greene writes this "as a satire on the increasingly prominent genre of the novel itself, as a self-conscious metafiction that offers 'parodic intensification' of narrative techniques developed by earlier eighteenth-century novelists" (Quintero 269). Thus, this ridiculous episode is meant to mock two different subjects: the espionage novel and the SIS.

Wormold's paranoia towards the end of the novel echoes Greene's own relationship with Kim Philby, Greene's friend and colleague who turned out to be a double agent. Philby's subsequent ejection from the Secret Intelligence Service led Greene to be offered Philby's former position as head of the Iberian subsection as a promotion. Greene was completely detached from the SIS at this point and resigned, saying, "I saw the beginning of this affair – indeed I resigned rather than accept the promotion which was one tiny cog in the machinery of his intrigue. I attributed it to a personal drive for power, the only characteristic in Philby which I thought disagreeable" (Hull 58). Greene became mistrustful of his colleagues and left the SIS, while Wormold becomes mistrustful of almost everyone, especially Captain Segura, a corrupt police officer who has an unsettling infatuation with Milly. Unlike Greene, however, Wormold joins the SIS, as he does not care about liars and double agents.

Greene and Philby's relationship mirrors that of Wormold and Segura's relationship, as Wormold must (begrudgingly) work with Segura. Hull writes about Greene and Philby's friendship and recounts an instance where Philby sent a message to Greene which stated: "New Year Greetings from Your Fan in Havana. Muchos Daiquiris en la Floridita! KP" (267). The message is much like when Wormold and Segura meet at the Wonder Bar and drink daiquiris together after Hasselbacher's death (Greene 190). Greene loosely bases Hasselbacher's murderer on Philby as well. After Wormold identifies Hasselbacher's killer as a man named Carter, Wormold pretends to befriend him by taking him to a brothel, where Wormold ultimately killing Carter. Carter sees the gun pointed at him and tells Wormold, "I was under orders, Wormold. I h-h-h- [...] We are only private soldiers, you and I" (Greene 209). Hull believes that "[t]his scene contains clues hidden in plain sight to implicate Carter as Philby, the notorious worm at the heart of British intelligence. As well as his deadly combination of overt charm and hidden

treachery, other Philby hallmarks were a debilitating stammer and a pipe” (269). Indeed, Philby and Greene’s complicated relationship is reflected in Wormold’s apprehension about killing Carter, as Greene writes, “With every second [Carter] was becoming human, a creature like oneself whom one might pity or console, not kill. Who knew what excuses were buried below any violent act?” (209). Greene did not hate Philby, just as Wormold did not hate Carter, but both relationships were tainted by criminal acts. Hull expands on Greene’s relationship with Philby, as “Greene appeared to sympathize with [Philby’s] dilemma through the rhetorical question, ‘who among us has not committed treason to something or someone more important than a country’” (268). Wormold is committing treason by lying to the Secret Intelligence Service to take care of his daughter, making him a traitor as well. His murder of Carter is not out of hatred, but simply for the revenge of Hasselbacher. Greene’s and Philby’s friendship ended similarly: with a mutual respect marred by a feeling of betrayal.

In “Fictions about Fiction: Graham Greene’s ‘Our Man in Havana’ and R.K. Narayan’s ‘Talkative Man,’” Urbashi Barat explains how Greene is writing a metafictional narrative by having the protagonist writing his own fictions, which end up becoming reality. The metafictional style offers an exaggerated satiric method that both emphasizes Wormold’s dumb luck as well as the gullible people who work in the SIS. Beatrice notes that “[t]he world is modelled after the popular magazines nowadays,” which Wormold accidentally proves true (Greene 124). Richard Kelly explains in his article “Greene’s Consuming Fiction” that a self-aware comment such as that one is entertaining to the reader, since as Wormold’s “second audience, we delight in his fiction and his clever deception of the gullible Home Office” (55). Thus, the metafictional aspect of *Our Man in Havana* makes the SIS look even more ridiculous,

as the added layer of fiction that Wormold provides makes the story even more nonsensical, pinpointing the stupidity of the Secret Intelligence Service for believing such stories.

Taking place during the Vietnam War, Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* follows the journeys of two characters – Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout – that lead to a disastrous night, resulting in a mental breakdown, a physical rampage, and an encounter with the Creator. According to Vonnegut, “This is a tale of a meeting of two lonesome, skinny, fairly old white men on a planet which was dying fast” (7). Dwayne is described as a widower whose “body was manufacturing certain chemicals which unbalanced his mind. But Dwayne, like all novice lunatics, needed some bad ideas too, so that his craziness could have shape and direction” (Vonnegut 14). In her article “Playing by the Rules: Causes of Madness in *Breakfast of Champions* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*,” Jennifer Krause expands on Dwayne’s behavior, explaining how his “bad chemicals” cause “Dwayne to see things and say things that others would not. They force him to break the status quo, berating his co-workers and his lover. He sings random songs in public and wanders about town aimlessly” (5). Kilgore Trout on the other hand is a “science-fiction writer [...] [Who] was a nobody at the time, as he supposed his life was over. He was mistaken” (Vonnegut 7). Trout is a lonely pessimist who would tell his pet parakeet that “humanity deserved to die horribly since it had behaved so cruelly and wastefully on a planet so sweet” (Vonnegut 18). Though the novel follows the two men’s separate journeys, “the book does not have a well-defined plot,” however; “[t]hese two men are doomed to meet at the Midland City Arts Festival, where Dwayne will read one of Trout’s novels, take it too literally, and attack everyone he sees” (Krause 5). Each character is already unhinged and on the verge of a meltdown, which is due to their negative outlooks on themselves and the world.

As a novel written during the Cold War, Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* touches upon the anxieties of the period, such as the Vietnam War, global pollution, racial inequality, economic inequality, mental illness, and free will. According to the *Encyclopedia of Intelligence & Counterintelligence*, the Vietnam War was when "the United States supported efforts to create an independent, non-communist Republic of Vietnam as an alternative to the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam." The efforts to stop communism ultimately proved fruitless, as "[t]he CIA continually reported that the war was proceeding poorly for the United States and that the military had underestimated the strength and resolve of the communist government and military, concluding as early as 1965 that the United States could not win the war" (Miller). Vonnegut's overall tone of pessimism is an extension of the cynicism that Americans had during the time, as he wrote the novel in 1973, when Americans knew that they were fighting a losing war. In his book *Kurt Vonnegut's America*, Jerome Klinkowitz explains that Vonnegut wrote *Breakfast of Champions* to add a new dimension to his writing, which was "that of the civic responsibility in expressing new ideas for the betterment of life" (72). Thus, though Vonnegut's cynicism is evident throughout the novel, his decision to write it was not just to express his frustrations about life during the Cold War but also to articulate the specific problems that were born from it in order to push for change.

Vonnegut displays Juvenal's "note of righteous anger" and a desire for change when explaining the Vietnam War. In *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, Dustin Griffin describes Juvenal's satire, writing, "What Juvenal helps us see is the element of performance and entertainment in good satire. When rhetoric is deployed in the agora, the forum, the law court, or the senate house, it serves as a means to an end – some practical decision" (75). Though Vonnegut satirizes his country's choice to go to war, he can neither stop it nor escape it. Thus,

Vonnegut's frustration with living in a country fighting a losing war makes *Breakfast of Champions* a push to end the war and the societal issues that came with it. Kilgore Trout – one of the novel's protagonists and an unsuccessful science-fiction writer – discusses the Vietnam War with the truck driver who is taking him to the fictional town of Midland City. The trucker mentions that his brother "works in a factory that makes chemical for killing plants and trees in Viet Nam" (Vonnegut 87). The fictional Vonnegut then proceeds to define the Vietnam War in his own words, writing, "Viet Nam was a country where America was trying to make people stop being communists by dropping things on them from airplanes. The chemicals [the truck driver] mentioned were intended to kill all the foliage, so it would be harder for communists to hide from airplanes" (88). In *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, Ruben Quintero would explain Vonnegut's language as the "satirical use of [...] ironical false naïvety, and defamiliarization" (156). Keith Booker defines defamiliarization in his book *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* as a technique providing "fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable" (18). The "things" and "chemicals" Vonnegut described were Agent Orange, a "[s]elective defoliant, notorious for its use by US forces during the Vietnam War to eliminate ground cover that could protect enemy forces [...] [containing] highly poisonous dioxin" which caused cancer, diabetes, leukemia, and deformities (*The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*). By oversimplifying and defamiliarizing gruesome aspects of the Vietnam War such as Agent Orange, Vonnegut's childlike language reinforces his belief that America's decision to go to war was unnecessary, as the country was losing a war simply to stop communists, which he described as a group of people who "had a theory that what was left of the planet should be shared more or less equally

among all people, who hadn't asked to come to a wrecked planet in the first place" (12). Here, not only is Vonnegut ridiculing America but he is humanizing communists as well.

Peter Messent describes Vonnegut's childlike storytelling in his article "*Breakfast of Champions: The Direction of Vonnegut's Fiction*" as "explaining absolutely *everything*, [and] embarking upon what appear to be vast, textural irrelevancies and little else" (111). Messent continues describing Vonnegut's language by citing Vonnegut himself, writing that "[h]e does not like, he informs the reader, old-fashioned stories which 'make people believe that life had leading characters, minor characters, significant details, insignificant details, that it had lessons to be learned, tests to be passed, and a beginning, a middle and an end'" (112). Vonnegut's over explanation of subjects is evident in the drawings he includes, as he enjoys subverting traditional literary structures. The value of language begins to deteriorate in *Breakfast of Champions*, such as Hoover's echolalia, in which he repeats a word until it is utterly meaningless. Hoover repeats the last few words of any sentence he hears without registering its meaning, such as when he is listening to the radio segment on the raped women of Pakistan and India, and how their husbands do not respect them after their rape. Instead of listening to and understanding the gravity of the segment, Hoover just repeats the last word, which is "unclean" (Vonnegut 136). Thus, even in Hoover's universe, words lose meaning and horrible events, such as what the radio story is expressing, become background noise. Messent believes that "[a]s words become less, symbols become more, important. [...] And this ties in with Vonnegut's attempts to write a fiction suitable for the 1960s and 1970s – the more general move from the oral to the visual and aural" (113).

Dan Cordle also expands on Vonnegut's simple storytelling in his article "Changing of the Old Guard: Time Travel and Literary Technique in the Work of Kurt Vonnegut," writing, "Vonnegut unseats any pretensions we might have to see intrinsically meaningful. This is then reinforced

throughout the novel by the reiteration, with that wonderful, almost childlike simplicity and bluntness that characterizes Vonnegut's prose, of the failings of human brains” (173).

Vonnegut’s nihilism allows him to assume that his audience’s “failed brains” are completely incapable of understanding his writing, so he oversimplifies his language and incorporates drawings and diagrams as well.

One specific example of incorporating illustrations into his already childlike prose is when Vonnegut includes a drawing of a bracelet commemorating WOI Jon Sparks, and writes, “I was wearing a bracelet which looked like this [...] The bracelet had cost me two dollars and a half. It was a way of expressing my pity for the hundreds of Americans who had been taken prisoner during the war in Viet Nam” (253). The illustration itself is quite simple – so simple, that it may not be immediately obvious it is a bracelet. Vonnegut draws a curved symbol with thick, messy strokes, and uses his own handwriting to depict the inscription of the bracelet: “WOI Jon Sparks 3-19-71” (252). By reducing Jon Sparks’s identity into a crudely drawn bracelet, Vonnegut displays the ridiculousness of wearing something material to pay tribute to the fallen soldiers. Similarly, while Vonnegut the character is waiting in the lounge during the arts festival, he describes two different characters who both fought enemies that “were fueled by rice.” One is Harold Newcomb Wilbur, who “got his medals for killing Japanese [in World War II], who were yellow robots.” The other character is unnamed, and he “got his medals in the war in Viet Nam” (Vonnegut 207). Both men who Vonnegut creates are decorated veterans, and he includes a drawing of one of the medals that the Vietnam veteran received. Before his illustration, Vonnegut writes, “This man, who was white, had all the medals Harold Newcomb Wilbur Had, plus the highest decoration for heroism which an American soldier could receive, which looked like this” (208). The medal is drawn with thin lines and contains more detail than

the bracelet. It has a sash with thirteen stars on it attached to a bird sitting on top of the medal, which says “valor” and is shaped like a star. The star is incredibly detailed, with curved lines and leaves in between the points; however, the one part of the drawing that is lacking detail is the image of the soldier that is at the center of the medal, who is just a round shape with a dot for an eye and a plain cap (Vonnegut 208). Once again, Vonnegut’s illustration is showing how soldiers were trivialized during the Vietnam War; Vonnegut’s disregard of the soldier’s details is similar to the disregard of human life during wartime. His introduction prior to the drawing dehumanizes the Japanese and Vietnamese, but his illustration ultimately satirizes the war by having a pathetic depiction of a soldier on an otherwise detailed drawing of the Medal of Valor.

Vonnegut’s ill feelings towards the war are apparent throughout the novel, and eventually translate into a general nihilism. As both the author of the book and a character of the novel, Vonnegut seamlessly adds his own commentary on the state of the world. Through the thoughts of his own character, Vonnegut writes:

As I approached my fiftieth birthday, I had become more and more enraged and mystified by the idiot decisions made by my countrymen. And then I had come suddenly to pity them, for I understood how innocent and natural it was for them to behave so abominably, and with such abominable results: They were doing their best to live like people invented in story books. This was the reason Americans shot each other so often: it was a convenient literary device for ending short stories and books. (215)

Vonnegut is bluntly addressing his fellow Americans and does not hesitate to call them idiots. Jonathan Greenberg describes an aggressive satirist such as Vonnegut in *Modernism, Satire and the Novel* and his “double movement” theory. Greenberg describes one type of satirist as having more subtle critiques, while the other is more like Vonnegut, who “is a renegade who enjoys the

subversion of traditional values, delights in his own aesthetic powers, even savors the cruelty he inflicts” (7). Instead of a traditional narrative, Vonnegut creates a metafictional narrative, comparing war to literature and ruthlessly critiquing his peers while speaking as both character and narrator.

Vonnegut’s narrative structure is particularly important in establishing *Breakfast of Champions* as a work of satire. As Peter Petro explains in his book *Modern Satire: Four Studies*, “[b]y adopting several avenues of communication with the reader, the satirist renders the direction of the satirical attack both diffuse and complex” (104). By using three different voices, Vonnegut promotes a grotesque reading of the novel, since “grotesque, like caricature, is not *per se* concerned with evil actions – only with characterization. In most modern accounts, the grotesque is described as a mixed form, combining comedy and tragedy, humor and disgust, perfectly suited to satire” (Quintero 314). Each different narrative technique is grotesque, as each narrator combines tragedy, humor, and disgust in their own way. Petro explains their different voices, writing, “The *first* avenue is the autobiographical narrator. The *second* is the *alter ego* of the narrator, Kilgore Trout [...] Finally, the *third* avenue is the culturally-moribund Midland City, with its gallery of all-American types” (104).

The autobiographical narrator of “Kurt Vonnegut” exemplifies Wayne C. Booth’s “‘implied author’” (from *The Rhetoric of Fiction*), which Booth described as “the author’s ‘second self,’ the ideal, literary, created version of the ‘real’ author. It is important to realize that authorial or narrative voice is as much a fiction as any other character” (73). By being an implied narrator in his own book, Vonnegut fulfills “the reader’s need to know where, in the world of values, he stands—that is, to know where the author wants him to stand” (Booth 73). “Vonnegut’s” inclusion in the novel immediately establishes him as the Creator, which drives the

already unhinged characters – particularly Kilgore Trout – mad. This leads to the second authorial voice, which is that of Kilgore Trout. Trout is based on Vonnegut as well; however, Trout is a parody of Vonnegut, and the novel constantly establishes Trout as a failed science fiction writer. Because of “Vonnegut’s” self-awareness, the encounter between Vonnegut and Trout results in Trout gaining his own self-awareness. Vonnegut’s character tells Trout, “For the others, tonight will be a night like any other night. Arise, Mr. Trout, you are free, you are *free*” (301). Trout now realizes that Vonnegut is his creator, who could control every aspect of the world, so Trout begs Vonnegut, “*Make me young, make me young, make me young*” (302). In Donald Morse’s article “The ‘Black Frost’ Reception of Kurt Vonnegut’s Fantastic Novel *Breakfast of Champions*,” he explains that “Trout dreams of returning to his youths, dreams of magically receiving a second chance from his creator – as do many people, but with the difference that this creator, as a novelist, can make such fantasies come true by simply typing a new page” (149). After this encounter, both “Vonnegut” and Trout become the only self-aware characters in the novel. The third narrator is “Midland City itself, [where] the focus is on Dwayne Hoover, the details of whose life accumulate in a way that make him the ideal reader for Trout’s fiction” (Klinkowitz 68).

Dwayne Hoover is a character who is possibly the least self-aware, but he believes that he is the only one in the world with free will. He reads a book by Kilgore Trout titled *Now It Can Be Told*. Hoover reads the novel literally, as it states, “You are an experiment by the Creator of the Universe. You are the only creature in the entire Universe who has free will. You are the only one who has to figure out what to do next – and *why*. Everybody else is a robot, a machine” (Vonnegut 259). From the beginning, Hoover is established as having “bad chemicals” that seem to be worsening as the novel progresses, making him ready for a breakdown. With an already

unstable mental state, Hoover's speed-reading of Trout's novel results in a very literal understanding of the book. Hoover truly believes that he is the only one with free will and goes on a violent rampage resulting in multiple injuries, which he disregards since everyone else is a "robot" in his mind. This psychotic episode allows for the first and second avenues of narration – "Vonnegut" and Trout – to come face to face. Thus, by using three different narrators, Vonnegut the author is able to bring together three different characters and their varying levels of self-awareness.

Terry Eagleton explains the fragmented narrative style in *The Illusions of Post Modernism*, writing, "One vein of postmodernism views history as a matter of constant mutability, exhilaratingly multiple and open-ended, a set of conjunctures or discontinuities which only some theoretical violence could hammer into the unity of a single narrative" (207). The complexity of a postmodern view of history creates difficulties when writing a "standard" narrative, which makes fragmentation necessary. Eagleton continues this thought, explaining that "[p]ostmodernism, after all, insists that all contexts are fuzzy and porous" (207). The three avenues of narration certainly make *Breakfast of Champions* a more complicated text to read, as Vonnegut is "working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*" (Lyotard 81). Fragmentation in *Breakfast of Champions* clearly establishes the novel as a postmodern text, because Vonnegut is "working without rules" by creating new forms of narration and basing two of the narrators off himself. This, in turn, contributes to his satiric purpose, since the different deranged voices allow for "the illusion of fiction [to be] inevitably dispelled as the reader the reader recognizes the satiric target [...]. It is possible to attack a specific target from different vantage points" (Petro 17). Vonnegut thus depicts three different narrators with varying levels of instability to show that everyone's suffering was similar during

the Cold War, whether it was “himself,” a failed author loosely based on himself, or a lowly car salesman in a small town.

According to Griffin, “satire thrives in the face of-and because of-threatened censorship or political reprisal” (139). The Cold War was a perfect example of this, as writers like Graham Greene and Kurt Vonnegut gained popularity with *Our Man in Havana* and *Breakfast of Champions*. Each author satirized different aspects of the period, as they “criticize [...] an established political or social order, they generally launch their attacks from the vantage of a humane mean set against corruptive extremes and abuses of power” (Quintero 436). For Greene, the British Secret Intelligence Service was his main object of satire. While satirizing the SIS, Greene establishes himself as a Horatian satirist, since Quintero defines Horatian satires as “urbane, finely nuanced, engaging, detached, thoughtful, and amused” (104). Greene is subtle and clever when he is criticizing the period. His protagonist Wormold says, “‘It’s a complicated world, I find it easier to sell vacuum cleaners’” (Greene 160). Wormold’s offhand comment is cynical and fatalistic, as opposed to Vonnegut who is very blunt as a satirist. He is a Juvenalian satirist, since, like Juvenal, his satire is “labeled as harsh, acerbic, contentious, vituperative, and lacking in control” (Quintero 105). Instead of making gentle and witty criticisms like Greene, Vonnegut directly addresses his frustrations, even writing from the point of view of an unnamed and insignificant Midland City resident who “thought the planet was terrible, that he never should have been sent there” (99). Petro writes that “Since one of the purposes of satire is to criticize, it should be obvious to the reader what is being criticized. Satire should not have to be interpreted by the critic to the reader” (17). Both satirists are criticizing the state of the world, but Greene’s tone is much more restrained than Vonnegut’s. Regardless, their varying voices are effective in conveying their message and making the different objects of satire clear. Though

their tones could not be more different, each author is bringing to the attention of the reader a major societal issue that emerged during the Cold War.

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