



Jailbird

Kurt Vonnegut

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Walter Starbuck, a career humanist and eventual low-level aide in the Nixon White House, is implicated in Watergate and jailed, after which he (like Howard Campbell in *Mother Night*) works on his memoirs. Starbuck is innocent (his office was used as a base for the Watergate shenanigans of which he had no knowledge) and yet he is not innocent (he has collaborated with power unquestioningly served societal order all his life). In that sense, Starbuck is a generic Vonnegut protagonist, an individual compromised by the essential lack of interior.

Jailbird (1979) uses the format of the memoir to retrospectively trace Starbuck's uneven, centerless and purposeless odyssey in or out of the offices of power. He represents another Vonnegut Everyman caught amongst forces which he neither understands nor can defend. Written in the aftermath of Watergate, *Jailbird* is, of course, an attempt to order those catastrophic events and to find some rationale or meaningful outcome, and, as is usually the case with Vonnegut's pyrotechnics, there is no easy answer or perhaps there is no answer at all.

Starbuck (his name an Americanized version of his long, foreign birth name), in his profound ambiguity and ambivalence, may himself constitute an explanation for Watergate, a series of whose consequences have not, almost forty years later, been fully assimilated or understood. The Nixon who passes across the panorama of *Jailbird* is no more or less ambiguous than Starbuck himself—a man without qualities whose overwhelming quality is one of imposition.

About the Author

Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) is one of the most beloved American writers of the twentieth century. Vonnegut's audience increased steadily since his first five pieces in the 1950s and grew from there. His 1968 novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* has become a canonic war novel with Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* to form the truest and darkest of what came from World War II.

Vonnegut began his career as a science fiction writer, and his early novels—*Player Piano* and *The Sirens of Titan*--were categorized as such even as they appealed to an audience far beyond the reach of the category. In the 1960s, Vonnegut became closely associated with the Baby Boomer generation, a writer on that side, so to speak.

Now that Vonnegut's work has been studied as a large body of work, it has been more deeply understood and unified. There is a consistency to his satirical insight, humor and anger which makes his work so synergistic. It seems clear that the more of Vonnegut's work you read, the more it resonates and the more you wish to read. Scholars believe that Vonnegut's reputation (like Mark Twain's) will grow steadily through the decades as his work continues to increase in relevance and new connections are formed, new insights made.

ABOUT THE SERIES

Author Kurt Vonnegut is considered by most to be one of the most important writers of the twentieth

century. His books Slaughterhouse-Five (named after Vonnegut's World War II POW experience) and Cat's Cradle are considered among his top works. RosettaBooks offers here a complete range of Vonnegut's work, including his first novel (Player Piano, 1952) for readers familiar with Vonnegut's work as well as newcomers.

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