



The Vonnegut Effect

By Jerome Klinkowitz

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Kurt Vonnegut is one of the few American writers since Mark Twain to have won and sustained a great popular acceptance while boldly introducing new themes and forms on the literary cutting edge. This is the "Vonnegut effect" that Jerome Klinkowitz finds unique among postmodern authors. In this definitive study of the author's fiction, Klinkowitz examines the forces in American life that have made Vonnegut's works possible - some would say necessary. Born in 1922 and still writing trenchantly more than 80 years later, Vonnegut shares with readers a world that includes the Great Depression, during which his family lost their economic support; the Second World War, in which he was captured at the Battle of the Bulge and experienced the firebombing of Dresden; the corporate surge of postwar America, which he abetted as a publicist for General Electric's Research Laboratory, where "Progress Is Our Most Important Product"; the entrepreneurship of the 1950s, which he participated in when he ran a Saab automobile dealership and operated a short-story business, selling to the era's family magazines; and the counter-cultural revolt of the 1960s, during which his fiction first gained prominence. Vonnegut also takes us through the growth in recent decades of America's sway in art, which his fiction celebrates, and geopolitics, which his novels question. A pioneer in Vonnegut studies, publishing in the field since 1969, Jerome Klinkowitz offers "The Vonnegut Effect" as a thorough treatment of the author's fiction - a canon covering more than a half century and comprising 20 books. Considering both Vonnegut's methods and the cultural needs they have served, Klinkowitz explains how those works came to be written and concludes with an assessment of the author's place in the tradition of American fiction.

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