



## Exploring Trauma: Trauma Theory Perspective on Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores that Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse-Five" is a powerful reflection of how war trauma affects individuals. Using trauma theory, it shows how the main character, Billy Pilgrim, represents the confusion and emotional struggles of someone who has survived trauma. The novel's unusual structure, where events are told out of order and often end with the phrase "So it goes," mirrors the way traumatic memories disrupt a person's sense of time and reality. The study aims to show how Vonnegut's storytelling style helps readers understand the psychological effects of trauma, especially PTSD. It explores how Billy Pilgrim's experience of being "unstuck in time" is similar to the flashbacks and memory disruptions that many trauma survivors face. The paper has key questions include: How does the novel show different ways of dealing with trauma? How does its disjointed structure reflect the mental state of someone suffering from trauma? And how does the novel challenge traditional ideas about war and heroism? The study involves a close reading of "Slaughterhouse-Five" through trauma theory. This approach focuses on analyzing how Vonnegut's narrative techniques, like repetition and non-linear storytelling, capture the fragmented experience of trauma survivors. By examining these literary devices, the study aims to show how trauma is represented in the novel. The paper will end with a conclusion that sums up the results of the analysis.

### Introduction

Trauma transforms time and narrative. Psychological trauma, the overwhelming mental response to distressing events, distorts the manner in which its victim perceives and experiences time. Time may seem "to be stretching out and speeding by simultaneously" (Gusich, 2012, p. 513). As the traumatized navigate their memories, certain fragments of experiences may be repressed or resurfaced (Di-Capua, 2015, p.2). Some veterans of World War II write their life war experiences in the form of literary work which contains their

experience, their point of view about war, and the long-term effect of the war that they have.. One of the main authors that write his experiences about war trauma is Kurt Vonnegut. Vonnegut was an American writer noted for his wryly satirical novels who frequently used postmodern techniques as well as elements of fantasy and science fiction to highlight the horrors and ironies of 20th-century civilization.

Much of Vonnegut's work is marked by an essentially fatalistic worldview that nonetheless embraces modern humanist beliefs. He had survived the firebombing of Dresden, Germany during World War II back in February of 1945.

Although Vonnegut's work was already popular in the late 1960s, the publication of "Slaughterhouse-Five"; or, "The Children's Crusade" (1969; film 1972) secured his reputation. Drawing explicitly on his experience at Dresden, Vonnegut produced an absurdist nonlinear narrative for which the bombing raid itself furnishes a leitmotif of the cruelty and destructiveness of war through the ages. Critics hailed the novel as a latter-day classic.

'Slaughterhouse-Five' or "The Children's Crusade": A Duty-Dance with Death is often cited as Kurt Vonnegut's important autobiographical novel. Billy Pilgrim has been traumatized due to taking part in war and observing bombing of Dresden city. He and other prisoners were kept in a slaughterhouse in Dresden where they witnessed the bombing of the city and became some of the few survivors. Now he is wealthy and successful in the optometry business, but "has come unstuck in time" (Vonnegut p. 15). He travels between periods of his life, experiences past and future events out of sequence and repetitively. He is kidnapped by extraterrestrial aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. He spent time on Tralfamadore, in Dresden, in the War, in his post-war married life in the U.S.A. of the 1950s and early 1960s. He also predicts his death and makes a tape recording of his account of it. His being "unstuck" in time and his going backward and forward in time are the result of the turbulence of his mind and his visit to Tralfamadore planet is not irrelevant.

During the novel, he takes a long process to get rid of his unpleasant situation, to deny it at times and to banish it from his unconscious mind. As a matter of fact, Billy's story is the story of the narrator's life and his attempt to write a novel about it is indeed a struggle to heal his wounds. The present study seeks to demonstrate that both the narrator and the protagonist of Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim, were traumatized in the Second World War. Thus, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder can be traced in both characters. However, each seeks for recovery in their own way, Billy's time travel to the planet Talfamadore and talking about it on a radio show and the narrator's attempt to write a book about the massacre in Dresden. His will to keep in touch with his old war buddy for sharing memories of past, demonstrates his struggle to prevail his outrage at the cruelties of war. It is an effort to put an end to his suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder as the result of witnessing the cruelties of war.

Although twenty-three years have passed and the narrator is, at least apparently, living a secure life with a good job and a family, yet he is still suffering from the consequences of the traumatic event. His insomnia and involvement in alcohol and telephones late at nights, the way he narrates his life events, the people around him and his experiences at war could be considered as clear examples in this regard. Indeed, it is him that is "unstuck" in time and his narration of Billy Pilgrim's life story is a reflection of his internal conflicts.

The paper will focus on three main questions which are : How does the novel portray various approaches to coping with trauma? In what ways does its fragmented structure mirror the mindset of a person experiencing trauma? Additionally, how does the novel question conventional beliefs about war and heroism?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The word trauma (an English alteration of *trōma*) derives from Greek, and since it literally means “wound,” it was originally used to refer to an injury inflicted on the body. It was only later that the psychoanalytic work of Freud popularized the use of it in its contemporary understanding, and suggested that the wound may be inflicted upon the mind, rather than the body (Caruth 1996, P. 3).

This psychological wound, “the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” (4), is not simple and healable damage comparable to a bodily injury, but rather an event which is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (4). The first mention of trauma, or rather of a disorder called “traumatic hysteria,” can be found in the volume *Studies on Hysteria* (first published in 1895), which Freud wrote in collaboration with Josef Breuer.

The now-famous statement that “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences,” which appears in this essay (Breuer & Freud 1957, P. 7), already points to the fact that the symptoms of a distressful experience may be belated. According to Freud and Breuer, the memories of a traumatic event are not easily available to the patient, because, in contrast to ordinary memories, to encounter trauma is to encounter “a foreign body”, an alien part of our psyche, which acts as a “contemporary agent . . . long after its forcible entrance” (221). The fact that a traumatic event should impose itself on the mind of a traumatized person in the form of recurring nightmares and relivings is what perplexed Freud the most since, as he stated, these night horrors do not agree with the wish-fulfilling nature of dreams, which is so crucial to Freud’s theory (1961, p. 24).

It seems that the only possible explanation for the emergence of this pathology is the psyche’s complete inability to cope with the traumatic experience and the fact that, since it defied comprehension, it had not been assigned any psychic meaning. As a result, the traumatic event forces the mind to compulsively relive the experience in order to understand it. Since traumatic events often involve a direct threat to one’s life, the trauma may not necessarily be a response to these experiences, but rather to the perplexing act of survival (Caruth 1996, P. 60).

Expanding Freud’s assertion, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event” (Caruth, 1995, p.4), once again bringing attention to the fact that a traumatic event is always incomplete since the psyche fails to sufficiently register it when it occurs – a person experiencing something traumatic is never fully conscious during the event’s occurrence. And because it is never fully assimilated when it happens, the event may impose itself on the mind of the traumatized and be relived with great clarity in the form of intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, or hallucinations. The assertion may at first sound somewhat paradoxical: how can the mind repeat in exact detail an event during which one was not completely conscious? As Caruth points out, “the literal registration of an event—the capacity to continually, in the flashback, reproduce it in exact detail—appears to be connected, in the

traumatic experience, precisely with the way it escapes full consciousness as it occurs” (153). This perplexing contradiction stems from the fact that a traumatic recollection is not a simple memory, and it is not ordinarily encoded in the human brain (153).

Such a theory seems to be confirmed by the research conducted by two psychiatrists – van der Kolk and van der Hart – who, working with neuroscientists, argue that trauma differs from an ordinary memory in that it “has affect only, not meaning” (Kaplan 2005, p. 34). It causes one to experience emotions such as fear or shock, but above all, it gives “the normal feeling of comfort” (34). That is so because only the amygdala, the sector of the brain responsible for sensation, is active during trauma; while the meaning-making sector, the cerebral cortex, which is responsible for cognitive processing and rational thought, remains shut down as the effect is too powerful to be registered cognitively in the brain (34).

A traumatic event is never fully integrated into memory, and as psychiatrists state, it is “in a sense, timeless. It is not transformed into a story, placed in time, with a beginning, a middle and an end (which is characteristic for narrative memory)” (van der Kolk & van der Hart 1995, P. 177). A traumatized person is unable to treat the traumatic memory as an ordinary aspect of their life, as it does not fit with other experiences. This lack of integration, according to van der Kolk and van der Hart, results in dissociation. The idea that there may exist a breach, a lag in the experience of a traumatized person, which disengages him/her from linear chronology, is central to the present analysis of the text.

While formalist approaches to the study of literature traditionally focus on plot and narrative structure, methods informed by psychoanalysis shift the center of attention to the characters of a text. A psychological approach is, however, merely one way of evaluating or interpreting characters; it is also possible to analyze character presentation in the context of narrative structures. Generally speaking, characters in a text can be rendered either as types or as individuals.

Vonnegut advances his characterization of Billy by revealing more about the fragmentation of Billy's personality. Billy's fantasy life is now linked to specific, unbearable events in "real" life. The boxcar taking him into captivity becomes a flying saucer taking him to serenity. When he scrambles out of the shrubbery where the Germans tossed him, he was living simultaneously in 1944 and 1967. His hallucinations, then, are an escape from the present moment. Sometimes he must also escape from his own past.

While the Marine major is talking about the need for bigger and better bombings, Billy "did not shudder about the hideous things he himself had seen the bombing done." Here he survives the moment by suppressing his own firsthand knowledge. In private, Billy weeps without knowing why, yet in public he tells the mayor he is proud of his son in the Green Berets. "I am. I certainly am," he says, in a manner that was long ago identified as "protesting too much." In

In the next chapter, we shall learn Billy's real answer to the majors' advocacy of more bombing. Like the episodes reviewed here, it will demonstrate that Billy is torn into fragments: he is a pitiful example of a modern man in a society in which the individual must deny his own experience (Vonnegut, 1991, p.15) This paper will focus on Billy's character and behaviour according to trauma theory and psychological analysis.

## Methodology

The study employs a literary analysis approach, using trauma theory as the primary lens to examine Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse-Five". The methodology involves a close reading of the novel, focusing on how Vonnegut's use of narrative techniques, such as non-linear storytelling and repetition, reflects the fragmented nature of trauma and its impact on individuals.

## Literature Review

The theory of trauma in Kurt Vonnegut's novel has been a broad field of interest among scholars, given the novel's depth in explaining the psychological features of war actions. The literature that exists on the subject examines several aspects of trauma: from historical and cultural complications to their representation as narratives.

Trauma and Life Stories by Kim Laky Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff and Graham Dawson (2006) is a collection of studies in terms of the works of anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and oral historians. It focuses on a wide variety of social, political contexts in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The life-long impact of traumatic experiences is the subject of the essays collected. It is an attempt to explore the relationship between the experiences of terror, the ways survivors remember and the language and form which they use to retell their stories.

All contributions are concerned with painful aspects of the past which may have consequences in the present as private nightmares or public conflicts.

We believe that it is a crucial theme to address, not only intellectually but also

Because the legacy of trauma raises such immediate personal and political issues and dilemmas, it is important for us to remember that all the words printed here can have little significant impact on the ultimate loneliness of those who suffer such psychic wounds from social dislocation and violence.

The Trauma Question by Roger Luckhurst (2008) is a historical genealogy of trauma which tracks its origin from the 1860s to the present through industrialization and bureaucratization, law and psychology, military and government welfare policies. It draws upon a range of cultural practices from literature, memoirs and confessions journalism through to photography and film. The writer's strong claim is that cultural narratives have been integral not just in consolidating the idea of post-traumatic subjectivity, but have actively helped form it. At the end, the book suggests the ways in which the traumatic paradigm might meet its limits.

In his article entitled "New Wars, Old Battles: Contemporary Combat Fiction for the High School Canon" Randal W. Withers (2011) considers the novels by Kurt Vonnegut as alternatives to established antiwar canon. He believes that the atomic strikes on Japan are widely discussed across America while the destruction of Dresden, Germany, is often quietly overlooked, even though the attack by Allied bombers on this peaceful city killed more than the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombs. He finds this a motivation for Vonnegut to write his semi-autobiographical work, an account of his year as a prisoner of war in Dresden and how he survived the attack. Therefore, the main reason for

"Slaughterhouse-Five" to be one of the most banned books in American high schools is its embarrassing portrayal of the atrocities committed by the United States. In another article titled Nothing is Ever Final: Vonnegut's Concept of Time, Philip M. Rubens (2011). He states that Vonnegut owes a debt for the crux of his ideas to several popular time theorists, the most

considerable of all Henry Bergson who believes that man is not only free to move at random through time, but also able to experience a progressive interiorization into memory. John R. May (2011) focuses on the impact of the Tralfamadorians on Billy Pilgrim's world view in his article "Vonnegut's Humour and the Limits of Hope", is taken from what the Tralfamadorians say about the dead. Accordingly, when he hears that someone has died, he simply shrugs and repeats his famous phrase. He also adds that the sameness Billy notices in his unstuck pilgrimage is the universality of death and the inevitability of war.

In the Iranian context, Moghadam & Kolahi (2015) also attempted a study on the novel. However, it has been the critical discourse analysis of its Persian translation through ideological approach. Such scarcity of studies on the topic under investigation in the Iranian context suggests the need for the present study.

Unlike the previous studies, which primarily focus on the historical, psychological, and cultural aspects of trauma in the text, this research takes a closer look at how Kurt Vonnegut's narrative structure itself, particularly the non-linear storytelling and the repetitive phrase "so it goes" reflects the disorienting effects of trauma on the individual mind. While other works have explored the relationship between trauma and memory or time, this study will specifically investigate how Vonnegut's unique form of storytelling mirrors the fragmented and chaotic experiences of trauma survivors, especially those with PTSD. By focusing on the literary techniques used to represent trauma, the research offers a fresh perspective on how trauma is not only a theme within the novel but is also embedded in its structure and style.

### **Discussion: The Representation of Trauma in "Slaughterhouse-Five"**

In the novel, Vonnegut presents a vivid and multifaceted portrayal of trauma, particularly the psychological impact of war. The novel explores how traumatic experiences disrupt one's sense of time, memory, and identity by employing a fragmented narrative structure, where events are presented out of chronological order, mirroring the chaotic nature of traumatic memories. This non-linear storytelling reflects how trauma victims experience time as disjointed, where past events can intrude upon the present without warning. Trauma theory, as articulated by scholars like Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, emphasizes the disruptive nature of trauma on memory and consciousness, aligning with how Vonnegut structures his novel to reflect these disruptions (Caruth, p. 4; Herman, p. 37).

Billy Pilgrim exemplifies the fragmentation of self that accompanies traumatic experiences. As a World War II veteran who survived the bombing of Dresden, Billy's life is marked by the recurring intrusion of traumatic memories. His experience of becoming "unstuck in time" symbolizes the psychological effects of trauma, where memories are not sequential but fragmented and randomly accessed. This representation aligns with symptoms of PTSD, such as flashbacks, which are vivid recollections of traumatic events that can disrupt one's present reality (Herman, p. 52).

There are symptoms of trauma experienced by Billy. The first is memories of traumatic events that continue to appear uncontrollably. The second is losing enthusiasm for life. The third is the delusion of believing that he is once taken by aliens to a planet called Tralfamadore and he can travel in time without controlling. The fourth symptom is having sleep disturbance characterized by his frequent wiping of tears that keep flowing whenever he tries to sleep. Caruth (1996) in her book, *Unclaimed Experience*, explains that trauma is a response to a terrible incident or event that cannot be understood at that time which later returns in form of repetitive phenomena like flashbacks, nightmares, and others. In the novel, there is a description where the main character, Billy Pilgrim, experiences repeated events in the form of

flashbacks which it calls "unstuck in time", delusions about the Tralfamadorian planet and his adventure in time, and weeping for no reason every time he takes a nap.

Billy is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren't necessarily fun. He is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next" (Vonnegut, 1968, p. 27). There is another explanation that Billy's flashbacks cannot be controlled and most of his flashbacks are not always about good memories. It happens because most of his memories come from his experiences during the World War II where he witnesses terrible events like the bombing of Dresden that has killed more than 130,000 people because of the massive bombing from the alliance, and the humiliation he has received during the war from his fellow soldiers and enemies, and bullying from Roland Weary. Billy's condition is getting worse after he returns from the war. A doctor who takes care of him in the veteran mental hospital fails to diagnose Billy with a nervous disorder and people close to him are thinking that he is going crazy.

Caruth (1996) explains that trauma is a delayed response by the sufferer to an incomprehensible horrific event that returns in the form of repetitive phenomena. This is in line with what Billy experiences in his lifetime after returning from the war where he constantly has flashbacks to the horrific memories he experiences starting from his escape from the battle of the Bulge city. He also gets the violence and humiliation from his fellow soldiers, and the most affected in his life when he witnesses the bombing of Dresden city. Billy's psychological condition is getting worse when the doctor misdiagnoses the mental illness he is suffering from the war and his family do not seem suspicious of what has really happened to him besides he never tells his family about what really happened to him during the war. In Billy's lifetime, people do not yet know about what trauma and trauma symptoms someone has if she/he is suspected of experiencing a traumatic event.

Caruth (1995) in her book "Exploration in Memory", explains that the American Psychiatric Association recognized the Trauma phenomenon in 1980 under the name "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder". Billy died in 1976, four years before the recognition of Trauma as a psychological disorder.

The connection between Billy's time travel and PTSD is very vivid in the text, Billy's time travel serves as a literary representation of PTSD symptoms, specifically flashbacks and memory disruptions. PTSD is characterized by intrusive recollections of traumatic events, which can occur unexpectedly and disrupt a person's sense of the present. These experiences often feel as if they are happening in real-time, leading trauma survivors to relive the events rather than just recall them.

Billy's disjointed experience of time, where he moves unpredictably between different moments of his life, mirrors the way PTSD disrupts an individual's memory and perception. For instance, the sight of a barbershop quartet during a wedding reception causes Billy to recall the aftermath of the Dresden bombing, leading him to feel "upset by the song as though the past had exploded back into the present" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 177). This shows how seemingly benign events can trigger deeply buried trauma, causing Billy to involuntarily revisit his past. Billy is not aware of having a flashback, and Billy's mind is also affected by believing that this event is time travel. Billy, who does not know that he is having a flashback sees it as an uncontrollable back-and-forth passage of time. Billy thinks he is the only person who can know what will happen next to him and those around him without realizing that it is all just flashbacks from his memories long ago.

It is not clearly explained which memory first time he has flashbacks for, but it is clear that since that day Billy has continued to experience flashbacks throughout his life. From this event, he later often gets into a delusional state in which he believes that he can be traveling in time without controlling it. Caruth (1996) describes that people who suffer from a traumatic event are often in recurrent flashbacks.

Billy says that he first came unstuck in time in 1944, long before his trip to Tralfamadore. The Tralfamadorians didn't have anything to do with his coming unstuck. They were simply able to give him insights into what was really going on. Billy first came unstuck while World War Two was in progress" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 31). The quotation is an explanation about Billy, who has an argument with his daughter Barbara, because he has written a letter about his explanation of the Tralfamadorian and everything he got from traveling to the Tralfamadorian planet. His first letter is published in the local newspaper. After his first "unstuck in time" experience, which is called a flashback in the memory, until his death Billy still experiences this kind of flashback in his memory.

The phrase "So it goes" is a recurring motif in "Slaughterhouse-Five" that appears after every mention of death or suffering. This phrase appears over a hundred times throughout the novel, serving as a coping mechanism for both Billy and the narrative to acknowledge death without fully confronting the emotions associated with it. Each time a death is mentioned, the narrative responds with "So it goes," a refrain that suggests resignation and inevitability. For example, following the description of the destruction of Dresden, the phrase recurs to underscore the sheer number of lives lost: "One hundred and thirty thousand people died in Dresden. So it goes" (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 214).

This repetition of "So it goes" highlights the numbness that can result from constant exposure to trauma, where the mind becomes desensitized to suffering in order to survive (LaCapra, 2000, p.91). Billy perceives life as futile and that he has lost his eagerness for it because of the things he has experienced and witnessed during the war. The death of a close family member, experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, suffering from a life-threatening illness, and extreme bullying are some of the many more reasons a person can experience trauma, some of which also cause sufferers to lose their willingness to live. The thing that complicates the situation of trauma sufferers is that trauma sufferers do not always open themselves and say what bothers their minds; most sufferers do not realize that they are suffering from trauma.

The disjointed Structure and non-linear storytelling play a key role in the novel and a powerful method that the writer uses. The novel's disjointed structure is crucial in conveying the fragmentation associated with trauma. It does not follow a linear timeline; instead, it jumps back and forth between different periods of Billy's life, from his childhood to the war and beyond. This narrative style reflects how traumatic memories disrupt the continuity of time, as survivors often experience intrusive memories that break the flow of normal life. Billy's nonlinear timeline is composed of events most of which have traumatic influences on his psychology. These traumatic events contribute to the deterioration of his perception of time in his life. In this respect, Vonnegut makes use of time as a means of reflecting the reader's opinion of what his main character, Billy's life was like during and after the war. In the novel, as in Billy's life, most of the events are narrated out of sequence in order to strengthen the tone. In Vonnegut's words:

BILLY PILGRIM has come unstuck in time. Billy has gone to sleep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding day. He has walked through a door in 1955 and come

out another one in 1941. He has gone back through that door to find himself in 1963.

He has seen his birth and death many times, he says, and pays random visits to all the events in between. He says. (Vonnegut 2016, p. 19)

Social and psychological concerns are integrated in unusual style in the novel. Since Vonnegut brings together various timelines of the protagonist, it is not possible to follow a linear order for the plot. For example, in the second chapter, Billy's birth date, 1922, is given but a couple of paragraphs later his plane accident in 1968 is narrated. Later his abduction by the Tralfamadorians is mentioned only a few pages later. In the same chapter, Billy's visit to his mother in a nursing home in 1965 is recounted.

As a flash-forward, his son's Little League Banquet in 1958 is depicted. This expression of temporality in an experimental manner continues in the other chapters. For instance, in chapter five, Billy's experiences, when he was with other English soldiers in a German prison camp, are described. However, as a flash-forward, Billy's meeting with his famous science fiction writer, Kilgore Trout in 1964 is recounted in chapter eight as well (Vonnegut, 2016). As Billy moves through different points in time, the reader is taken on a journey that reflects the confusion and disorientation experienced by trauma survivors. By revealing future events before they happen, the narrative mimics the unpredictability of trauma, where memories resurface without regard for chronological order (Herman 52; Caruth 128)

Billy's character challenges conventional war narratives, Billy Pilgrim stands in stark contrast to the traditional war hero archetype. Instead of being depicted as courageous or heroic, Billy is portrayed as passive and often indifferent. Billy joins the war as an unarmed chaplain's assistant. He has no quality and physique of a soldier, hence becomes a laughing figure. The narrator describes him as "a funny-looking youth – tall and weak and shaped like a bottle of Coca-cola". During the war, Billy became a figure of fun in the American army. He was powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends. And other time the narrator tells that he didn't look like a soldier at all. He looked like a filthy flamingo. But he has natural gentleness and innocence; however, they hardly prepare him for idiocy of battle.

Billy's behaviour during the war is ironic to a soldier on the battlefield. When the other three soldiers have weapons, Billy is empty-handed, ready for death. He does not exhibit the qualities typically celebrated in war literature, such as bravery, strength, or leadership. When captured by the Germans, for example, Billy appears apathetic and disoriented, described as a "filthy flamingo" because of his awkward, mismatched clothing and his lack of combat readiness (Vonnegut, 1969) Death-wish persists in Billy's mind during and after the war.

In an event he is shot at, and his reaction to the event is absurd for he stood there politely, giving the marksman another chance because it is his understanding of the rules of warfare that the marksman should be given a second chance. The other soldier saves Billy's life but he wouldn't do anything to save himself or more importantly, Billy wanted to surrender. Billy is presented as not befitting the heroic wartime model of the soldier. In many ways he lacks the self-agency associated with the hero; instead his lack of control is emphasized by pointing out that he "has no control over where he is going next" ((Vonnegut, 1969, p. 19). However, Billy does some heroics such as to refuse to join in with the conflict taking place in Germany and even to refuse to carry a weapon throughout his time abroad. Billy Pilgrim tries to maintain a more compassionate mindset. His continued innocence in a time of widespread madness

enables Billy to retain his sanity. He has never instilled in him the militaristic urge to be the most efficient soldier in the war. Rather, like his creator, he assumes a strong humanitarian stance causing him to respect life rather than destroy it. Through Billy, Vonnegut manages to provide a message of pacifism against America's propensity towards militarism. One of the most poignant evocative episodes of the future in which Billy watches a documentary on World War II backward-what he sees in it is an Allied attack on Germany, reconfigured into a healing rather than a destructive sequence. This subversion of the war hero archetype reflects Vonnegut's anti-war stance, suggesting that there is nothing inherently glorious or heroic about war. Instead, the novel portrays war as absurd and meaningless, a theme reinforced through Billy's experiences.

### Conclusion

This paper has provided evidence that Vonnegut's novel is one of the powerful portrayals of trauma due to war and its lasting psychological effects. Drawing on trauma theory allows us to appreciate how the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, experiences an invalidation of time and memory in his disordered way. His being "unstuck in time" reflects symptoms of PTSD, such as flashbacks and memory disruptions, which are indicative of how trauma can fragment our senses of time and self. Vonnegut goes out of his way to make this not another war story but a fragmented reality to take away from the romanticized telling of war and instead bring attention to the continued suffering of those who had experienced trauma.

Billy Pilgrim is the embodiment of a trauma survivor whose passivity and indifference strongly contrasts with the typical hero narrative of soldiers. The experiences, especially during the bombing of Dresden, portray war not as a noble effort but as chaotic and absurd. This portrayal destroys the usual image of soldiers by showing a protagonist whose vulnerability emphasizes the futility in trying to find meaning in the destruction of war. By doing so, the novel questions cultural stories that celebrate war while ignoring deep psychological effects.

The analysis has shown that "Slaughterhouse-Five" is a work of much weight because it explores different dimensions of war trauma with an extraordinary storytelling technique, which might be reflected in the discrete nature of survivors. Distortions in time and realities constitute evidence for the impact of post-trauma on Billy Pilgrim's psyche. Equally significant is the fact that the novel satirizes traditional war narratives for underlining the meaninglessness of conflict. This research helps us understand how literature can depict trauma, because of events not only being witnessed but also how traumatic memories are depicted fractured. In final consideration, the novel pushes the reader towards understanding the long-lasting effects this war will/can have on a mind and to re-evaluate cultural grand narratives that minimize the actual cost of violence and glorify military conflict.

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