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### PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE : A CHRONOSYNCRATIC INFUNDIBULUM OF REALITIES AS REPRESENTED IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF KURT VONNEGUT JR.



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#### ABSTRACT

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade: A Duty Dance with Death* is a dystopian novel that has changed American fiction into such a way that it has really retraced our understanding of War literature. More than placing war and state as the heroes the author tells the reader as the world being caught up in a chronosyncratic Infundibulum, a kind of a snare in which the human race has been caught in. Vonnegut uses several devices, several

places both original and fictional, usurps the time – space continuum and places the reader along with the characters in a system which keeps going backwards and from which there is no escape. This paper is an attempt to study some of the devices and features used by Vonnegut in his narration.

#### KEYWORDS

Billy Pilgrim, Chronosyncratic Infundibulum, Tralfamadore, War, Intertextuality.

## RESEARCH PAPER

*Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade: A Duty Dance with Death* is a novel by the best-selling author Kurt Vonnegut. It is set mostly in Germany, and recounts the bombing of Dresden in World War II. It is perhaps Vonnegut's most popular work and is regarded as a classic of its kind. It is unusual in the way it combines science-fiction with analysis of the human condition, and most especially the bombing of Dresden. It is the story of the American soldier; Billy Pilgrim captured by German soldiers and forced to live in a makeshift prison. Pilgrim is 'unstuck in time' (*Slaughter House-Five*) and visits different parts of his life at random. He is also taken by aliens from the planet Tralfamador who see life in four dimensions, the fourth dimension being time, which allows them to examine any moment in time as and when they wish. While on Tralfamadore, Billy is exhibited in a zoo, with a movie star from earth, Montana Wildhack. There are three main settings for the novel.

1. Ilium in New York where Billy is born and lives all his life.
2. Dresden in Germany where Billy goes to fight in the World War and is caught by the German Army and kept prisoner.
3. Tralfamadore in a strange universe where Billy is captured and showed off in a zoo as a creature from a strange land.

There are also mentions of Cape Cod and Pennsylvania when the author mentions about himself and his friend Bernard V.O' Hare. The book examines many events in Billy's life including his death. One event in Billy's life is the war years and the infamous bombing of Dresden. This latter event was the inspiration for the book and it was an event which the author, Kurt Vonnegut, had himself experienced. Vonnegut considers the whole mankind as a group of children who attain success by a series of trials and errors. A good example for this style is found in the sub title of *Slaughter House-Five*, viz. 'The Children's Crusade'. There are only mentions of individual children, who die in war but not in a crusade. Thus one can infer that the author is representing all humanity as children. Vonnegut says that *Slaughterhouse-Five* 'is a telegraphic, schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet TRALFAMADORE, where flying saucers come from. PEACE.' (*Slaughterhouse-Five*). The tale is a mixture of Billy's life as an ordinary soldier and as a wealthy optometrist, a synthesis of his life on Tralfamadore and a fusion of his past, present and future. Though Billy is rich he finds the ultimate PEACE, which Vonnegut proposes, only in his captive life in Tralfamadore. It is like a heaven for him. The search for ultimate PEACE is the key word in this novel. Tralfamadore is a dream where ultimate PEACE reigns for Billy and perhaps the whole human race.

A metafictional reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five* can be done only by a similar study of Vonnegut's life and his other novels. So examples have to be taken from Vonnegut's other texts to signify a particular point. A primary analysis of *Slaughterhouse-Five* based on the parameters mentioned earlier is listed below.

1. Reality is no longer understandable; history is just fiction. This is a condition we understand while reading *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The whole plot is an amalgam of the present, past and future. Vonnegut says it as an autobiographical plot. This unique plot structure makes the plot as enjoyable as a fairy tale. So reality becomes understood and history turns out to be fiction.
2. Language as an arbitrary system. Language plays a significant part in a Vonnegutian text. Language is that moving force which controls the flow of the story. Vonnegut rarely cares for the standardised language. Instead he frequently uses slang and simpler words from the vernacular. Due to the use of words that are used everyday, the story becomes an everyday reality. So Language in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an arbitrary system, which obtains its strength from its everyday use.

3. The paradoxical status of author-power or no power. Billy is an image of Vonnegut sometimes, especially when the plot is set in Dresden. What Billy Pilgrim does is a pilgrimage of re living of Vonnegut's experiences. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy has no power throughout the plot. In the war he has no power, as he is a prisoner. In life he is the prisoner of Valencia and there too he has no power. But he is powerful enough to live according to his own standards, even though he is a prisoner in Tralfamadore. This is a true representation of the writer's state too. He is able to control the plot at certain times though most of times he is unable to do so as the reader can draw from his own conclusions. So the author is in a paradoxical state of power and powerlessness.

4. Foregrounding the fiction of fiction and reality. By substantiating the fiction with real incidents the fiction becomes reality and reality becomes fiction. Fictional characters and historical figures are juxtaposed to give a more realistic perspective. It can also be done as discussion of writing techniques, inclusion in the text of "external" elements of the text such as "preface," author, editor and advertisement. Thus after a re working in the metafictional machine what we get is a completely different text. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, significant statements from authoritative texts are taken and put in to make the fiction a reality. Real life incidents like the bombing of Dresden are juxtaposed along with the imagined life in Tralfamadore. So by foregrounding the fiction becomes reality and vice versa.

5. Intertextuality. Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five* uses various alternative texts to substantiate his argument. This is sometimes expressed as a mockery. A usual practice in the intertextual mode is either the mockery of a famous text or the taking up of certain aspects from a text to substantiate a point. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut uses Theodore Roethke's *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* and *The Destruction of Dresden* by David Irving and from the *Gideon's Bible. The Execution of Private Slovik* by William Bradford, which is a true account of the execution of Pvt. Eddie D. Slovik who was shot down by the firing squad for showing cowardice, is an important text used by Vonnegut. He also incorporates a number of songs and children's carols. The first two texts are used to substantiate his arguments while the last two are allegorically reproduced to mock the real objective. So intertextuality too exists in this novel.

### **Significant Features of Vonnegut's Presentation**

#### **(i) Sense of Time and Characters**

Paul Young says that prior to the publication of *Slaughterhouse Five*, Kurt Vonnegut invented the terminology "Chrono-Synclastic Infundibulum", ([www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com)) defined as a phenomenon in the universe where matter scatters through space and time, resulting in their simultaneous existence in multiple places and times. Consequently multiple notions, often contradicting, can exist at the same time and consume the same space. Chad Hines in an essay called *Slaughterhouse-Five: A Novel of Opposites* quotes from F. Scott Fitzgerald thus, "only a first-rate intelligence can hold two opposing ideas and still be able to function" ([www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com)). Therefore his first rate intelligence enabled Vonnegut to exist in the Chrono Synclastic Infundibulum he has created.

In many respects *Slaughterhouse Five* is a Chrono-Synclastic Infundibulum where multiple contradicting notions intertwine: it is a place where elements of autobiography and science fiction coexist, as the result of Vonnegut's usage of time travel to challenge linear chronological progression although there are some unknown notions of time and space that create ambiguity. But since the flow never stops the reader safely returns to the main plot revealing another sub plot. . The reader is left with an uncertainty of where the actual experience ends and imagination begins. (np.)

Vonnegut's characters are not specially designed for a particular novel. Instead they move around in his other novels too. He is well aware of the nomadic characters in his novels

and openly acknowledges such wanderings. For example the science fiction writer ‘Kilgore Trout’ and the millionaire ‘Elliot Rosewater’ are characters found in *Slaughter House-Five* and *Breakfast of Champions*. So one cannot frame a cut and dried definition about the characters of Vonnegut. They exist as abstract entities representing a certain idea. For example Kilgore Trout is the representation of all the authors who have no publishers while Billy Pilgrim is the representation of everyman’s constant search for ultimate peace and rest. Similarly Lt. Bernard O’Hare hunts down Howard Campbell Jr. as the World War nears its end in *Mother Night*. The same O’Hare is presented as the friend of Vonnegut in *Slaughter House-Five*. Vonnegut’s description of places and people on Earth and other planets is logical and precise. Sudden shifts of people and places too occur in Vonnegut’s style. The usual takes unusual twists and turns. The clear becomes opaque. The familiar is defamiliarised. The good becomes vulgarised. For example in *Breakfast of Champions*, without a proper publisher the science fiction author, Kilgore Trout, has to publish his works through a set of pornographic books. He is invited to a big conference as the chief guest to speak about his works. The conference is organised by a foolish millionaire who has never ever read even one of Trout’s works. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy sees war films in the reverse order, where all the damages are repaired instantly. This can be considered as a sort of wish fulfilment for both Billy the character and Vonnegut the author simultaneously because they have seen so much damage.

The position of Vonnegut in all these narratives is doubtful. The place from where he is telling the story cannot be easily identified. He is at Dresden, he is at Tralfamadore, he is at Illium and he is everywhere. At times he is near the reader telling his experiences while at other times he is far away in a distant solar system. One can only say that he too like Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time.

## (ii) Linguistic Properties

The title of the book *Slaughterhouse-Five* too has linguistic importance. The name ‘slaughter house’ refers to a place where innocent animals are slaughtered. Here man becomes the innocent animal. Billy and his fellow prisoners hide in a ‘meat locker’ and escapes from the war outside. So the meat locker, which is a place where dead animals are kept, becomes a refuge of life. Vonnegut also starts each of his books with a well-known quotation or a piece of poetry. *Slaughterhouse-Five* starts with four lines from an old children’s carol

The cattle are lowing,  
The Baby awakes.  
But the little Lord Jesus  
No crying He makes.

Here in the novel ‘the little Lord Jesus’ is not a Saviour, the only hope of humanity; instead he is the picture of an anti Christ, a Destroyer who will swallow up the whole world through war. The Jesus here does not bring peace or happiness. Instead He is a punishing Jesus and the novel represents a second coming where the innocent are slaughtered along with guilty One might even draw a comparison with the slaughter of the Holy Innocents at the time of the birth of Christ. Biblical verses are also used to show the misery and destruction of life like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire. Here Dresden is the ‘Sodom and Gomorrah’ but it is not destroyed due to the sin of its inhabitants. Instead innocent people are destroyed due to the sin of others far from them. All Vonnegut’s literary works start with such a quotation but the reader will find something exactly opposite what is said in the quote. The names of Vonnegut’s characters are interesting due to their peculiar

high-sounding nature. A good example of such names is seen in *Slapstick* where the characters are named with super long names like Vera Chipmunk-5 Zappa, Wilbur Daffodil-II Swain, Melody Oriole-2 von Peterswald and Isadore Raspberry-19 Cohen. Even though these names sound like that of ancient kings and queens, like Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, they are the names of ordinary persons in the future time. Can one consider this as a mockery of the desire of the aspiring to have a lineage, which has high-sounding names and titles? The names are ridiculous as well as weird. They are just equivalents for the identification of a particular person. They sound like the names of robots in science fiction novels. By using such a nomenclature Vonnegut describes the robotic style of existence that we see even in today's society. A similar linguistic venture we see in Vonnegut's works is the frequent use of definitions and comments. These definitions, which are made by Vonnegut himself, have a striking relationship with the hidden reality, which Vonnegut proposes to uncover. For him the military academy is a place 'where men are made into killing machines' (*Breakfast of Champions*). 'There is nothing intelligent you can say about a massacre'. (*Slaughterhouse-Five*) are examples of a Vonnegutian comment. These are not a mad man's ravings but words of wisdom from a true seer.

'So it goes', and 'And so on' are two phrases which consistently saturate every chapter of *Slaughterhouse Five*, forcing the reader to tirelessly absorb these two uncomfortably short sentences, and placing them into their subconscious. These two words give mobility to the tale. The story moves from one setting to another. These two words give a childish tinge to the story since they sound like 'and they lived happily ever after', a much familiar ending of fairy tales. So the child factor becomes more important. The autobiographical turns out as a fairy tale too. The factor of reality present in the novel doesn't vary. The key character represented here is the World War II. But the reality of war moves in the minds of the reader and World War II becomes synonymous with the Vietnam War, Korean War, and Gulf War and to the reality of being in war. Paul Young argues that "So it goes" is a phrase referring to death in Vonnegut's system. It becomes Vonnegut's way of cheapening death, setting off the readers to wonder why Vonnegut perceives death to be insignificant—to the degree of using such a short sentence as a form of eulogy. Yet in the horrific setting of war, in sight of quarter million deaths, one can only feel numb from such a massive and inconceivable tragedy. Perhaps this was how Vonnegut felt. Thus the best thing Vonnegut does to convey his calloused reaction, is to simply say: "So it goes." ([www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com))

So death, which often is the most dramatic scene in novels, can be summarized by "So it goes," leaving the reader in an awkward position of simultaneously feeling sorrow and apathy. This is a lesson which Vonnegut teaches- 'care for the living, not the dead'. "So it goes" then is the representation of life in reality as well as the life in the novel. The novel goes on even though Life goes out. "And so on" depicts the forward rush of the novel and life which has to go on. (np.)

The novel way of presentation by simple descriptions by Vonnegut too becomes interesting. For example in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he describes a scene where Valencia came to see Billy in the hospital. 'Billy's fiancée had finished her Three Musketeers. Now she is having a Milky Way' (*Slaughterhouse-Five*). In a first reading one will think that all these are absurd. But on a closer look what he says is that Valencia is having two candy bars. The names of the candy become once more important as Three Musketeers was the nick name of a group of Billy's colleagues in the war. Milky Way becomes significant when we think about the monstrosity of war, which is engulfing the whole universe. Since Vonnegut was a soldier and had seen enough war and destruction, his description of the military forces and

war, tends to take a more precise and genuine account with true to life pictures. The change in tone makes these events more realistic than the rest of the story. His satirical style becomes a true-life experience that he tries to share with his readers.

Vonnegut's satire becomes even bolder when he is discussing societal restrictions. We often find him of using slang, vernacular usages and unparliamentary phrases to talk about some activities we do everyday like yawning, snoring, etc. Vonnegut in his *Breakfast of Champions* describes this in a very simple common man's tongue as 'F\*\*\*\*\*g was how baby's were made'. This is an entirely devastating picture when considered along with the fable of babies brought in by storks. The divine experience of sex is made into something as commonplace as a biological drive or mere mating.

### (iii) Interpersonal Relationship

In modern day America, the relationships between families matter little Marriage is considered as just a business arrangement only to produce children. The children do not care for their parents and elders. The couples also do not really care for each other. Suicide too is very common one might even say it has become popular. This is a condition that is spreading like wild fire not only in the American society but to other societies as well. Many writers throughout the world lament this fall of social values. American society is fast becoming a pseudo world. Vonnegut too is sad about this condition of society. This fall in society started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and goes on into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Vonnegut's family too suffered such losses as part of this societal degradation. His mother committed suicide when he was away in the battlefield. This incident affected him very much and is mentioned in *Breakfast of Champions* as Dwayne Hoover's wife's suicide. This incident is always mentioned in the story and it is presented as the cause for the degradation of the relationship between Hoover and his family. Hoover becomes insane and the cause for it is the unhappy relationship between him and his wife. Vonnegut also laments for the ignorant emigrants from the third world, who migrate to 'the Land of Freedom'. To be a part of the social system they too are forced to be the members of this false society. Dr. Cyprian Ukwende and Khashadahr Miasma are examples of such migrants. So one of Vonnegut's sincere efforts is to criticise the degraded world order, with special emphasis on inter personal relationships.

In *Mother Night* Vonnegut gives another interesting idea. Campbell only broadcasted for the Nazi radio. He was in a way partially responsible for the millions of deaths during the Nazi regime. But when people came to know that he was associated with the Nazis they started to attack him seeking revenge for the death of their friends and family members. Although one cannot say that Campbell is fully guilty we can surely say that he could only be blamed for making the world hate the Jews through the broadcasts. Here Campbell is a spy of America too and America does not send any help to relieve him.

Vonnegut laments over the fall of social values and ethics. The Worlds created by him throughout his writings is of a pseudo society with false ideals. *Breakfast of Champions* is a good example of this pseudo society. Dwayne Hoover and his family relations is a sample of that pseudo society. His wife committed suicide; he has an affair with his secretary and does not care for his son whom he thinks as insignificant. He thinks of him as a homosexual. He turns mad due to lack of attention and care. In the Vonnegut society one can find many personalities who have not turned out to be successes-those who wanted to do something; but who could not become anybody, people like Lt. Bernard O'Hare of *Mother Night*, who turns from a brave soldier to a custard vendor and father of too many kids. People hate each other and live with a false prestige. A good example is found in *Mother Night*, Rev. Dr. Lionel Jones and his paper *The White American Minuteman*, which is against all that is not a white man. Dr. Jones is a dentist and the high priest of a strange order he founded. People try to take what is not theirs. Resi Noth in *Mother Night* pretends to be her own sister to spy on her

brother in law. In some other novels people are barred from knowing any news about their family like Col. Ivanova Patova alias George Kaper, the Russian spy in *Mother Night*. Dwayne Hoover's failed relationships with his wife and secretary leads to the ultimate end-madness-in *Breakfast of Champions*. 'Alcoholics Anonymous' is yet another example of interpersonal relationships.

*Slaughterhouse-Five* does not deal with the individual problems of any particular individual. Instead it is the plight of a quarter million people who were attacked in Dresden. Billy is a good example of a failed man. Circumstances caused him to fail. The married life of Billy too was not so successful, but he had an average family life-not so good, not so bad. He was a figure of fun in the army as the Chaplain's assistant. Sleep was unknown to him and he had to be rocked to sleep like a baby with 'magic fingers'. Her father thrust Valencia, who was not so good looking, into the life of Billy. Billy without any protests accepted her. His will power is lost. The discussion on the failures and the interpersonal problems of Billy's life is futile when war itself is the greatest evidence for a lack of interpersonal relationship. The treatment of Russians in the book too is a picture of how the lack of personal relations can cause skirmishes not against individuals but to war on a large scale.

Vonnegut describes a buddy system through his works. Vonnegut uses a pair of binaries, like Laurel and Hardy or Hitler and Churchill, to express his ideas of a universal cooperation or universal rivalry. There is a binary for each and every character he creates. For example in *Breakfast of Champions*, the white man Dwyne Hoover has a binary existence in Wayne Hoobler, an ex-convict. Similarly in *Mother Night*, Howard Campbell Jr.'s binaries are the prison guards. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim's binary is Roland Weary. Kilgore Trout's binary is Elliot Rosewater. These binaries need not always be of friendship, they could be of enmity too. But he has one equivalent made for every one of his characters with a distinct personality. These typical characters are related to one another in one way or another. They are either for or against each other and one's existence becomes miserable without the other.

#### (iv) Facing the Reality of Death

Death is a major theme in the works of Vonnegut. For him death is not 'the end', there is something beyond it, which is hard to explain. What is after death may be a Christian heaven or a Tralfamdorian or a supernatural 'Fairy Land', a symbol of heaven often seen in Vonnegut's writings. 'So it goes' is his way of accepting what for him is the reality of Death. It should come in its own due course, not attained forcefully. Jerry Green through his essay, *The Moral of Slaughterhouse-Five*, points out that 'Through his writing, Vonnegut poses an ancient question: Are we masters of our destiny, or are we simply pawns of fate? The medium through which Vonnegut presents this riddle is death' ([www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com)).

Death is the central point to which all action in the book connects. The story is primarily about the death of 135,000 German civilians in the bombing of Dresden. The story is also about Billy Pilgrim, a man who experiences death from every viewpoint, a man who survives many life-altering experiences, and does not change at all. Through death, Vonnegut examines free will, and refutes it. He shows death as meaningless. The casual treatment of death demonstrates the futility of free will in human life.

The first mention of death occurs in the third sentence of the book. This same event of death is mentioned repeatedly throughout the book. Technically, it occurs several times. Edgar Derby, a man that the main character, Billy Pilgrim, and Vonnegut both know, is caught taking a teapot out of the rubble of Dresden. The three guards of the Nazi Germany Army execute Mr. Derby. This happens after the bombing of Dresden. 135,000 German civilians, who had no real involvement with the war, were massacred all at once. Then one man is executed for taking a teapot. This kind of irony is the principal tool of Vonnegut.

The phrase “So it goes,” is perhaps the most famous one in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Each time a death occurs, “So it goes” is repeated. The phrase is used indiscriminately, without regard to the importance of or the number involved in the death. Thus the word attains a new meaning as death continues while man ends. Vonnegut tells the readers to face death bravely, since it delivers a new reality.

Vonnegut gives us his own view of death through the Tralfamadorians. Vonnegut sums it up best:

When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in bad condition in the particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments. Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is ‘So it goes’. (*Slaughterhouse-Five*).

Death is a painful experience but Vonnegut in some of his novels boldly faces it and in some others ridicules it. The innocent deaths of Dresden were described as the deaths of martyrs in a holy war between good and evil while suicide and other covert ways of facing death are often ridiculed with absurd similes. For example in *Breakfast of Champions* Dwayne Hoover’s wife commits suicide by drinking Drano, a chemical that causes violent stomach upsets which in turn causes dehydration and ultimately death. It is a very painful sort of death; nobody trying to commit suicide will ever want to have it. They just want to end the miserable life, which could be done in simple ways by having an overdose of sleeping pills. This is an occasion when death is ridiculed. A similar experience of death is presented in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is

Weary was as new to war as Billy. He was a replacement, too. As a part of a gun crew, he had helped to fire one shot in anger-from a 57-millimetre antitank gun’. The gun made a ripping sound like the opening of the zipper of the fly of God Almighty. The gun lapped up snow and vegetation with a blowtorch thirty feet long. The flame left a black arrow on ground, showing the Germans exactly where the gun was hidden. The shot was a miss.

What had been missed was a Tiger Tank. It swivelled its 88-millimetre snout around sniffingly, saw the arrow on the ground. It fired. It killed everybody on the gun crew but Weary. So it goes. (*Slaughter House-Five*).

Here death is presented as a reality even though a bit implicit. Another representation of death is seen in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is as follows

He was down in the meat locker on the night that Dresden was destroyed. There were sounds like giant footsteps above. Those were sticks of high-explosive bombs. The giants walked and walked. The meat locker was a very safe shelter. All that happened was an occasional shower of calcimine. The Americans and four of their guards and a few dressed carcasses were down there, and nobody else. The rest of the guards had, before the raid began, gone to the comforts of their own homes in Dresden. They were all being killed with their families.

So it goes.

.....

So it goes.

A guard would go to the head of the stairs every so often to see what it was outside, and then he would come down and whisper to others. There was a firestorm out there.

Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn. (*Slaughterhouse-Five*).

This is an entirely different, genuine report of death that is rarely found in Vonnegut's narrative. Death here is a forced reality while the other two incidents are made more or less by the victims themselves. Death becomes painful as we experience it directly like the destruction of Dresden. As we read *Slaughter House-Five* death becomes an undesirable phenomenon. Those who die here are the innocents. It is a forced circumstance. Here death becomes a reality from which man should learn and understand.

#### (v) **Deliberate Expression of Societal Restrictions**

Vonnegut's satire becomes even bolder when he is discussing societal restrictions. We often find him of using slang, vernacular usages and country phrases to talk about some activities we do everyday like yawning, snoring, etc. Society expects us to be restrained in doing or saying such things in public. Yet we have to do such things. But the false prestige and other restrictions of our pseudo society cause us to often hide our innermost feelings. According to Vonnegut we should release all our emotions openly. One cannot deliberately hide these human realities, since they are part of our own body and mind. Vonnegut laments the fall of social values and ethics. The worlds created by him throughout his writings are of a pseudo society with false ideals. *Breakfast of Champions* is a good example of this pseudo society.

He provides a new viewpoint of society by explicitly speaking about the taboos of the society. Vonnegut also gives a good commentary on the history and even the relevance of Pornography. Due to such a case of vulgarised representation the depth and perception of the idea changes on reaching the readers mind, triggering the mental discussion about the truth in the novel. Such a unique way of writing and presentation overcomes all types of conventional jargons and opens a true cross section of the ordinary American Society. Thus he exposes and laments over the present chaotic state of the society. He finds an ordinary American physically and mentally confused. This state of confusion is spreading throughout the world due to the pseudo societal culture that is engulfing the present day world.

#### (vi) **The Struggle between Good and Evil resulting in Pessimism**

The differences between good and evil too is a topic of discourse in many of Vonnegut's literary works. From his M. A. thesis in 1946 *On the Fluctuations between Good and Evil in Simple Tales*, which was unanimously rejected by the anthropology faculty of the University of Chicago due to its unfamiliar and unpopular ideas, to his most latest version of writings one can see this struggle.

There is no reason why good cannot triumph as often as evil. The triumph of anything is a matter of organisation. If there are such things as angels, hope that they are organised along the lines of the Mafia. (*The Sirens of Titan*)

The innate pessimisms in Vonnegut's writings can be considered as the result of this confusion between good and evil. *Mother Night* is a good example for such a crisis stage between good and evil. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* space and time travels are used as a tool for Vonnegut to remove traces of human compassion from the horrors of a massacre; they are also tools to express his pessimistic views on technology. The struggle between good and evil is seen in every person. If the good factor wins, he will try to fight against evils and vice versa. Vonnegut knows the 'good' and he is aware of its prominence. But Vonnegut turns to a pessimistic attitude of society since he is aware he cannot change the world single handed. So he has chosen to fight evil through his pessimistic writings.

**(vii) The Devastating Experience of War**

Vonnegut's novels, plays and short stories are, unlike other such works, presents the realities of War in a uniquely simple style where reality and fiction interlace so well that it produces a new literary order. Unlike other authors Vonnegut seldom gives out a ray of hope for the betterment of society through his works. Since Vonnegut was a soldier certain offshoots of soldiering can also be found often in his works. The use of military slang, absurd songs and stories, the description of weapons and the description of a sense of duty that prevails all his works is ample evidence to prove his military leanings. *Slaughter House-Five* provides such military pictures often. The sub title itself-*A Duty Dance with Death*-is an example. The sense of duty for Vonnegut is his campaign against war. The destruction of Dresden was, is and will be a great event described through his works since it is the great experience Vonnegut himself has seen, known and experienced. Vonnegut clearly expresses his thought of war (massacre) in the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse Five*:

... there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds. (*Slaughterhouse-Five*).

The interrelationship between war and technology accurately reflects the attitude of Kurt Vonnegut. As the primary factor in both World Wars, technology has unleashed massive destruction and while war causes massive casualties, technology fuels this process and amplifies its results. Thus in Vonnegut's point of view, science, technology, and war all have become interdependent. Although intelligent human beings propound and encourage technological developments, there is nothing intelligent or even humane about what technology yields. The yield is undoubtedly destruction.

**(viii) Science Fictional Mode of Presentation**

Science Fiction is a new type of story narration that came into existence in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Science is merged with fiction and a new fictitious realm involving the future of mankind and the presence of alien characters from outer space. It also deals with the future marvels of science and technology. Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Isaac Asimov were the most celebrated authors in this field. Kurt Vonnegut too is a science fictional writer as he writes about strange planets like, Tralfamadore in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Instead of an ordinary novel due to its relations with space and time travel placed into the novel-without any scientific explanation-*Slaughterhouse Five*, reads like a science fiction novel. Yet such a classification would again be somewhat inappropriate, as Vonnegut violates the traditional rules of science fiction. Vonnegut's science fiction is not filled with technical jargon but with ordinary educating ideas. His mode of presentation is basically a mock or quasi science fictional society of the future. He ridicules all types of conventional writing and modes of presentation through science fiction. Thus when Vonnegut begins his tale by writing,

Listen: 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* [my emphasis] 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. (*Slaughterhouse-Five*).

One can only see this sort of presentation in a narrative by Vonnegut. The usual science fiction style is entirely different. A modern day science fiction work will start by saying about a distant universe, which men are colonising or closing in. Vonnegut's narratives are in the reverse order. They are basically the representation of our earth by an alien/earthling in the future. Such a style looks like a prophetic vision. He does not allow the reader to understand how or why Billy has this supernatural ability. While Billy becomes a time traveller by becoming 'unstuck in time', Vonnegut never explains why this magical 'door' allowing time-travel exists or how it works scientifically. Furthermore the reader is not granted access to reasons why Billy can see his birth and death. Paul Young says

When one compares Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* with *The Martian Chronicles* or *2001: A Space Odyssey*, one can see that *Slaughterhouse Five* was never intended to be a work of science-fiction. ([www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com)).

Now the question arises why Vonnegut uses a science fictional mode for a novel, which he so longer called autobiographical. A possible answer is that this mode can be considered as a bonding between the reader and the writer. It gives a personal touch to the novel, which makes it very much personal to the reader. They share the experience like two close friends. The novel forces the reader to become more involved with the text, suspecting the validity of every piece of the novel; the reader is brought closer into the text, closing the gap between the reader and the author. Thus Vonnegut transforms the novel into a space where both he and the reader can simultaneously exist, an Infundibulum. In much of his work Vonnegut's own voice is apparent, often filtered through his proxy, science fiction author Kilgore Trout, characterized by wild leaps of imagination and a deep cynicism tempered by humanism. Thus Trout is possessing a dual role as a character as well as the author.

Vonnegut also blames science for being responsible for the failure of the innocent human society. Science that used to characterize and model real life phenomena is now used to deconstruct our preconceived notions of reality. This breakdown of a 'single reality' is exactly what drives *Slaughterhouse Five*. Vonnegut forces the reader to question not only the novel's realism, but also reality itself. *Cat's Cradle* is a good example of such a destructive scientific experiment. The invention of bombs and weapons too are an example for the destructive nature of science. He does not advocate any special god but gives a special attention to the 'universal spirit' that is present in all.

#### (ix) Conserving Nature

Care for nature is largely seen in Vonnegut's writings. The deep spreading consumerist culture upsets him. Pollution of nature is the side effect of this fast track culture. People fail to see their surroundings and the little joys in them. People have become so consumeristic that there is no place for the huge amount of waste that has developed as a by-product of this strange culture. The most contradicting factor is that people tend to deposit them on places where they should never be present. So we deposit our waste into a river from which we take our drinking water. A similar situation is seen in *The Breakfast of the Champions* where Kilgore Trout's feet are caked with plastic bags as he wades through the Sugar Creek stream. We create monstrosities that spoil the pristine beauty of the natural world. Fred T. Barry's convention centre in *Breakfast of Champions* is an example for such a monstrosity. Vonnegut says that it looked like a second harvest moon in the nights of Midland City. *Slaughterhouse-Five* provides no such explicit pictures on nature conservation. But there too Vonnegut gives good pictures of the nature around him before and after war.

### The Moral of *Slaughterhouse-Five*

The moral of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is whatever the reader wants it to be. That is the beauty of the book. However, in his typically dark, sarcastic way, Kurt Vonnegut gives us several possible themes to explore. One of the themes relates to the way in which Vonnegut presents the human life span. Death is the central point to which all action in the book connects. The story is about the death of 135,000 German civilians in the bombing of Dresden as well as about Billy Pilgrim, a man who experiences death from every viewpoint, a man who survives many death experiences.

One of the three main settings in the book is Tralfamadore, a planet to which short, plunger-shaped, one-eyed aliens take Billy to live in a zoo. The Tralfamadorians' concept of time is that all events are predetermined, and that time is not linear. All events happen at once. This is illustrated in the scene where Billy is first abducted. This encounter demonstrates the Tralfamadorian concept of time and free will. Time is an illusion, and free will doesn't exist. In another point in the story, the Tralfamadorians address the concept of free will directly. Through the Tralfamadorians, Vonnegut gives us his views on free will: it is just an illusion. Without free will, there is no point in struggling for anything, because it will do no good. That is why Billy accepts everything and is not shaken up by death.

Jerry Green puts it all in one word 'So It Goes: An examination of life through death' ([www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com)) in his essay on *Slaughterhouse-Five*. This is the basic case of study in the novel. Vonnegut moves in and out through various occasions of life, death and near death experiences, which he too has known or experienced. He studies the value of human life through death. Vonnegut satirises death and to an extent that he laughs at death itself.

In *Breakfast of Champions*, Vonnegut says about the meaning of life is

To be  
The Eyes  
And Ears  
And Conscience  
Of the Creator of The Universe,  
You Fool.

To be a part of the omnipotent as well as that of the everyday ordinary man. Such a universal message of equality is spread through the literary works.

Billy is saved from the bombing by hiding in an underground meat cellar. Here death shows man its supremacy. Even the title 'Slaughterhouse' is an apt one since slaughterhouses are place where innocent animals are slaughtered. Man as an animal has to undergo this experience in the slaughterhouse of the world war. Here the lesson is that war is destructive and our sincere efforts should be to stop war and all types of injury to human society and our eco system. This is the ultimate message of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and of Kurt Vonnegut Jr. His whole effort is condensed in the prayer he has recorded in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

God grant Me  
The Serenity to Accept  
The Things I cannot Change,  
Courage  
To Change the Things I can,  
And Wisdom always  
To Tell the  
Difference.

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