ALTERNATE REALITIES IN CONFRONTATION: THE TRALFAMADORIAN PHILOSOPHY ,THE BOMBING OF DRESDEN AND LIFE ON EARTH

A STUDY ON KURT VONNEGUT'S ANTI-WAR NOVEL *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE*

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MEZBAHA-BEŞ, BIR ANTI-SAVAŞ ROMANI*:* ÜTOPIK VE DISTOPIK GERÇEKLIKLERIN YÜZLEŞMESI TRALFAMADORE FELSEFESI VE GÜNÜMÜZ DÜNYASI

ÖZET

Ütopik roman günümüzün temel bozukluklarını ve yanlışlarını sorgulamak için uygun bir türdür, çünkü kabul edilegelmiş akıl yürütme ve olasılık kalıplarından çıkma fırsatını sağlar. Olanaksızı olanaklı kılarak belirli konuları farklı bakış açılarından ele almak bu türle mümkündür. Ütopik roman yazarlarının temel ve en önemli amacı okuyucunun ilgisini yaşadığı dünyanın gerçeğine çekerek yarattığı ütopik dünyanın gerekliliğine inandırmaktır. Romanda yaratılan iki farklı gerçeklik karşılaştırma yapılmasına yol açar ve okuyucu değişimin gerekli olduğunu algılar:

> Ütopik düşünce 'düzen isteği' tarafından yönlendirilir. Güçlü ütopik istek dünyayı mümkün olduğu kadar karmaşadan ve düzensizlikten kurtarmaktır. Ütopya düzen rüyasıdır (...), geri planında tarihin kabusu vardır' (Kateb, 1971:8).

Tarihin kabusu *Mezbaha-Be*ş'de savaştır. Savaşın vahşeti ve anlamsızlığı insanları aptallaştırır ve hüzünlü bir olaya tepki vermekten aciz kılar. İnsanlık bozguna uğramış 'deli' ve birey olamayan insanlardan oluşur çünkü yaşama iyi bir anlam yükleyebilmeleri için ellerinde bir şey kalmamıştır.

Roman başkişisi Billy Pilgrim'in başından bir çok travmatik olay geçer. Özellikle 2. Dünya Savaşı esnasındaki Dresden'in bombalanması onu derinden etkiler. Billy'nin yapabileceği en iyi şey günümüz distopik dünyasını yok saymaktır. Böylelikle 'hayali' bir dünya yaratır ya da bu dünya aslında vardır ve o algılama gücüyle bu dünyayı hissedebilme ve görebilme ayrıcalığına sahiptir. Bu 'hayali' dünya, Tralfamadore, çatışmalardan ve gerilimlerden arınmıştır. Orada insanoğlunun sorumluluk duyabileceği savaş gibi korkunç gerçekler yoktur. Vonnegut böyle bir kaçışı onaylamaz ve sorumlulukla hareket etmenin edilgen bir şekilde yaşamaktan daha değerli olduğunu savunur. Romanın okuyucuda oluşturduğu en önemli soru: 'Yaşamdaki anlamsızlığa

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> ve şiddete insanoğlunun en uygun tavrı, tepkisi ne olabilir?'dir ve bu soru yine romanda yanıtlanır. İnsanoğlu, toplumdaki aksaklıkları ve kötülükleri değiştirme güçlerinin farkında olmalıdır. Sorumlulukla ve eşgüdümle değiştirici güçlerimizi harekete geçirirsek daha yaşanılası bir dünyamız olabilir.

Kurt Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five* abandons the traditional structure of linear time and solidly fixable space and thus introduces the reader with various possible ways of perceiving reality and the human condition.

As a metafictionist, Vonnegut creates a Vonnegut persona who talks directly to the reader in the first and in the last chapters of the novel, and quite often intrudes in the narrative, which is a third-person omniscient narration. There are three different point of views, which at the same time represent three different worlds. The Vonnegut persona portrays the writer's vision of life. Billy Pilgrim, who lives through the dreadful experience of World War Two Vonnegut himself went through, depicts a vision of a meaningless life and the decline of humanity, and the last point of view represents the fantasy world of a idiosyncratic philosophy of escapism and indifference in which Billy finds refuge; the Tralfamadorian philosophy. Vonnegut uses disclaimers for the fantasy section of the novel, in which Billy Pilgrim is kidnapped to the planet of Tralfamadore, learns the Tralfamadorian philosophy and becomes a kind of missionary for the Tralfamadorians.

The novel juxtaposes historical fact; World War Two, elements of Vonnegut's fiction, and a kind of utopian fantasy, in order to create a dystopian vision of the world as a 'slaughterhouse.' By mingling fantasy and reality, Vonnegut creates a powerful but a disputable utopia in which he protests against blind and purposeless human cruelty and tries to prevent the final catastrophe from happening.

The title of the novel, Slaughterhouse-Five, literally refers to the meat locker in which the American prisoners of war are locked up when the bombing of Dresden occurs, but metaphorically it reflects the dystopian vision of our world. In this world a senseless and absolutely gratuitous slaughter like Dresden can happen. Vonnegut tries to warn the reader that humanity is headed for some sort of apocalyptic disaster unless we find something to live by. The question of what would be the proper response of humankind to the absurdity and meaninglessness is the main issue of this novel. Charles B. Harris referring to Vonnegut's works takes up this main problem and argues that the author offers at least three possible answers to this question in the body of his works:

> Man [sic] may practice uncritical love, hoping through kindness and charity to lend some meaning to an otherwise meaningless human condition. Or he [sic] can manufacture new illusions to supplant the old – comforting lies that will shelter him [sic] from the icy winds of an ab-

> surd universe [, as in the case of *Slaughterhouse-Five*]. Finally, he [sic] can simply accept the absurdity of his [sic] condition, neither affirming nor denying it and never asking the most meaningless of questions, Why? (1971: 66-67).

Vonnegut opens the novel by saying, 'all this happened, more or less, The war parts, anyway are pretty much true' (Vonnegut: 1). Such a statement prepares the reader for the mingling of reality and fantasy. 'Tralfamadore is a fantasy,' argue Robert Merrill and Peter Scholl, 'a desperate attempt to rationalize chaos, but on most sympathizes with Billy's need to create Tralfamadore. After all, the need for supreme fictions is a very human trait' (1978: 69). And Kathryn Hume observes, 'when Vonnegut's characters are confronted with the shifting currents of his universe, they are naturally insecure. They want meaning, or at least a recognizable pattern. (...) Like all people in all societies, they both inherit and make bulwarks against the flux' (1982: 216-217).

The first chapter depicts a persona of the author attempting to come to terms with the trauma of witnessing the destruction of Dresden while a prisoner in war, and the idea of writing about it. The Vonnegut persona talks realistically about the troubles he has recalling and constructing the bombing, which resulted in an awful massacre. He initially assumes that it will be a comparatively simple project, a writing of facts and observations, however he soon finds out that he is mistaken; words come slowly and seem inadequate to the task. He admits that his restless search does not seem to be producing profound or intelligent responses, the novel is not finished within twenty-three years and even after he completes writing the book, he remains dissatisfied, as he tells his editor:

> It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because 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 (Vonnegut: 14).

Here we have the big question again; what can one say about this wild destruction of humanity? And what is the proper way for mankind to come to terms with the evils of humanity?

The stated purpose of the novel is to discourage wars, although the writer admits that writers cannot prevent them. He promises his friend's wife Mary O'Hare that he will not give a glamorous view of the war. The subtitle of the book – *The Children's Crusade* – helps convey his idea that wars are fought by people who do not quite understand what they are doing. They are victims of war rather than its conscious agents.

In order to express his view of wars being meaningless and cruel, Vonnegut creates a fictional character, Billy Pilgrim, a peaceful, sensitive young man, who goes

through the war experience that Vonnegut had gone through. Through Billy Pilgrim's massive psychic shock we see why and how an experience can become an incomprehensible and fearful memory. The image of massacre affects Billy Pilgrim deeply; therefore it is not surprising that he behaves as a passive victim of a hostile fate. He suffers an uneasy awareness of the miseries he witnessed during the war.

Through Billy's Tralfamadorian experiences we see the mutilated, arrested quality of daydreams, a creation of utopian world that he aspires to with what is left of his will to live. In his fantasy planet Billy, captured in the zoo, is secured from value judgments passed on his achievement or performance; he can be as passive as he wants and needs to be. Tralfamadore supplies Billy with the philosophy he needs to stay away from the insanity of war and responsibility or action because it emphasizes a belief in predestination. Therefore, it helps Billy to find comfort in indifference and passivity.

Vonnegut shows various responses of the mind to the Dresden experience disguised in the Vonnegut persona, Billy and his utopian philosophy to provide the reader with a dynamic tension and show various effects of a disaster in human beings. The Tralfamadorian vision created out of psychological needs provides Billy some relief from the harsh terms of his life. The Vonnegut persona projects that vision in an attempt to come to terms with his experience of the bombing of Dresden and the representation of it after so many years.

Billy through the Tralfamadorian philosophy develops the fantastic ability of getting 'unstuck' in time, so that he can escape the horrors of his time and visit different periods of his life – past, present, future. The narrative, therefore, consists of juxtaposed fragments, and the reader is given the opportunity to read different moments of Billy. It can be argued that there are three different phases in Billy's life: before the Dresden bombing, after the bombing, and after an airplane crash. Examining these phases, one can get a deeper insight into Billy's character and understand how his war experience affects him.

Billy arrives in Europe to participate in the Second World War. His assignment in the war is to serve as a chaplain's assistant, ironically Billy provides neither protection nor solace to his fellow soldiers; he is instead 'a figure of fun' for he is 'powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends' (Vonnegut: 22). When he joins the regiment in Luxembourg, the outfit is in the process of being destroyed by the Germans. Billy never meets the chaplain he is supposed to assist, but he survives and becomes 'a dazed wanderer' (Vonnegut: 23) until he eventually becomes a prisoner of war. It is in this state of daze that Billy is depicted in most of the episodes concerning the war.

A peaceful young man like Billy is naturally unfit to face the hardship of war, and Billy's unwillingness to live is conveyed by the narrator's description of him at the beginning of the novel: 'he had no helmet, no overcoat, no weapon, and no boots' (Vonnegut: 24), in other words, he is 'empty handed, bleakly ready for death' (ibid). However, ironically, later in the novel Billy Pilgrim will be the survivor of both the

bombing of Dresden and a plane accident. While wandering behind the German lines with two scouts and Roland Weary, Billy often thinks about 'quitting,' but he is forced to move forward by the fat, mean eighteen-year-old Weary, who considers himself the leader of the group. Weary has some romantic ideas about the war, and calls himself and the two scouts 'the three Musketeers' (Vonnegut: 37). He is determined to save Billy, the 'damn college kid, who was so weak he shouldn't even have been in the army' (Vonnegut: 30), so he kicks and shoves Billy along. He is about to kick Billy on the spine when the two of them are captured by the Germans and sent to a prisoners' camp. Although Billy keeps his friendly smile, nobody wants to sleep beside him in the crowded boxcar of the train that takes them to Germany, because Billy yells, kicks, and whimpers in his sleep. Billy has to sleep standing up, or not sleep at all.

Billy is not the only clownish figure in the book. Most of the American prisoners of war are in as bad shape as Billy. The eight German guards, who later on have to keep the American prisoners in Dresden, feel rather relieved when they see the group:

> The eight ridiculous Dresdeners ascertained that these hundred ridiculous creatures really *were* American fighting men fresh from the front. They smiled, and then they laughed. Their terror evaporated. There was nothing to be afraid of. Here were more crippled human beings, more fools like themselves. Here was light opera (Vonnegut: 109).

Later in the novel, the narrator says that the Poles were not the only 'involuntary clowns of the Second World War' (Vonnegut: 143). Such passages stress the idea that wars are fought by people who do not fully understand what they are doing. They are victims of uncontrollable forces. In one of the many self-reflexive passages in the novel, Vonnegut elaborates on this idea, at the same time that he explains his method of composition:

> There are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations, because most of the people in it are so sick and so much the listless playthings of enormous forces. One of the main effects of the war, after all, is that people are discouraged from being characters (Vonnegut: 119).

There are people without characters since violence renders people unable to establish an inner wholeness. Any attempt in participating in one's destiny is in vain because the terrors of the war wipe out the courage needed to encounter one's fate and therefore any possibility of change is unimaginable. The truest awareness is recognition of the meaninglessness of one's self.

Before the firebombing of Dresden occurs the city is described as it appears to the prisoners of war:

> The boxcar doors were opened, and the doorways framed the loveliest city that most of the Americans had ever seen. The skyline was intricate and voluptuous and enchanted and absurd. It looked like a Sunday school picture of Heaven to Billy Pilgrim (Vonnegut: 108).

When the firebombing of Dresden occurs, Billy and his companions are locked up in a slaughterhouse underground. They and their four German guards emerge from the slaughterhouse next morning to find the city completely destroyed:

> There was a firestorm out there. Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn. (…) [T]he sky was black with smoke. The sun was an angry little pinhead. Dresden was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighborhood was dead (Vonnegut: 129).

The two scenes contrast tragically and this effectively carries out the task to comment on the meaninglessness and inhumanity of the war.

After witnessing so much horror, Billy remains in a state of deadened shock. His pain is released only when a couple of German doctors force him to look at the bleeding mouths and the broken hooves of the horses that pull the cart in which Billy and some of his companions are riding.

After the war, Billy suffers a nervous breakdown, and, while in the hospital, he meets Eliot Rosewater who introduces him to science fiction, especially to the work of Kilgore Trout. Both Billy and Rosewater seem to find a form of escape in science fiction, as the narrator observes:

> Rosewater was twice as smart as Billy, but he and Billy were dealing with similar crises in similar ways. They had both found life meaningless, partly because of what they had seen in the war. Rosewater, for instance, had shot a fourteen-year-old fireman, mistaking him for a German soldier. So it goes. And Billy had seen the greatest massacre in European history, which was the firebombing of Dresden. So it goes.
>
> So they were trying to re-invent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help (Vonnegut: 73).

By this argument Vonnegut shows his believe that human beings need illusion in order to go on living in a meaningless, absurd world. He makes this idea clear in

Rosewater's remark to a psychiatrist: 'I think you guys are going to have to come up with a lot of wonderful *new* lies, or people just aren't going to want to go on living' (ibid). Science fiction gives Billy enough interest to keep 'going on,' although he remains detached and 'unenthusiastic about living' (Vonnegut: 44).

Billy Pilgrim, very like Rosewater, is a war-damaged mind whose very numbness of response is the most appropriate reaction. He experiences an emotional explosion in himself. In his middle ages, he is a successful optometrist and businessman, with investments in all the profitable business in town. Considering the fact that despite this success he is on the edge of breakdown, we can say that the Tralfamadorian episodes are his delusions and alternate realities, then he is actually 'insane' or, to put it correctly, driven insane by the insanities of the war.

A turning point comes to Billy's life when he suffers an airplane crash in early 1968. Everybody is killed except Billy, who has his skull broken. Rumfoord, a military historian who shares a hospital ward with Billy shows an indifference to human value. Billy, communicating with him, stresses that Dresden was real, 'We don't ever have to talk about it (…) I just want you to know: I was there' (Vonnegut: 141). His insistence on this point, like his insistence on the reality of the Tralfamadorians, is central to his and Vonnegut's view of life, he was in Dresden, he saw what happened there, and he will no more permit questioning that reality.

It is soon after the crash that Billy starts talking about his visit to Tralfamadore, kidnapped by a flying saucer in 1967. This is the most fantastic element in the novel, and Vonnegut uses disclaimers here when he says that Billy's daughter, Barbara, and several other people believe that Billy is going senile, 'because of damage to his brain in the airplane crash' (Vonnegut: 21). Moreover, Billy's trips and his experiences in Tralfamadore happen to be quite similar to the ones in the science fiction books he reads. Billy finds source materials for his escapist utopian vision in a tawdry Times Square bookstore which he visits in 1968, over twenty years after the war. First he notices a Kilgore Trout novel, which he soon realizes he has read before:

> The name of the book was *The Big Board.* (…). It was about an Earthling man and woman who were kidnapped by extra-terrestrial. They were put on display in a zoo on a planet called Zircon-212 (Vonnegut: 147).

The extra-terrestrial visitors of the zoo are entertained by the Earthling's reactions to the rising and falling prices of their supposed investments on Earth. In reality, however, the telephone, 'big board,' and ticker with which they monitor their fortunes are fake, designed only as 'stimulants to make the Earthlings perform vividly for the crowds at the zoo' (ibid). In the same bookstore Billy also sees a 'girly magazine' with a question on its cover, '*What really happened to Montana Wildhack?*' (Vonnegut: 149), and he subsequently watches a film on a movie machine of an erotic performance by Wildhack (ibid).

Similarly, on his daughter's wedding night, Billy comes 'slightly unstuck in time,' (Vonnegut: 53) and 'watches' a war movie backwards, beginning with German planes sucking bullets out of American planes and ending with specialists who bury the minerals with which bombs are made so that those materials would never hurt anyone again. But Billy's wish fulfilling movie does not end there:

> The American fliers turned in their uniforms, became high school kids. And Hitler turned into a baby, Billy Pilgrim supposed. That wasn't in the movie. Billy was extrapolating. Everybody turned into a baby (Vonnegut: 54).

This reflects Billy Pilgrim's wish for return to innocence to prevent wars, which cause the present to be a dystopia. Immediately after Billy watches his backward movie, he goes into the backyard to meet his Tralfamadorian kidnappers. They take him aboard and introduce an anesthetic into the atmosphere so that he will sleep. When he awakens he finds himself on display in a zoo. The Tralfamadorians bring him a mate called Montana Wildhack, an erotic filmstar. Billy goes about the routines of life here – eating 'a good breakfast from cans,' (Vonnegut: 82) washing his plate and eating utensils, exercising, taking showers, shaving, using deodorant – and the visitors to the zoo are fascinated by his appearance and his actions. Here, Vonnegut indicates that, since the Tralfamadorians could not know that Billy's body and face were not beautiful, 'they supposed that he was a splendid specimen' and 'this had a pleasant effect on Billy, who began to enjoy his body for the first time' (Vonnegut: 82).

Tralfamadore functions as an escape mechanism. When the situation on Earth becomes too absurd, Billy is transported back to Tralfamadore where he is kept 'on display' (Vonnegut: 80). Even though the Tralfamadorian zoo offers Billy a kind of escape and protection from the absurdities in the world, its primary purpose is to make him a spectacle for entertainment. Although Billy says he is '[a]bout as happy as I was on Earth ' (Vonnegut: 82), the fact is that he actually exists as an animal in a zoo – a rarity for the Tralfamadorians to look at. There is 'no place for Billy to hide,' especially when he 'took a leak. The crowd went wild' (Vonnegut: 81). So, even fantasy cannot provide Billy with an unimpaired and perfect escape, since the zoo, constructed by his own imagination, is a further prison.

In short, Vonnegut tries to show the sources from which Billy Pilgrim's creation of his utopian fantasy world derive, and in this regard, the novel proves to be quite realistic, a portrait of one of life's victims (especially war's victim). Billy's alteration of the source materials to create his utopian world reflects his longings for peace, love, immutability, stability and an ordered existence. With these alterations all of the pieces come together so that Billy has the chance to bridge the gap between his longing for utopia, a world full of harmony and free from the present problems of humanity and his search for answers for his questions concerning life's hidden meaning, if there is one at all.

Vonnegut introduces Tralfamadorian philosophy as an antidote to death and destruction. Even though he makes clear that Tralfamadore is an illusion, we cannot be sure to what degree he agrees with the Tralfamadorian philosophy. Billy Pilgrim takes this philosophy as true and lives by it, although he emotionally fails to accept it totally because he is human, not a Tralfamadorian robot-like creature.

Billy's creation of a fantasy world is of crucial importance because it provides him with the kind of illusion he needs to give a new meaning to life. Vonnegut, as stated above, demonstrates his believes that human beings need illusion in order to go on living and this illusion comes in the form of philosophy, the philosophy of Tralfamadore. Billy accepts this philosophy because it brings him some consolation and resignation. After the airplane crash, therefore, he starts 'devoting himself to a calling much higher than mere business' (Vonnegut: 21) and becomes a kind of missionary:

> He was doing nothing less now, he thought, than prescribing corrective lenses for Earthling souls. So many of those souls were lost and wretched, Billy believed, because they could not see as well as his little green friends on Tralfamadore (Vonnegut: 21).

The Tralfamadorians are robot-like creatures:

> they were two feet high, and green, and shaped like plumber's friends. Their suction cups were on the ground, and their shafts, which were extremely flexible, usually pointed to the sky. At the top of each shaft was a little hand with a green eye in its palm (Vonnegut: 19).

They are far superior intellectually to their human guests, for the space creatures also reason at a higher level. They are able to see in four dimensions, and they pity Earthlings for being able to see only in three. Moreover, having no voice boxes since they communicate telepathically, they must make accommodations so that Billy can communicate with them, the accommodation being, 'a computer and a sort of electric organ' to stimulate human sounds (Vonnegut: 55). Despite all these superiorities, Vonnegut does not present them as preferable, on the contrary he disapproves of their philosophy which make them representatives of the considerable proportion of humanity which shows little concern for their fellow creatures and the disastrous events going on in the world. This idea is best conveyed by the narrator who comments that Billy expected the Tralfamadorians to be concerned about the war continuing on Earth 'but the subject war never came up until Billy brought it up himself' (Vonnegut: 83).

Nevertheless, Billy believes they have much to teach the Earthlings, especially about death and time. 'the most important thing I learned on Tralfamadore,' explains Billy Pilgrim in a letter to a newspaper, 'was that when a person dies he only *appears* to die.' He continues:

> He is still very much alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral. All moments, past, present, and future, always will exist. (…) When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in bad condition in that 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' (Vonnegut: 19-20).

'So it goes' becomes an insistent and relentless punctuation used throughout the novel every time death is mentioned, which deliberately makes the reader annoyed. Death and the fear of death are so horrible and unbearable that Billy needs to establish an attitude that would enable him to cope with them. The attitude belongs to Billy not to the Vonnegut persona in the first chapter. The detached Billy seems to be too disinterested for the Vonnegut persona who in contrast tells us of himself in the first chapter:

> I have told my sons that they are not under any circumstances to take part in massacres, and that the news of massacre of enemies is not to fill them with satisfaction or glee.
>
> I have also told them not to work for companies that make massacre machinery, and to express contempt for people who think we need machinery like that (Vonnegut: 14).

The phrase 'so it goes,' insists that the reader attend to each and every death recounted in the novel, however, it also suggests a way to minimize its impact. This originates with the Tralfamadorians who believe that death is not a terminal event as we three-dimensional beings take it to be.

The Tralfamadorians tell Billy that only Earthlings believe in free will. They know that everything happens as it is supposed to happen and there is nothing we can do about it. Their advice to Billy is to ignore the awful times and concentrate on the pleasant ones. Ironically, however, Billy does not have many pleasant moments in his life to concentrate on. The Tralfamadorian teachings cause Billy to become quite passive, and he tries to convince himself that '*Everything* is all right and everybody has to do exactly what he does' (Vonnegut: 145). Billy does not protest the bombing of North Vietnam, or any other atrocities that happen around him. The prayer that Billy frames and puts on his office wall reads, 'God grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to tell the difference' (Vonnegut: 44). This prayer helps Billy to keep going, but the narrator comments that: 'Among the things Billy Pilgrim could not change were the past, the present, and the future' (Vonnegut: 44).

If human will cannot exist, if determinism is dominant, people are relieved of all responsibility for their actions, for in such circumstances it cannot make sense to hold people accountable for their various doings. If Paul Lazzaro is cruel and spiteful, if he is to kill Billy, it cannot be prevented. Past, present and future coexist and no one can change any flow of event. In this view Paul cannot be blamed, since he, like his victim, is merely another person 'unstuck' in time, caught in an unalterable fate. Paul suffers his actions in the same manner that Billy does, he simply functions as an agent for conducting the predetermined behavior. Thus, in the Tralfamadorian view of things, guilt is a meaningless and empty notion, it can play no formative role in the conduct of human life (Vonnegut: 151). Furthermore, not only are persons excused from the consequences of their actions, but they are relieved as well from the responsibility for acting at all. In other words, this view pushes an individual into a passive relationship to his/her own actions. A life is something to be suffered or endured, not something one makes. Thus, although he cannot know it until much later, the passivity of Billy Pilgrim throughout his life comes to seem visionary once he has been introduced to the philosophy of Tralfamadore.

Since all moments, happy and painful alike, already exist, and since the Tralfamadorians have access to a fourth dimension, on the principle of making the best of what is offered for them the Tralfamadorians attend only to the happy moments. A Tralfamadorian guide, while giving Billy information about the wars that mark their history, tells him that:

> There isn't anything we can do about them, so we simply don't look at them. We ignore them. We spend eternity looking at pleasant moments – like today at the zoo. Isn't this a nice moment? (Vonnegut: 85).

The guide then insists that earthlings too should conduct their lives on such policy. The Vonnegut persona in the first chapter seems to have taken this advice, at least he will try to forget the pain he has lived through (Vonnegut: 16). Such a policy obviously removes disappointment, suffering and most importantly a sense of responsibility for improvement and change. With this philosophy we are effectively immunized against death in any form. However, Kurt Vonnegut does not agree with this philosophy since he always holds an ironic distance to Tralfamadore and its way of looking at the reality going on in the 'real' world. Furthermore this view introduces a telling inconsistency into the novel. If all one's actions are as thoroughly determined as claimed, how is it that one can choose to 'ignore the awful times, and concentrate on the good ones' (Vonnegut: 85)? One could not.

Tralfamadorian philosophy satisfies Billy Pilgrim intellectually only. It seems to give a new meaning to life and bring him some consolation. However, emotionally Billy still suffers from his 'war wound,' and often has fits of crying, for no apparent reason. Billy's life is the dramatization of the horror and absurdity of war. His

apparently unreasonable fits of crying, his breakdowns, his lack of interest in life are the very essence of Vonnegut's protest.

The psychological interest of the novel is to show Billy's attempt to cope with the horrors of the war, the symbol of a declining humanity, however neither the dull routine of optometry, nor the fantasy escape to the planet of Tralfamadore can prevent the terror of being tormented by the dreadful memories.

Vonnegut makes references to the concentration camps, the destruction of European Jewry, the bombing of Hiroshima to insist on his view that human beings experience a deviation from humanity. Beside these mass slaughters he sets references to smaller events, such as the execution of Edgar Derby, which seem comically and comparatively trivial but are fearful and appalling in their consequences. The aged Edgar Derby is the victim of his own idealism. He 'had pulled political wires to get into the army at his age' (Vonnegut: 60), and ironically, he is executed by a German firing squad because he takes a teapot from the catacombs after the destruction of Dresden.

Deaths are recounted in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the final chapter begins with these brief paragraphs:

> Robert Kennedy, whose summer home is eight miles from the home I live in all year around, was shot two nights ago. He died last night. So it goes.
>
> Martin Luther King was shot a month ago. He died, too. So it goes.
>
> And every day my Government gives me a count of corpses created by military science in Viet-nam. So it goes.
>
> My father died many years ago now – of natural causes. So it goes. He was a sweet man. He was a gun nut, too. He left me his guns. They rust (Vonnegut: 154).

This recounting offers further evidence of the murderousness of humankind. The final paragraph introduces another dimension. Billy's father dies of natural causes, not at the hands of others. However, the fact that it is included as merely another item in this series, the fact that it is too punctuated by 'so it goes,' suggests that Billy Pilgrim takes it somehow roughly equivalent to the murders of various sorts. We are told early on in the novel that even were wars somehow eliminated, thus no longer being occasions for human misery and subsequent outrage, we would still be left with 'plain old death' (Vonnegut: 3).

Although the Vonnegut persona states that he will forget the bad times and thus partly confirms the Tralfamadorian philosophy, he still does not fully approve with the deterministic philosophy and the kind of passivity it encourages. He shows his firm believes that human beings can exert at least a certain amount of free will and

advises his sons not to take part in massacres or work for companies that make massacre machinery. Moreover, he looks back on Dresden and writes a novel that attempts to discourage wars. His desire to write a book – to do something, his insistence on looking at human suffering rather than away from it, and his making the destruction of Dresden the novel's emotional center all reveal a very un-tralfamadorian stance. Therefore, we can argue that Vonnegut believes in getting involved even though he has doubts about how effective personal involvement can really be. Vonnegut presents his difficulties in believing the world will be improved, because human beings, he thinks, are not rational enough to be aware of their reality. This belief is conveyed in his depiction of the soldiers as clownish figures. Nevertheless, he maintains we should do our best to improve the world we live in, because that attempt only makes us remain human, not a mere plaything, like Billy for Tralfamadorians.

Considering the consequences of the Tralfamadorian view of free will, that the future has already happened, and that it is just those of us in three dimensions that are ignorant of what is there, we can derive at the idea that there can be no suspense. In other words, suspense is a function of our ignorance of an already existent future, not the result of the idea that the future is ahead. This accounts the structure of Tralfamadorian novel. Although Tralfamadorian philosophy is certainly not a philosophy Vonnegut can agree with, he structures his novel parallel to the Tralfamadorian's account of how novels are back home:

> Each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent – describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn't any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvellous moments seen all at one time (Vonnegut: 64).

Similarly, the first chapter announces that *Slaughterhouse-Five* is something of a Tralfamadorian novel. The most evident example is that the novel is built up out of a series of brief fragments or episodes, which are in turn organized in such a manner that terms such as beginning, middle, and end do not contribute much to its sequence. Moreover, Vonnegut deliberately does not allow for the development of any suspense: the first chapter ends by providing the reader with the final words of the novel, and Edgar Derby is never mentioned without reference to the fact that he is to be executed for stealing a teapot, an event which is not finally narrated until the final pages of the novel. Each mention of Derby's fate serves as a reminder that his fate is already an accomplished fact.

Despite all these parallels with Tralfamadorian philosophy, the structure of the book still mitigates against detachment, for the horrors of World War Two and Dresden coexist with the present instant. Moreover, Vonnegut makes the war scenes eternally present for the reader, as they are for him and Billy, so that the reader's action cannot be calm detachment. Rather, the reader will struggle violently against any attempt to send their children off a new crusade.

The novel ends with Billy finding himself alone and free, the war over as incomprehensively as it began. This quiet ending appropriately mirrors the aftermath of a disaster, for as Vonnegut remarks at the beginning, 'And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like "*Poo-tee-weet*"?' (Vonnegut: 14).

By showing the reader Billy, this defeated, passive and deluded man who, driven by the need to escape, creates his own vision of reality, Vonnegut indirectly invites us to come up with better solutions. Vonnegut believes that a kind of utopia can be attained within each individual and within societies, not by deterministic self-exculpation, but by responsible action.

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