

I. *Slaughterhouse-Five*; the Novel

During the post war period the young intellectuals shared the common feeling of incomprehensibility of life in connection with our human intelligence. These intellectuals inherited both skepticism and pessimism with a heightened sense of the notability of all human beings. For the logical and rational human beings, the mid twentieth century lost its meaning to human world. All certainties were lost. The strong pillars of hope and belief were broken.

The study of human situation revealed that humans struggle to avoid their destiny but ironically the struggle leads them to the same fate. The rational search of a human being to avoid the clutches of the destiny is doomed to failure because irrational and illogical forces rule the world itself. Absurdity and futility become greater achievement in the world.

Literary world was also not untouched by this crisis because literature is the outcome of society and its civilization. The modern writers started to give expression to the turmoil and uncertainties of the post war period in their writings through the use of black humor. One of them is Kurt Vonnegut who has used black humor in his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* to show the absurdity of human acts.

In this research study, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* has been analyzed as black humor to satirize the follies of the modern world. The use of black humor can be understood as a major means of satire. The primary satire is connected to the event where allied fire-bombing of Dresden killed more than 135,000 civilians, ironically, the climax occurs not with the bombing of Dresden but with the execution of an American foot soldier, Edgar Derby, who committed a petty theft of teapot. In all of the horror, death and destruction so much time is taken on the punishment of one

man. This tragic situation is humorously presented in the novel. The thesis concentrates on the literary devices related to black humor like black humor, satire, irony and absurdity.

The novel allows the reader to realize the horrors of war while simultaneously laughing at some of the absurd situations it can generate. The novel deals with in many ways the sense of absurdity in life. For instance, Vonnegut characterized Billy, the central character, as a ridiculous and mindless figure. Through Billy's time-traveling experiences, a disordered and chaotic view of life is presented as a reflection of the real life situation.

The novel depicts black humor within the fragmented structure of the novel covering the draconic act of fire bombing of Dresden in Second World War. Throughout the novel, the central character, Billy Pilgrim travels back and forth to all the dimensions of time, and he has been aptly termed as a 'time traveler but it is absurd that he cannot control where or when he will travel to. Moreover, in 1945, allied fire- bombing of Dresden killed more than 135,000 civilians, ironically, the climax occurs not with the bombing of Dresden but with the execution of an American foot soldier(Edgar Derby) who committed a petty theft of teapot. Amidst all of the horror, death and destruction, so much time is spent on the punishment of one man.

Black humor is seen in describing the man character as a "filthy flamingo" or when Billy attempted to publish his encounter with the Tralfamadorians. Both are slightly satirical, and when this style is employed in parts of the book about war, it enforces a sense that these ideas are, nothing tragic, but inexplicable and absurd.

Slaughterhouse-Five is considered Kurt Vonnegut's masterwork that treats one of the most horrific massacres in European history. It is largely set during the Second World War. It focuses on the capture of American soldiers by the Germans in 1945 during the battle of Bulge. The captured men are taken to Dresden to work in hard labor. In February 13, 1945, Dresden is destroyed by an allied air raid. All the inhabitants of the city, except for a few American prisoners and their German guards, are annihilated. The survivors were later used to dig through the rubble for corpses and to begin the clean-up of the city. This factual background information is a key to understanding the book.

Vonnegut enlisted in the U.S. Army, while the university contemplated expelling him for his poor academic performance. His experience as a soldier had a profound impact on his writing and philosophy. In 1944, he was captured by the Germans in the Battle of Bulge. The Germans forced Vonnegut, along with other prisoners of war to work in a factory in Dresden, a city that had no strategic value in the war. Nevertheless, in February 13, 1945, the allied forces firebombed the city while Vonnegut and the other POWs took shelter in the meat locker of a slaughterhouse. The bombing of Dresden yielded a death toll of over a hundred thousand defenseless civilians in a matter of hours, greater than the initial death count of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined. The scene of senseless misery and mass destruction at Dresden played a key role in Vonnegut's development of pacifist views. It would be twenty years before Vonnegut could bring himself to write about the experience in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, published at the height of the Vietnam War.

The World War II impacted Vonnegut's writing. His experiences in World War II were to haunt him for the rest of his life, and are prominently depicted in his

writings. Two of his novels, *Mother Night* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, take place almost within Hitler's Germany. The latter is perhaps Vonnegut's autobiographical work to date. The war to Vonnegut is a traumatic experience which is virtually impossible to describe. As Vonnegut says in the introduction, "... I thought, too, that it [the novel] would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was so big ... but not many words about Dresden came from my mind then" (Vonnegut 2).

The novel is a sophisticated novel that mixes black humor, science fiction and surrealism. It also contains elements of autobiography; documentary and the fantastic often appear in the form of inclusions from other sources- an imaginary story by Kilgore Trout or an actual book on a factual subject. The autobiography comes in the war scenes, like Billy Pilgrim, Vonnegut served in the infantry in Second World War, and was captured by the Nazis. As Vonnegut was, Billy was captured and assigned to manufacture vitamin supplements in an underground meat locker, where the prisoners took refuge from allied bombing. He was imprisoned in Dresden during its bombing and destruction. Therefore, most of the tales included in the book come out of Vonnegut's memory. In Trudeare Zywiec's *The Encyclopedia Britanica*, the novel has been analyzed as an "attempt to recreate his Dresden experience in fictional form; the book uses that bombing raid as a symbol of the cruelty and destructiveness of war down through the centuries" (430).

On the night of February 13, 1945, Vonnegut took shelter in Dresden in an underground meat locker while the allies unleashed one of the most relentless air raids of the war. A firestorm was created that essentially annihilated the historic half-timbered city and left more than 135,000 people dead. After the raid the prisoners emerged to the blasted landscape that Vonnegut describes so vividly in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. For him, the experience became a subject about which he felt

compelled to write. Vonnegut mixes his points of view. Although the majority of the novel is told from an omniscient third person narrator, he also intrudes upon the novel, especially in the first and last chapter, to tell about himself and why he is writing the book.

The centre of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the horrific effects of the bombing of Dresden by the allies. Pilgrim was a prisoner of war confined in a former slaughterhouse in the city, hence the novel's title. Because the prisoners of war happened to be underground at the time of the raid, they were among the few survivors. Vonnegut's novel has come out of his reaction to this event, and it is a memorial which conveys at least some sense of the horror of what happened.

The book is a fiction based on historical fact. But it is primarily a satire, with screaming antiwar sentiments and protests against the destructive consequences of war.

Kurt Vonnegut and Black Humor

Kurt Vonnegut is an American author of numerous novels and short stories. He is noted for his pessimistic and satirical novels that use fantasy and science fiction to highlight the horrors and ironies of twentieth century civilization. Most of his books are affected by his war experience, although in some novels it is hard to identify. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the war experiences are obvious from the beginning. He demonstrates the inhumanity and atrocities of the Second World War in humorous manner which force him re-examine the authority of scientific narrative and the value of technology in their paradoxical influences on human life. He uses a mode of writing black humor to show those illogicality and cruelty of human acts in his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Kurt Vonnegut was greatly influenced by his involvement in World War II. His entanglement with the Dresden bombing had a clear effect upon his psyche, and the horrible experience propelled the liberal antiwar assertions that dominate many of his novels. The thirty years of his life outwardly coincided with the average American man. He was born in Indianapolis in November 11, 1922, and lived a happy childhood with a stable family. He then moved to pursue science in college, served his country in World War II, and land a job in public relations before becoming a full time writer.

However, one element of his post world war would affect him in a way that would change his life forever. In December 1944, he was captured by the Germans at the Battle of Bulge. He and his fellow prisoners of war were taken to Dresden an open city rich with architectural treasures and devoid of any military value. British and American planes needlessly firebombed the city o the night of February 13, 1945, hoping to inspire terror in the Germans and crush their fighting spirit. Over 135,000 civilians were killed. It was twice the amount of casualties at Hiroshima. The insane horror and absurdity of Dresden attack remained deeply etched into Vonnegut's mind from that day forward.

Kurt Vonnegut is one of the significant dark humorists of the past century. Combining humor and poignancy, he has become one of the most respected authors of his generation. For twenty years, Kurt Vonnegut worked on writing his most famous novel ever- *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Vonnegut tied in personal beliefs, characters, and settings from his life into the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

All his books are strongly satirical and ironical, funny and extremely wise. They mostly have a very poor plot. They are fragmented because time does not follow a linear sequence. The emphasis is put into the comic and pathetic characters. Post modernists believe in fragmentation rather than unity. There is no root, centre and no

connections. Deleuze makes a difference between vertical and the horizontal thought. It moves horizontally to anywhere. A horizontal mode of philosophy emphasizes a difference. Therefore Kurt Vonnegut, being a postmodernist, believes in fragmentation but not in the unity and certainty.

Vonnegut has written many novels after and before the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. His first novel, *Player Piano* (1952) is not only satirical and ironical but also absurd. It depicts a future world of computers and other scientific technology, human have become completely useless. They live bored and unhappy lives. Then they rebel and begin destroying the machines. As a result they find that they cannot live without the machines and they start them up again. This is the absurdity of modern world.

Vonnegut uses science fiction in his next novel, *The Siren of Titan* (1959), to show the horrors and ironies of twentieth century civilization. It is filled with ray guns, "space dogs", and armies of evil robots. After it he published *Mother Night* (1961) which is an experimental novel for the first time, we see Vonnegut's typical style of short sentences and short paragraphs.

Vonnegut's humor becomes very black in his next novel *Cat's Cradle* (1963). In this life seems to be a terrifying joke. He also uses both satire and irony in the novel, and yet these types of humor are not predominant. *Cat's Cradle* is too absurd in places to be predominantly ironic and too morally ambiguous in places to be predominantly satirical. He pokes fun at serious ideas. Vonnegut sees laughter as a way of resolving frustrations. Laughter is a response to frustration just as tears are, and it solves nothing. The biggest laughs are based on the biggest disappointments and the biggest fears.

He deals a lot with fantasy in his book, *Cat's Cradle*. From the beginning he talks about the religion that he follows Bokonism. This is not a real religion; however he has rules, songs, scriptures, and opinions of a person that practices this fantasy religion. Within his description of this religion Vonnegut uses black humor as well. He mocks today's religion and the way that people are dedicated to their beliefs. This Bokonism is basically telling the religions believer that everything they read or hear is a lie, and that they need to think for themselves. Black humor is depicted in the book, where Bokonism arrives on land, completely naked, and has a revelation.

Cat's Cradle is a satirical commentary on modern man and his madness. It is book that counters almost every aspect of our society. Satire, the use of irony, sarcasm, or ridicule in exposing, denouncing or deriding vice of folly, is very prevalent in *Cat's Cradle*. Vonnegut hints on many aspects of human life with this satire. Government, religion, medicine, and business are just a few of these aspects. In focusing a government, he shows us a leader who attempts to create a utopia, but just like today's society. The leader makes promises to his people, and then fails to fulfill them. Ironically he allows the best for himself and his staff, while his people struggle. As well, Vonnegut attacks religion with his creatively made up religion which is nothing but lies. He shows religion and science to be contradictory where religion is based.

First the novel makes the reader laugh, and then it makes the reader think. Although the novel is about the day the world ended, it is full of jokes. By making it so, he makes it easier for himself to get his point across. Rather than making the book a crusade against science or religion, he instead creates a light-hearted look at people themselves. By seeing the characters in the book and laughing at them, he is forcing us also to laugh at ourselves.

Before World War II, Vonnegut was enrolled at Cornell University studying biochemistry. He was surrounded by scientists and machines and as a result his first literary works were based on that influence. Vonnegut's early writings were not accepted as serious, mainstream literature due to their scientific nature. He was considered a science fiction writer by literary critic.

Black Humor and *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Black humor is the writing style that depicts the juxtaposition of morbid and farcical elements to express absurdity, insensitivity, paradox and cruelty of the modern world. In it serious matters like death, terror, mass murder, war etc. are treated in a humorous or satirical manner.

We encounter much black humor in the novel. There is a sense of an embittered humor with the phrase, "So it goes", which is repeated over 100 times in the novel. Vonnegut's purpose in repeating the phrase after each statement of death is to build its meaning with each incremental refrain. At first, the saying can be looked upon as funny in an ironic way. However, as one reads further, the phrase becomes irritating and unrelated. This punctuating phrase forces the reader to look at the novel's deaths one after the other. Ultimately, the repetition creates a feeling of resentment that too many people are killed. The saying is a grim reminder that means exactly the opposite of what its words say. Vonnegut ends the novel with reminder of the deaths of John f. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and all of those that died in Vietnam. As a result the phrase that first caused the reader to smile leaves the reader on the verge of tears. It makes all who read this novel feel so powerless.

Characters are often simple in the mode of writing black humor. The focal point of Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the devastating fire-bombing

of Dresden in World War II, an event which was explained by the real life Vonnegut as well as the fictional character Billy Pilgrim. Through the novel, Vonnegut gives his account of an occurrence which is, in it, indescribable. In order to tell this story to the world, Vonnegut used inept character Billy Pilgrim's Tralfamadorian experience as a window that allows the reader some relief from the horrors of war. Tralfamadore is the planet which Billy says he was taken in a saucer. He is able to time-travel and often travels to his future there while he is fighting in the war.

It is funny that the Tralfamadorians look like toilet plungers with little hands.

The novel ridicules the Tralfamadorian view. They see time as something constant, where events always have happened, are happening, and will happen, as opposed to how earthlings are stuck in the present and live moment to moment. "So it goes" is the phrase that follows each and every mention of death in the novel, whether it is the mass death after the bombing of Dresden or the death of the lice and bacteria on the soldier's clothes as they are cleaned. It signifies the Tralfamadorian attitude towards death. When a person or thing is dead, they are also alive, because every moment that they were alive simultaneously exists- it is just that their body is currently not in very good shape. So they say "so it goes".

Humor in characters is shown by revealing absurdity in the characters and situations. In one instance an extremely drunk Billy Pilgrim is searching for the steering wheel of his car; "he was in the backseat of his car, which is why he couldn't find the steering wheel"(Vonnegut 47). In another episode, Billy becomes unstuck in time while watching television, so that he sees a war film backwards and the forwards. The most humorous sequence takes place when Billy travels from the zoo o Tralfamadore to his wedding night with his wife, Valencia. He wakes up to find himself in the German prison camp. He then finds himself back with Valencia after

returning from the bathroom. He goes to sleep, then wakes up on a train on the way to his father's funeral.

The novel contains irony as well. In his own mind Roland Weary consistently saves Billy from death, when in fact Weary takes delight in beating Billy (51). The only time Billy is actually saved from Weary is when the Germans capture the two. Also, it is the good soldiers who are killed, not Billy or Weary: "The two scouts who had ditched Billy and Weary had just been shot" (54).

There is the element of fantasy. Billy escapes from the nightmares and realities of his earthly life on the planet Tralfamadore. Because Vonnegut lives vicariously through Billy, the fictional character, it is the author's way of escaping from the pressure and nightmares of his experiences during the war.

II. Black Humor and Satire

Humor creates comic situation to satirize the event or situation. Satire is activated through humor that shows faults or weaknesses. The word "humor" originated from Latin, means "liquid" or "moisture". Humor evokes feelings of amusement and makes people laugh or feel happy. In early western physiology, one of the four fluids of the body that were thought to determine a person's temperament and features, when the four humors(fluids) of the body(yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm) were in proper proportion. When one fluid exceeded its normal amount, then disproportion occurred. These four fluids are to remain in balance otherwise the normal temperament of a person happens to be misbalanced. It was believed that the individuals in whom this disproportion occurred would be in a choleric humor say if yellow bile were predominant. If blood were predominant, there would be melancholy humor and if phlegm were predominant, there would be phlegmatic humor. Whichever humor predominated, the lack of balance indicated a deviation from normal, an excess that requires correction.

As far back as Plato and Aarmistice, they took laughter as a proper correction of the excessive. When we laugh, there arises an excessive of one element. The object of humor is to create laughter to satirize the event or situation. Humor is an artistic device to correct one's excessiveness and to ridicule upon an incident and situation.

The New Encyclopedia Britanica defines humor as "the only form of communication in which a stimulus on a high level of complexity produces a stereotyped predictable response on the psychological reflex level"(632). It means the response can be used as an indicator for the presence of the illusive quality that is called humor. In *Leviathan* Hobbes states "the passion of laughter is nothing else but

sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of others or with our own formerly"(683).

How humor came into use in western literature is a consequence of a wide range of research. It goes back to the time of Plato and Aristotle in Greek literature. In Greek tragedy, the humorous characters were presented in plays and later in Shakespearian comedy there appeared as successfully as in the Greek stages. James Bergson says laughter is the corrective punishment inflicted by the unsocial individual. In laughter we find an intention to humiliate and consequently to correct our neighbors. Sir Max Beerbohm, the twentieth century English wit found two elements in the public humor: delight in suffering and contempt for the unfamiliar. The American psychologist William Mac Doug believes laughter has been involved in the human race as an antidote to sympathy, a protective reaction shielding us from the depressive influence of the shortcomings of our fellow men.

Much of theorists agree that the emotions discharged in laughter always contain an element of aggressiveness. Laughter provides relief from tension. It also satirizes the situation considered to be opposite from the reality. In the mind of a man, a vast amount of stored emotions exist. These are released by the help of humor.

There are many theories of humor, laughter and comic. Generally, we can divide the theories into three groups: i) theories of superiority and degradation, ii) theories of relief of tension and free from inhibition, iii) theories of strange and frustration of anticipation.

Throughout the ages, theories of superiority and degradation have been remaining most persistently. The laughter is in the position of superiority, and the

object of laughter is in a position of degradation. R. M. Hare writes in the book *Plato* that we laugh at that which is "the ridiculous and out of place"(49).

Thomas Hobbes insists that joy is the cause of laughter. His definition of joy, however, emphasizes the sense of triumph that the laughter feels. Men laugh at the deformities of the other. The passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception with the infirmity of others, or with our own. Jonathan Swift and Joseph Addison tend to agree with Thomas Hobbes. Addison focuses that "absurdity", "oddness", and "infirmity" make us laugh. mildly from Hobbes contains that we do not have to be conscious of our own superiority when we laugh at others, and when he maintains that our derision need not be directed only at people but can also be extended to ideas and institutions.

Not all scholars have supported to the theory of superiority and degradation. Some opposed to it also. According to *Encyclopedia Americana*, "laughter always arises from a gaiety of disposition absolutely in compatible with contempt and indignation" (563). Jean Paul Richter writes that the observer of a humorous situation must subjectively identify himself with the object of laughter. Humorous finds no individual fools but foolishness in a foolish world and is therefore tenderly tolerant.

On the other hand Sigmund Freud is associated with the theory of Relief of Tension or Release from Inhibition. He believes that laughter arises when physic energy is freed from its static function of repressing the forbidden thought. A joke has its origin in an aggressive tendency. This tendency, according to Freud, must be kept away from the conscious, so it disappears into the unconscious. The freedom from repression and freedom of thought provides an enjoyable shock which produce delightful laughter.

A number of science fiction writers have explored the theory of humor. In *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Robert A Heinlein states that humor comes from pain, and that laughter is a mechanism to keep us from crying. On the other hand Isaac Arimov proposes that the essence of humor is anticlimax an abrupt change in point of view, in which trivial matters are suddenly elevated in importance above those that would normally be far more important.

Humor really is the best medicine. If someone is really upset or really angry a joke could cheer him or her. Laughter also could release someone's stress, and in less stressful situation, people would enjoy the world a much better place. Although humor usually cheers people up it also has caused many problems. There is a lot of sick humor like sexist and racial jokes.

Mark Cummings writes about Sir Philip Sidney who believes on incongruity which is mentioned in the *Encyclopedia Americana* that "laughter almost ever commeth of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature" (563). The incongruity situation and frustration of expectation become humorous. Laughter comes from strange and frustration of anticipation. Sometimes people promise one thing to do but do opposite. Their promises are not suitable even in a serious situation. It seems incongruous and emerges the frustration of expectation. This theory is often observed in politics. The political leaders make us laugh because they say one thing but humorously do not execute their words. Nothing makes people laugh so much as surprising disparity between what they expect and what they see. Blaise Pascal views laughter comes from the sudden transformation of strained expectation into nothing. Sydney Smith sees the cause of laughter is incongruity which excites surprise.

J.B. Priestley has suggested that Arthur Schopenhauer emphasizes incongruity: "the cause of laughter is simply the sudden perception of incongruity

between a concept and real objects" (102). One of his examples of this truism has been used repeatedly by subsequent theorist of humor. Some prison guards permits a convict to play cards with them. When they discover he is cheating, they kick him out of jail. Herbert Spencer and the nineteenth century German psychologist Theodor Lipps both belong to the incongruity theorist. Lipps suggests that "laughter results from a descending incongruity in which our attention passes from great things to small" (125).

Black Humour

There are different types of humor. Black humor or dark comedy, which is a type of humor, amuses the audience or the reader with something that would normally be inappropriate to laugh at. In it horrific events are portrayed in comic manner or satirical manner. In *Columbia Encyclopaedia* black humor is defined as:

Black humor in literature, drama and film, grotesque or morbid humor used to express the absurdity, insensitivity, paradox, and cruelty of the modern world. Ordinary characters or situation are usually exaggerated far beyond the limits of normal satire or irony. Black humor uses devices often associated with tragedy and is sometimes equated with tragic farce. (305)

Black humor is known as black comedy. It is also believed that it is a sub genre of comedy and satire whose topics and events normally treated seriously. Death, mass murder, sickness, madness, terror, war etc. are portrayed in humorous or satirical manner. Synonyms are also created to avoid possible racial overtones. They are dark humor, morbid humor, gallows humor and off color humor.

M.H. Abrams relates black comedy to literature of the absurd and argues that "there are also affinities with this movement in the numerous recent works which exploit black comedy; baleful, naive, or inept characters in a fantastic or nightmarish modern world play out their roles in what Ionesco called 'tragic farce', in which the events are often simultaneously comic, horrifying, and absurd" (2). Therefore black comedy allows the reader to realize the horrifying events which simultaneously laughing at some of the absurd situations. Characters are very simple in handling their situation properly. In a word they are not intelligent.

Black humor is the first wave of post-modernist literature and it starts in the late 1950s and becomes popular through the 1960s. The most identifiable feature of black humor is that it finds comedy in grim or inappropriate subject matter. It is related to postmodernism. Postmodernism is a diverse and complex movement in philosophy and the arts involving everything from literature and film to architecture, painting and music and it starts becoming discernible around 1960. Since it is complicated, it means different thinkers in different fields. For instance a French philosopher named Jean François Lyotard defines it as an "incredulity towards metanarrative" (13).

A "metanarrative", for Lyotard, is any theory that tries to explain much of what goes on in the world. And if you are "incredulous"" towards metanarrative, as postmodernist are, it means you are doubtful of them-that you disbelieve them.

There have been a number of important matanarratives in modern times. One is psychoanalysis; the type of thinking Sigmund Freud inaugurated which says all human affairs are understandable in terms of people's internal psychological conflicts. Another is Marxism which tries to explain absolutely everything in terms of economics and class struggle. A third matanarrative might be that of rational science

in general, which believes all phenomena can be classified and objectively understood through close empirical study.

All metanarratives are rational. They believe everything that happens can be explained rationally, according to the precepts of some theory. Postmodernists, being "incredulous" towards matanarrative, are essentially antirational. Rationality, logic and scientism are destructive forces for many postmodernist artists and philosophers. They are destructive because their belief can be used to control people or to make them follow some artificially constructed "norm". For instance, Deleuze and Guattari wrote a famous book in late 1960s called *Anti-Oedipus*, in which they attacked Freudian psychoanalysis. They consider it as an instrument of control that doctors and professionals use to make people conform to the repressive rules of modern society.

In psychoanalysis, the Oedipus complex is supposed to be the foundation for almost everything human beings go through in life. Deleuze and Guattary, however, say the Oedipus complex is a false norm that has been to socialize and control countless people of the world. It has also been used to proclaim "sick" anyone who does not follow its peculiar rules.

There has been anti-rational painting, anti-rational music, anti-rational theatre and anti-rational architecture. All of it meant to help people break out of the boxes that organized; controlled, logical thinking forces us into. There has been anti-rational literature too- and that is where black humor comes in.

Historically in 1960s, the unprecedented disorder and absurdity of social and political situation after the World War II in America made the modernist suspicious of any kind of systematic and objective authorities. A series of events after World War II reinforced the sense of contradictoriness and irrationality in life. The modern

technology brought both disaster and prosperity to human beings. The absurd conditions people faces were the result of reason. Its exact opposite was irrationality. What people experienced in daily life were incomprehensible and unpredictable events, which were impossible to be categorized and rationalized. There was thus a prevailing uncertainty towards the belief that the world could be understood and analyzed with systemized knowledge.

In response to this absurdity in life, a writing mode defined as black humor became dominant. It is the postmodernist writing mode of thought and experience. Critics have given various definitions of the term black humor. For example, Scholes thinks that the black humorists are concerned not with what to do about life but with how to take it seeing the universe as absurd and seen it as ridiculous, a joke. He focuses on absurdity and hence the universe is ridiculous.

For Hilfer, black humor is an aggressive cynical, even nihilist humor alerting them to the emergence of a new mood as well as a new mode. Vonnegut himself sees black humorists as gallows humorists, who try to be funny in the face of situation which they see as just horrible. He emphasizes on gallows humorists who express a strong interest in sad or unpleasant thing to make it ridiculous. In a word, the black humor writing style responds to the predicament of human existence, and shows the limit of human beings to understand and solve every problem in life.

Black humor satirizes the insanity and cruelty of rational human beings to rectify their traits. Black humorists believe that the power of world lies on the hand of insane and neurotic man. It may be impossible to establish peace in the world without complete change in human thought. Politicians, essentially, are insane and corrupted. For this reason the world faced world wars. If we look back in history, we find Mussolini, Hitler, and Nepolian are some of best representative example. More than

fifty thousands atom bomb have been created in the world. And one atom bomb can destroy whole creation around forty thousands square miles inordinately. Hence the atomic power can destroy more than seven mass like earth in number. It satirizes the disintegration among the people, scientific technology, and thirst for power of insane man. The atomic force brought the great havoc in the world in the past. The essence of black humor lies in showing this havoc in humorous and satirical manner.

Associates of Black Humour

Satire is one of the major associate of black humor. A satire, generally speaking, is an attack on foolish or wicked behavior by making fun of it often by using sarcasm and parody. The word 'satire' comes from the Latin word 'satura' which means primarily 'full' and then comes to mean 'a mixture of full of different things'.

Satire has usually been justified as a corrective of human vices and follies. Satires are the jokes about serious things. Satirist, like Ironist, says one thing and means another. Satirists present one thing or situation under the garb of another which may appear ridiculous at surface. A satirist, though he jokes and makes the reader laugh, tries to reveal human vice and folly. Satirists declare that their truth is what people do want to hear. While tracing the history of satire back to the ancient time, we find two main concepts prevailing; one is not to cure but to wound, to punish, to destroy, and the other is to warn and cure. The first type of satirists believes that the rascality is triumphant in the world, and is pessimistic. These misanthropic satirists look at life and find it, not tragic, not comic, but ridiculously contemptible and nauseatingly hateful. Gilbert Highet draws the distinctions between pessimistic and optimistic satirists and their writings: "the misanthropic satirist believe it (evil) is rooted in man's nature and the structure of society. Nothing can eliminate or cure it.

Man, or the particular gang of miserable manikins who are under his scrutiny, deserves only scorn and hatred.... the satirist is close to the tragedian" (235).

There have been common and widespread practices of satirical writings. Gilbert Highett's oversimplification on history of satire is: "most of us are apt to think that the history of satire begins with the Romans of Republic, continues in Latin for three centuries, and diverges into Greek with Lucian" (35). Highett sees it as one of the most original, challenging and memorable forms of literature, and says "it has been practiced by some energetic minds- Voltaire, Rabelais, Petronius, and Swift; by some exquisitely graceful stylists- Pope, Horace, Aristophanes; and occasionally, as paragon, by some great geniuses- Lucretius, Goethe, Shakespeare" (1).

Satire is a free and, very often, easy pattern of literature which pictures real men and women, often in lurid colors, but always with unforgettable clarity. It is one of the best forms of literature to attack human vice and folly in a disguise. Satires help in revealing the bitter truth in order to aware the people.

Gilbert Highett explains that a satire has three forms: monologues, parodies and the narratives. Whatever the form, it always deals with actual cases, mentions real people by name or unmistakably and, decries and denounces the evil. In a monologue, the satirist addresses the readers directly, and usually speaks either in his or behind a mask. He states his view of a problem, cites examples, pillories opponents and endeavors to improve his view upon the public.

Satirists always aim at revealing the bitter truths, no matter whatever motives they may have behind their works. Early experiences of life make the people view the world differently. In this regard Highett argues:

In fact, most satirists seem to belong one of two main classes. Either they were bitterly disappointed early in life, and see the world as a permanent structure of injustice; or they are happy men of overflowing energy and vitality, who see the rest of mankind as poor ridiculous puppets only half-alive, flimsy fakes and meager scoundrels. (24)

Satirists wish to stigmatize crime or ridicule folly. Satirists mock errant individuals and the folly of society, the purpose of satirical works is that it presents a picture of people in society, and by exaggerating or distorting the picture draw attention to how people often act in an outrageous or absurd manner. Human beings are presented as motivated by lust: lust for sex, money or power, or all three. The satirist creates a vivid and disturbing impression of a society that has lost its sense of responsible values.

Satire is obviously a form of comic writing, but the distinction between satire and comedy is that, whereas the satirist wishes to correct conduct; comedy takes the view that all human conduct is absurd and self-interested. It is non-fictional and is enlivened by wit, humor paradox, word-play, and other decorations. It appears to be perfectly spontaneous. In *A Modest Proposal*, Jonathan Swift states his views of the problem of the poor children in Ireland and satirically forwards a solution to it.

Irony is another major associate of humor. The origin of irony goes back to the Greek comedy. In Greek comedy some characters who are less intelligent, in pretension, would say one thing and meaning the opposite. There is no intention to deceive or cheat but to gain special artistic effect. There may be similarities between irony and satire but all ironies are not satire. However, satires are often stable ironies. Irony, unlike, satire does not work in the inherent of stability. The ironists do not pretend to cure such as a universal or to solve its mysteries. It is satires that solve.

Irony, as dictionaries tell us, is saying one thing and meaning the opposite. For Wayne C. Booth, we have "Irony is usually seen as something that undermines certainties, opens up vistas of chaos, and either liberates by destroying all dogma or destroys by revealing the inescapable canker of negation at the heart of affirmation. It is thus, subject that arouses passions" (Preface ix)

It is a term which means the opposite of what it says. Dramatic irony is a term whose significance is perceived by the audience or reader but not by the actors or characters in the story. We know more than the characters on the stage or in the novel know. We see that they are going to encounter problems because their perception of the facts is inadequate. Situational irony depends upon a discrepancy between how characters see a situation and the true nature of the situation.

It is common in satire writing. Dryden, Swift, Pope, and Johnson are the satiric writers who adopt an ironic stance. Swift is often praised as the finest ironist in English. As in his *A modest Proposal* (1729) he seems to advocate the eating of babies as a method of population control in Ireland. Swift often uses ironic persona, an invented narrator who is snug, self-confident or foolish. Therefore "ironic persona" is used to express all manner of foolish social ideas and prejudices. Satirists are disturbed by the fact the people can be so foolish. Irony is common in novels which often feature people who take themselves terribly seriously, but the narrator, adopting an ironic manner in which he or she seems to take them seriously too, will often be laughing at the characters. The point is that for these characters their predicaments are serious, but viewed from another angle their lives are absurd. In satire irony serves to ridicule the follies of the world. Irony, in novels and plays, is often used to reveal the inadequacy of the character's view or grasp of events. A reader is able to see the full

play of events and make aware of the complex nature of life where all views are partial or faulty.

Another trait of black humor is absurdity. Due to the devastating effects of the great world wars, futility and worthlessness crowded human rationality. The world wars brought the widespread feeling of despair and separation from the established order. The certainties and scientific outlook that ruled the previous century were broken into fragments. The old concepts like Unity, Christianity, Rationality, and Objectivity failed to satisfy people's curiosity. Uncertainty, anxiety, despair, and human alienation ruled the fragmented world. As writers are the representatives of the society, many of the contemporary writers began to oppose the doctrines that view man as the manifestation of an absolute value. They saw the world totally absurd and so inexplicable in terms of human rationality and scientific logic. This feeling of an existence without justification became the main proposition of Twentieth Century. Existentialist philosophers examined European civilization that failed and was at the verge of destruction. According to these philosophers, man is free of routine and conventions; he is laid bare and face to face with his own destiny. They draw attention to the risk, the void of human reality and speak of humans having to exist in a world where pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malaise, and death dictate. This strong feeling of alienation was the result of post war thought especially of Nietzsche's metaphor of "the death of God", the total negation of transcendental God as the source of absolute control and the values relating to him. Now, man is, therefore, a deserted animal in the godless, absurd, and overwhelming universe.

As science made the world more complex and inexplicable, the only predictable truth is the world is absurd and unintelligible. Camus finds the human condition synonymous to that of Corinthian king Sisyphus that he described in *The*

Myth of Sisyphus. Camus reached to the conclusion to declare the condition of man absurd when he realized that the speculative systems of past provided no reliable guidance for life or guaranteed any foundation of human values. Camus argues that humanity has to resign itself to recognizing that a fully satisfying rational explanation of the universe is beyond its reach; thus the world must ultimately be seen as absurd. To clarify the concept of absurd Camus says that This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what are absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together.

In the above concept of absurd, we are faced on the one hand with man, who wants to find reason and unity in the universe, and on the other hand with the universe, that provides him with nothing but mute and meaningless phenomena. As such, the absurd does not exist either in man or in the universe, but in the confrontation between the two. We are only faced with the absurd when we take both our needs for answers and the world's silence together. The absurd is the relationship that links these two basic facts. It is absurd that I should expect the universe to have a meaning when the universe itself is so resolutely silent. Because the absurd is the relationship that links the only two basic facts we can know for certain, Camus asserts that the absurd is our fundamental relationship with the world. The absurd is a fundamental truth and Camus takes it as duty to follow out its logic.

According to him, the absurd man is amoral (which is not to say that he is immoral). Either morality comes from God or it is invented by humans in order to justify certain kinds of behavior. The absurd man can not believe in God, and he has no need of justification. He is guided only by his own integrity, and integrity does not

need to be guided by a moral code. Because he is free from morality, and thus from the concepts of guilt or wrong-doing, Camus describes the absurd man as "innocent".

From afore mentioned framework of these aspects of the associates of black humor the novel will be analyzed and interpreted.

III. Black Humour in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

It is important to look at the historical context in which the book was written before analyzing the book. On the nights of February 13 in 1944 the city of Dresden, Germany was subjected to one of the worst air attacks in the history of man. By the end of the bombing 135,000 to 250,000 people had been killed by combined forces of the United States and the United Kingdom. Dresden was different than Berlin or many of the other military targets which were attacked during the World War II. Because it was never fortified and therefore, was not considered a military target. Thousands of refugees from all over Europe converged on Dresden for protection because of its apparent safety. Dresden's neutrality was broken and the resulting attacks laid waste. Kurt Vonnegut was a witness to this event and because of fate, had been spared.

Vonnegut was tormented by the attacks and through Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he attempts to reconcile the guilt which one feels when one is randomly saved from death while one's friends and loved ones perish. Billy Pilgrim's own life is spared, but he is never able to live with himself knowing that so many others have died. The feelings of guilt which emerges from his having survived the bombing of Dresden and from Billy's fortunate escape from death under the shelters of the fifth Slaughterhouse haunted Billy through much of his life. Billy Pilgrim does not consider his survival a blessing, but a curse. A curse is to be forced to live with the guilt of survival. Billy Pilgrim faces such tremendous guilt, that he spends his entire life after the bombing of Dresden trying to alleviate himself of it. His guilt is in many ways comparable to the guilt felt by the survivors of the holocaust. Many holocaust survivors were able to reconcile their feelings of guilt or put it out of their minds. This solution is never viable for Billy Pilgrim. Billy's guilt makes life so unbearable that he could no longer live with himself and he rejected the life that has

been granted to him. There is no answer to Billy's question because it was not in logical nor is it just. One could never give justification for the fortuitous slaughtering of the innocent, which claimed the lives of Dresden's inhabitants. This idea is exemplified in the secondary title Slaughterhouse-Five is known by, The Children's Crusade. The Children's Crusade was one of the many Christian "Holy" wars which aimed on destroying the Muslim people. The Children's Crusade was really a ploy by entrepreneurs to sell Christian children into slavery. Thousands of children were killed on ships on the way to the slave market and many others were sold, never to be seen again.

Vonnegut gives the children's "Crusade" as an example of the atrocities and inhumane acts which transpire with the help of war. That is why Billy Pilgrim invents a world where a justification can be given, where life and death are meaningless and feelings of guilt disappear. He creates a new world where he can be free from his guilt. That world is called Tralfamador. The Tralfamadorian world provides Billy Pilgrim with the escape that he needs from his guilt. The Tralfamadorian people are not locked in a three dimensional realm. They are not locked in the frames of time which the human world is forced to live in. Tralfamadorians can "shift" through time as seamlessly as humans can walk towards a point. This ability allows them to focus on the pleasant moments in the history of the universe and ignore the aspects of time they dislike. The guilt of Billy's being saved is reconciled by eliminating the existence of a past, present and future. Since any fraction of time is accessible in the Tralfamadorian world, death is just a tiny part of existence that is ignored like the fire bombing of Dresden. Billy Pilgrim reinvents himself and his universe to gain purpose in his guilt ridden life.

Billy is taken by a Tralfamadorian ship to be an exhibit of a human being in a Tralfamadorian Zoo. On Tralfamadore, Billy is exposed to an entire new way of thinking which neutralizes the “why me?” question. In the Tralfamadorian view of the universe guilt does not exist because in their view one is not responsible for one’s actions. Whatever will or has happened will always happen and did always happen. There is no way to change the course of events everything is predetermined. Billy is told by the Tralfamadores that: “Today we do [have peace] on other days we have wars as horrible as any you’ve ever seen or read about. 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” (117).

The Tralfamadorians even know when and who will destroy the universe, yet they make no attempt to stop it because in their eyes it cannot be stopped. Billy, by accepting the Tralfamadorian view, frees himself from the guilt which one feels when one is locked in time and responsible for one’s actions. Billy pilgrim grasps the Tralfamadorian philosophy and insists the Tralfamadorian world exists because it eliminates the “why me?” question. Guilt is a feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime wrong; a feeling of culpability. Under the Tralfamadorian outlook Billy Pilgrim does not have to feel remorse for being saved because that is how it was and always will happen. He does not have to feel guilt or remorse because there is no reason to. There is nothing that can be done about war and death, “they are as easy to stop as glaciers” (Vonnegut 3). The death of all those innocent people could not be stopped, it was predetermined by some unknown force just as the universe, by a Tralfamadorian testing a new fuel, is also predetermined and unstoppable.

Vonnegut uses irony by having Billy Pilgrim as an Optometrist, whose job is to help others see the world more clearly with greater acuity and sensitivity. Billy’s

job is to prescribe 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 (125). Billy by accepting the tralfamadorian view of the world frees himself from the metal sphere and from his guilt. Before he was introduced to the Tralfamadorian viewpoint he believed in crusading against war and the death of the innocent and felt guilty and upset when another human's life was blindly taken. Although Billy finds peace in many positive aspects of the Tralfamadorian mind-set, there also exist many negatives to his new vision. Many aspects of Billy's life, which is new vision, are clearly outlined in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. For example, whenever there is a tragic death or an entire city is destroyed Billy says what all Tralfamadorians say "so it goes". Billy does not feel remorse or anger when he hears of the war in Vietnam because it is just a frame in time which has is and always will happen. Just as the universe will be destroyed by the Tralfamadorians but no attempt is made to stop it. At one point in the novel Billy sees a war movie in reverse, he describes it as follows:

The formation flew backwards over a German city that was in flames. The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires, gathered them into cylindrical steel containers and lifted the containers into the bellies of the planes. The containers were stored in neatly sacks. When the bombers got back to their base, the steel cylinders were taken from the racks and shipped back to the United States of America where factories were operating night and day, dismantling the cylinders, separating the dangerous contents ... so they would never hurt any body ever again. (74-5)

Vonnegut has used this imagery to dramatize effectively the cruelty of bombing.

Billy is told that war, disease, and even the end of the universe is all pre-determined and that nothing he does can change what will happen. His acceptance of the Tralfamadorian world has freed him from his guilt but it has also freed him from “living”. On his tombstone it is written “everything was beautiful and nothing hurt”. Although this message on the surface would seem perfect, it in reality points to the short comings of Billy’s life. One can not enjoy life and happiness, if he has no feelings and lacks all remorse. Billy Pilgrim has full knowledge of why, when and where he will be murdered, yet he does nothing about it. While this could be looked at as an acceptance of the Tralfamadorian way of life, it also points to the fact that Billy does not want to stop it because life offers him nothing.

The novel is based on the main character named Billy Pilgrim who is always traveling to different parts of his life and rarely in the present state. Throughout the book Billy mainly travels back and forth to three big times in his life. In each different time period of Billy’s life he is in a different place. In the present state, he is in a town called Illium and his “travels” are to Dresden and Tralfamadore. When Billy is in Illium he is supposed to have a “normal”; he is married has two children, and works as an optometrist. Then Billy travels to Tralfamadore he is in an “imaginary” state, everything that happens to him is more like a dream. Through Billy’s travels in time he shows that he is striving to find meaning in the events that happened in his life that he is afraid to acknowledge. As Billy says “all moments past, present and future always have existed, always will exist” (27). This just proves even further that fact that Billy cannot ever forget any event in his life.

The main event that leads Billy to all his confusion is the times he spent in Dresden and witnessed the fire bombing that constantly appear in head along with pictures of all the innocent people Billy saw that fled to Dresden the “safe spot” from

the war before the bombing. When Billy sees the faces of the innocent children it represents his fear of the situation. Billy can't acknowledge the fact that they were innocent and they were killed by Americans. Americans soldiers just like him. Billy can not come to know why the bombings took place during all Billy's travels to Dresden he couldn't change what had really happened there although that was the closure he was looking for Dresden represents Billy's past and fears of the truth about what happened.

It is absurd that Billy can time-travel, but he can not control where or when he will travel to. The narrator says: "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"(27). R. Kent Rasmussen views the novel as absurd and analyses that "Drawing on Vonnegut's own experiences as a prisoner of war in Dresden Germany, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an absurdist time travel story in which mild mannered Billy Pilgrim is jerked back and forth between past and future" (May 2007).

Billy's everyday "normal" life in Illium, little things reminded him of Dresden. For instance, one day Billy was driving down the road and it was a scene of desolation and Billy thought, "It looked like Dresden after it was bombed like the surface of the moon" (2). Illium also reminds Billy of the war because Billy's wife died there and death brings him tears, tears that go back to Dresden and all the deaths that happened in Dresden. Billy often finds himself "weeping instead of sleeping" (3), which doesn't allow Billy to be happy and proper in Illium. Even though Billy was born in Illium and grew up there, got married there, raised his children there, he still can not live there in the present because his present is his past in so many ways.

When Billy travels to his “imaginary” state he travels to place called Tralfamadore. In Tralfamadore Billy meets these creatures that are called Tralfamadorians, “they were two feet high, and green ... their suction cups were on the ground, and their shafts, which were extremely flexible, usually pointed to the sky” (4) . Tralfamadore is like traveling to the future for Billy who is trying to get far away from his past as he can. In his head Billy has made this place an “ideal society”, the Tralfamadorians have knowledge, insight and belief that are stunning and though provoking; when a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in a bad condition in that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments” (5). This is just an example of how stunning the Tralfamadorians beliefs are. When Billy talks about Tralfamadore he says, “The most important thing I learned on Tralfamadore was that when a person dies he only appears to die. He is still very much alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral” (6).

The incidents what Billy saw during his six months on the battlefield and in Dresden as a prisoner still dominates his life. He has no escape, past, present, future, Dresden; Dresden will always exist in every moment of time Billy travels through. Billy’s prescription for dealing with time is not dealing with it at all. He has way to deal with it he is “unstuck in time, in 1994, when World War II was in progress” (7) he is spastic in time and no prescription to cure it. As Billy Continues to travel from time to time and place to place he will continue to strive to find the meaning of the events that happened in his life that he is still afraid to acknowledge.

After witnessing the firebombing of Dresden, Billy Pilgrim can not find a way to cope with the death and destruction, so he creates the “Tralfamadorians”. Susane Ve-

Gulani, one of the major critics, focuses on the "psychiatric approach" of the novel through which he claims:

Vonnegut's writing of *Slaughterhouse-Five* can be seen as a therapeutic process that allows him to uncover and deal with his trauma. By using creative means to overcome his distress, Vonnegut makes it possible for us to trace his path to recovery. We slowly narrow in on his condition using the novel as a conduit first to the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, then to the narrator, and finally to the author Himself. (175)

The Tralfamadorians are an alien species that Billy claims his abduct. The Tralfamadorians can see time in a completely different way than humans. They see an entire event instead of individual moments like humans. Tralfamadorians have seen the beginning and end of the universe. They describe this ability to Billy as looking at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains instead of a small pebble of it. With this new knowledge of time the Tralfamadorians give Billy the ability to become "unstuck" in time. This means that Billy is free to travel to any point in his life at any time without control.

Humour becomes very black because the preface asserts the fact that the book will be about war however it is silly and informal and a run-on sentence. The narrator confesses he smokes too much and talks about bringing up the fantastic subject of flying saucers:

...A FOURTH GENERATION GERMAN – AMERICAN
 NOW LIVING IN EASY CIRCUMSTANCES
 ON CAPE COD

[AND SMOKING TOO MUCH],
WHO, AS AN AMERICAN INFANTRY SCOUT
HORS DE COMBAT,
AS A PRISONER OF WAR,
WITNESSED THE FIRE-BOMBING
OF DRESDEN, GERMANY,
“THE FLORENCE OF THE ELBE”,
A LONG TIME AGO,
AND SURVIVED TO TELL THE TALE,
THIS IS A NOVEL
SOMEWHAT IN THE TELEGRAPHIC SCHIZOPHRENIC
MANNER OF TALES
OF THE PLANET TRALFAMADORE,
WHERE THE FLYING SAUCERS
COME FROM,
PEACE

At the beginning of the chapter I the narrator assures that it is a real story about the war parts. He goes back to Dresden where he has been kept as a prisoner years ago. It looked like Dayton, Ohio and the narrator thinks there must be lots of human bone meal in the ground. The narrator goes back with his war buddy Bernard V. Hare to the slaughterhouse where they were kept as prisoners of war. They talk with the cab driver, Gerhard Muller, who had been a prisoner of the Americans. He said it was

hard to live under communism “because everybody had to work so hard and there wasn’t much shelter or food or clothing” (1) but things were better now. His mother was killed in the bombing of Dresden. At this moment the narrator says, “So it goes”. Here the writer has presented the death of cab drivers mother in humorous way.

Amidst the discussion of the death of the cab driver’s mother and the hard times under communism, the narrator wants to write about Dresden and make a lot of money of it. Humorously he again thinks of a lewd, funny limerick about an old man and his member:

There was a young man from stamboul,
 Who soliloquized this to his tool;
 “You took all my wealth
 And you ruined my health,
 And now you won’t *pee*, you old fool.” (2)

In addition, the narrator remembers a playful song:

My name is Yon Yonson,
 I work in Wisconsin,
 I work in a lumbermilt there.
 The people I meet when I walk down the street,
 they say, “What’s your name?”
 And I say,
 “My name is Yon Yonson,
 I work in Wisconsin...” (3)

The narrator is ready to research the Dresden book and looks up Bernard o' Hare's phone number. He jokes that he has a disease involving a telephone and alcohol, in which he gets drunk and tracks down old friends. The narrator thinks "the climate of the book will be the execution of poor old Edgar Derby." (4-5). Here the great irony is that in 1945, allied firebombing of Dresden killed more than 135000 civilians, however, the climax occurs not with the bombing of Dresden but with the firing squad of an American foot soldier (Edgar Derby) who commits a petty theft of teapot: "The irony is so great that a whole city gets burned down, and thousands and thousands of people are killed. And then this one American foot soldier is arrested in the ruins for taking a teapot. And he's given a regular trial, and then he's shot by a firing squad" (5).

Narrator addresses his publisher Seymour (Sam) Lawrence directly:

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, except for the bird. And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like "*Poo-tec-weet?*" (19)

He seems to apologize for delivering such a short, fragmented manuscript. The irony of this passage is that if there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre, then writing a book about one, no matter how short is a major accomplishment. Perhaps like birdsong, the book merely serves as a simple communication demonstrating that life still exists in a devastated world. The bird's inquisitive refrain returns in the very last line of the novel, leaving us with the unanswered question of what life is like in the unanswered question of what life is like in the aftermath of war which is life most

devastating enemy. “As an Earthling, I had to believe what over clocks said – and calendars “(20). It is ridiculous that the narrator has to believe in clocks and calendars since he is an earthling. He misses his plane to Germany and says the night passed slowly because someone was playing with the clocks so that a year would pass each time second hand moves. However he could do nothing because he is an earthling.

At the end of the chapter I, the narrator assures that he has finished his war book then. Now he is going to write the next one that will be fun. “I’ve finished my war book now. The next one, I write is going to be fun” (22). Although he affirms to write fun, there are death, destruction, insanity, cruelty and pain portrayed in humorous and satirical manner from chapter II onwards.

Billy as a Timetraveler

Billy is the protagonist and central character on whom the whole emphasis of the book is placed. The novel is really about four sides of Billy’s life. 1) His past life as a soldier in world war II, 2) his present uneventful life as a husband father, and optometrist in Ilium, new York, 3) his time travels that take him into the past and into the future; and 4) his life as a prisoner on the distance planet of Tralfamadore. Of the four parts of Billy’s life the greatest emphasis in the novel is placed on his life as a soldier for it dominates both his past and his present.

The main character, Billy Pilgrim, is introduced in the second chapter; and a chronological summary of his earthly life is given. Explanations are given about his childhood, his time in the army, and his career as an optometrist. There is also an explanation of his head injury. Billy was in an airplane crash in 1968, wounding his head in the accident. In the same year, his wife dies, further complicating his life. After her death, Billy goes public on the radio about coming unstuck in time. He also

writes to the newspaper about being kidnapped by aliens. His daughter feels that his head injury has made him senile permanently. She threatens to place him in an old folks' home. Therefore, there is nothing extraordinary about his growing up or youth. In fact, there is never anything extra ordinary about Billy until he becomes unstuck in time. Now he claims he has also been kidnapped by aliens. Since Billy's public claims about time-travel and aliens occur after his plane crash, the people around him especially his daughter believe his fantastic stories, are caused by brain damage from the head injury he sustained in the crash.

In black humor characters are often simple and innocent. Bill's name is a symbol of his innocence. Vonnegut has used the child's form, "Billy" rather than "William". In addition, his last name "Pilgrim" has symbolic significance. He is on a journey, and "pilgrim" here strongly intimates innocence. Although he is a soldier, he is more like a naive traveler than a warrior or hardened ascetic and not a conventional war hero. Vonnegut makes Billy weak, fearful, incompetent, and mentally unstable. He refuses to glorify war by creating a glamorous hero; instead, he presents us Billy.

Billy first comes unstuck in time in 1944, during World War II. He is behind enemy lines with three other Americans. As they "try to make their way to safety, Billy is too weak to go. However one of the other Americans, Roland Weary, bullies him along. As he painfully moves, he begins to time travel to his past and to this future. Billy is moving so slowly that two of the soldiers, the scouts, leave Billy and Roland behind, fearing the approach of the enemy. Ironically, the scouts are killed while Billy and Roland survived. Still Roland is angry and blames Billy for causing the scouts to leave. Therefore, Roland starts hitting him. He then realizes that they are being watched by German soldiers. It is irony that the arrival of the German soldier,

the enemy, saves Billy from further mistreatment by Weary. In other words Billy is rescued from his American compatriot by the enemy:

It was entirely Billy's fault that this fighting organization no longer existed, Weary felt, and Billy was going to pay ... knocked Billy away from the bank ... Weary kicked him in the ribs, rolled him over on his side ... 'you shouldn't even be in the Army, said Weary ... But then Weary saw that he had an audience, five German soldiers and a police dog on a leash were looking down, into the bed of the creek. The soldiers' blue eyes were filled with on bleary civilian curiosity as to why one American would try to murder another one so far from home and why the victim should laugh. (51)

The most dominant characteristic of Billy's personality is his passivity. He quietly takes whatever life hands him, without question or complaint. It never occurs to him to fight against fate or to struggle to make a situation more tolerable. When Roland Weary, a fellow soldier, mistreats him during the war, he does not resist or fight back. Neither does he hate Roland.

In addition, when he knows he is to be kidnapped by aliens and taken to another planet as a prisoner, he goes out into the garden to meet the aliens and boards their flying saucer without resistance. When they imprison him in a zoo for observation, he makes no attempt to run away. He allows himself to be imprisoned and displayed naked in the zoo. He listens and absorbs the Tralfamadorian philosophies without a question. When Montana Wildhack (female Character) is brought from earth to be his mate, he accepts her without hesitation and has a child with her.

One of the most irony in the novel is the time when Montana is seen nursing her infant. This maternal image is effectively juxtaposed next to a scene of total destruction in Dresden.

Billy is a simple and harmless person who seems to merely exists, with little will of his own. Even when things happen to him that he does not like, he refuses to arrest himself. During the war, he allowed Roland to bully him along. When he time travels, , he has no input as to whether he goes, when he goes, or for how long he goes. As a result, Billy seems to be a weak character who is at the mercy of the powerful force that surround him and over which he has no control:

Roland Weary and the scouts were safe in a ditch, and weary grow land at Billy, “get out of the road, you dumb motherfucker.” The last word was still a novelty in the speech of white people in 1944. it was fresh.....’saved your life again, you dumb bastard, weary said to Billy in the ditch. He had been saving Billy’s life for days, cursing him, kicking him, slapping him, malting him move. It was.....because Billy would not do anything to save himself. (34)

As the novel proceeds, another humorous situation appears. We know from Billy’s stories on the radio program that he is in fantastic and nightmarish world. This is a Tralfamadore from where a flying saucer lands and kidnaps him ... he had been kidnapped by a flying saucer in 1967. The saucer was from the planet Tralfamadore he said. He was taken to Tralfamadore, where he was displayed naked in a zoo, he said. He was mated there with a former earthling movie star named Montana Wildhack. (25) Billy talks about his kidnapping by the Tralfamadorians on the night of his daughter wedding. He describes the creatures of the Tralfamorians as two foot tall toilet plungers with tiny little hand and advanced knowledge:

...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 painted to the sky, at the top of each shaft was a little hand with a green eye in its palm. The creatures were friendly, and they could see in four dimension. They pitied earthlings for being able to see only three. They had many wonderful things to teach earthlings, especially about time. (26)

The novel begins as he announces, it is clearly shown, that Billy is in a ridiculous situation having come unstuck in time, he went to bed a senile widower in 1955 and woke up on his wedding day in 1941. Although he can time travel, he has no control over where or when he will go and trips are not always pleasant. "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" (23)

It is funny to know that Billy has observed his birth and death many times and visits randomly to all the events in between. Moreover he is described as "a funny looking child who became a funny-looking youth tall and weak, and shaped like a bottle of coca-cola" (23). Furthermore there are accounts that force the reader to laugh and deal with in many ways the sense of absurdity in life. For example Vonnegut characterized Billy, the central character as a ridiculous and mindless figure. Through Billy's time traveling experiences a disordered and chaotic view of life is presented as a reflection of the real life situation. In one instance, an extremely drunk, Billy Pilgrim is searching desperately for the steering wheel of his car: "He was in the backseat of his car, which is why he couldn't find the steering wheel" (47). This is a comical scene in the novel.

In another situation Billy's daughter Barbara, who is only twenty-one years old feels always worried because of effect in his brain in the airplane crash. She also thinks that she should take all the responsibilities of the family. At this time the narrator place fun at Barbara by calling her a bitchy flibbertigibbet and saying she has legs like an Edwardian grand piano:

Barbara was only twenty-one years old but she thought her father was smile, even though he was only forty-six senile because of damage to his brain in the airplane crash. She also thought that she was head of the family, since she had had to manage her mother's funeral, since she had to get a house keeper for Billy, and all that. Also Barbara ... all this responsibility at such an early age made her a bitchy flibbertigibbet ... this was a fairly pretty girl, except that she had legs like an Edwardian grand piano. (28-9)

In the third chapter, Billy and Roland are taken prisoners by the Germans. They are locked up with other captured American soldiers. During his imprisonment, Billy finds himself traveling in time and visiting many scenes from his future. When he returns from his time traveling, he finds himself being marched along with thousands of other prisoners. He then travels again to his future where he finds himself prosperous and respected. In spite of his success, Billy is very depressed and apathetic about life in those future visions. Returning to reality, Billy finds that all the prisoners are being locked into trains. They are then taken interior from where he is captured by a flying saucer from Tralfamadore:

Billy Pilgrim's train the longest train of all, did not move for two days ... its box cars were kept locked tight. Nobody was to get off until the final destination to the guards who walked up and down outside each

car became a single organism which ate and drank and excreted through its ventilators. It talked or sometimes yelled through its ventilators, too.

(69)

The Germans who capture Billy and Roland are portrayed as weak men, not the invincible, omnipotent enemy that Americans imagine them to be. Throughout the novel, Vonnegut tries to convey the message that the enemy is also human, and humans are vulnerable and imperfect, whether they are Germans or Americans. He also makes it obvious that war is an unnatural state of existence that dehumanizes people. This is clear in the description of the captured Americans who lose their individuality and their will to resist. Focusing only on survival, the prisoners become totally passive. The enemy is also dehumanized by treating the captured men as inanimate objects.

Before Billy and Roland are taken to prison, Billy, along with two infantry scouts and a antitank gunner Roland Weary, have been separated from their platoon and are alone in enemy territory. In contrast to the two scouts, who are quiet and swiftly moving through the forest weary and Billy are loud and clumsy. Ironically the talented, trained scouts are killed by the Germans, whereas Billy and Weary are spared and merely taken as prisoners of war:

Three inoffensive bangs came from far away. They came from German rifles. The two scouts who had ditched Billy and Weary had just been shot. They had been laying in ambush for Germans. They had been discovered and shot from behind. Now they were dying in the snow, feeling no. thing, turning the snow to the color of raspberry sherbet. So it goes. So Roland Weary was the last of the Three Musketeers. (54)

Here the simplicity and innocence in the description of the tragic ends of the scouts are told in simple sentence. The endings of lives, especially, that of comrades can not be characterized as “inoffensive”.

The chapter begins on a note of irony. At the end of the last chapter, a frustrated Roland Weary is seen hitting Billy for moving so slowly and causing the scouts to leave. Ironically, the arrival of the German soldiers, the enemy, saves Billy from further mistreatment by Roland. In other words, Billy is rescued from his American compatriot by the enemy.

As an escape from the unpleasantness of imprisonment, Billy begins time-travel involuntarily. In his future, he sees himself falling asleep at work. This action reveals his tendency to escape from anything unpleasant. It is fantastic that in his time-travelling, he sees himself as a rich, prosperous, and respected man.

In the fourth chapter, the night after his daughter’s wedding in 1967, Billy gets up out of bed, unable to sleep. He knows that the flying saucer will come for him soon:

Billy Pilgrim could not sleep on his daughter’s wedding night. He ... shuffled down his hallway, knowing he was about to be kidnapped by a flying saucer ... went into his daughter’s room. Her drawers were dumped. Her closet was empty. Heaped in the middle of her room were all the possessions she could not take on a honeymoon. She had a princess telephone extension all her own- on her windowsill. Its tiny night light stared at Billy. And then it rang. Billy answered. There was a drunk on the other end. Billy could almost smell his breath- mustard gas and roses. It was a wrong number. Billy hung up. (72-3)

This shows that Billy wanders into his daughter's empty bedroom, the phone rings, and on the other end is a drunk. It is unusual that Billy claims he can almost smell the mustard gas and roses on his breath over the phone. This detail emerges through a kind of empathy that seems to connect unrelated moments in the omniscient narration. We, the readers, recognize this drunk from chapter one : he is the author, Kurt Vonnegut, who in his middle age has a tendency to make drunken phone calls late at night to old girlfriends, his breath stinking of mustard gas and roses. The odd combination of mustard gas, often used as a chemical weapon, and roses, a symbol of romance, highlights how deeply the war has affected Vonnegut's life.

In addition black humor is clearly shown in the following details in which Billy is able to reverse the late movie so that the bloody and violent war turns into an ideal and naïve fantasy where bombers suck up fire and shrapnel and everyone reverts to paradise and the two perfect people, Adam and Eve:

He came slightly unstuck in time, saw the late movie backwards, then forwards again. It was a movie about American bombers in the Second World War and the gallant man who flew them ... The bombers opened their bomb bay doors... 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, and all humanity, without exception, conspired biologically to produce two perfect people named Adam and Eve he supposed. (73-5)

Moreover, before the flying saucer presents itself, Billy is aware that it will arrive and take him away on the night of his daughter's wedding. But he does absolutely nothing

to prevent it from happening. He simply allows events to happen to him with no resistance on his part.

The cruelty and dehumanization has been presented in the chapter. As Billy time-travels back to the war, he sees the mistreatment that the American prisoners receive at the hands of the Germans. In a dehumanizing process, they are intentionally treated like a herd of cattle, and like unthinking animals with no free will, they do as they are told that they are imprisoned psychologically as well as physically.

After falling asleep in the chapter saucer, he finds himself traveling back in time to the war. He is in a boxcar crossing Germany with Roland Weary, who is dying of gangrene. Roland accuses Billy of killing him. Billy and the other captured Americans are brought to a German prison where they are deloused and given used overcoats. Here, the irony is that one of the Americans, Paul Lazzaro, warns Billy that he will make him pay for Roland's death.

According to Billy, he has been to Tralfamadore many times, he claims that he was first kidnapped by a flying saucer on a clear night in 1967 – nineteen years after he first encountered Kilgore Trout's fiction in the psychiatric ward: "The saucer was from the planet Tralfamadore, [Billy] said, he was taken to Tralfamadore where he was displayed naked in a zoo, he said, he was mated there with a former earthling movie star named Montana Wildhack" (32). Throughout the novel, it is unclear whether Billy was abducted by a flying saucer or whether he was lost his mind. In 1969, near the end of the novel, a Kilgore Trout novel catches Billy's eyes on the window of a New York adult bookshop, he quickly enters the shop and begins inspecting the novel. At this point, Vonnegut breaks into the narrations "He got a few paragraphs into it, and then he realized that he had read it before – years ago, in the veterans' hospital. It was about an Earthling man and an Earthling woman who were

kidnapped by extraterrestrials. They were put on display in a zoo on a planet called Zircon"(81).

Comparing the description of Billy's abduction with the plot of Trout's *The Big Board* makes it clear that Tralfamadore is nothing more than a product of Billy's mind. He first read the novel in the veterans' hospital in 1948 – during the spring of his reinvention. As a result, he created Tralfamadore as a way of escaping his troubled past. In that light, his Tralfamadorian existence must be approached as an escape mechanism grounded in mental instability but fueled by Troutean science fiction.

Tralfamadorians see the stars as luminous spaghetti. They can see where each star has been and where it is going. Humans have thousands of legs, from babies' to old people. The narrator says, "The creatures can see where each star has been and where it is going, so that the heavens are filled with rarefied, luminous spaghetti. And tralfamadorians don't see human beings as two-legged creatures, either. They see them as great millipedes" (87). Further Billy Pilgrim says, "With babies legs at one end and old people's legs at the other" (87).

At the beginning of the chapter 5, one of Billy's captors explains the Tralfamadorian novel to him. It seems that Vonnegut has taken this template as a model for *Slaughterhouse- Five*, down to the rows of asterisks or dots separating short clumps of text. The irony of such a strategy is that Vonnegut, like Billy, lacks the Tralfamadorian ability to pick and choose his moments. Vonnegut thus considers his book a failure of sorts, because he has achieved the Tralfamadorian structure without its accompanying depth and beauty, and because he has come up with nothing more intelligent or deep to say about a massacre than "*poo- tee- weet*". Most readers would argue, however, that Vonnegut has actually succeeded in making a thing of great beauty out of collection of tragic moments:

There isn't any particular relationship between 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 marvelous moments seen all at one time. (88)

Billy was then flung back to when he was twelve years old, visiting the rim of the Grand Canyon. He was sure, he would fall in. His mother touched him and he wet his pants (89). Moreover the coat that the Germans give Billy is ridiculous. It is made for a small monkey, with fur collar like a dead animal. He found himself back in the war. The shower was over. Billy got his clothes back. His coat was about the right size for an organ grinder's monkey and it was full of bullet holes. He tried to put on and it split. The flare that was supposed to happen at the waist happened at Billy's armpits. The Germans found screamingly funny:

When Billy got his clothes back, they weren't any cleaner, but all the little animals that had been living [...] his new overcoat was thawed out and limp now. It was much too small for Billy. It had a fur collar and a lining of crimson silk, and had apparently been made for an impresario about as big as an organ-grinder's monkey. It was full of bullet holes [...]. He put on the little overcoat, too. It split up the back, and, at the shoulders, the sleeves came entirely free. It was meant to flare at its owner's waist, but the flaring took place at Billy's armpits. The Germans found him to be one of the most screamingly funny things they had seen in all of World War Two. They laughed and laughed. (90)

An imperfection of characters in the novel is another trait of black humour. In this chapter Billy begins to lose more and more control. His time travels rush from the past to the future, and back to the past again. He travels back to the German prison, and Vonnegut gives a comparison of the British and Americans who have been captured. The British officers, who have been German prisoners for almost the entire length of the war, have eaten well and are in top physical form. In sharp contrast, the newly arrived American prisoners appear more dead than alive. The British are at first horrified over their bedraggled condition. However, they soon become contemptuous of the weak-bodied, dirty-looking, shuffling American soldiers. Although the “perfect” British look down upon the Americans as inferior beings, the reader is made to sympathize with the poor Americans, who seem real because of their imperfections.

In another situation, Billy travels back to the veteran’s hospital where he meets other ex-soldiers who, like him, also “found life meaningless, partly because of what they had seen in the war” (101). In the hospital, his fiancée, Valencia, is there. She is big as a house “because couldn’t stop eating” (107). Her rhinestone glasses matched her diamond engagement ring. Billy has found the diamond in Germany and insured it for eighteen hundred dollars. He knows he is going crazy when he hears himself proposing. She is a symptom of his disease. He sees his marriage proposal to “ugly Valencia” (107) as concrete evidence that he is going crazy. After leaving the hospital, Valencia becomes his wife.

Since the story of the novel does not flow in linear sequence, also in the chapter, Billy travels to the tralfamadore, where he again has no control over what happens to him, much like on Earth. He is placed naked in a cage and exhibited in a zoo. Eventually he is given a mate from Earth, an American movie star. When he is

asked if he is happy on Tralfamadore, he answers, “About as happy as I was on Earth” (114).

There are five genders on Tralfamadore. The differences are in the fourth dimension. Tralfamadorians told him that they had identified seven different genders on Earth, but five were only active in the fourth dimension. There could be no babies without male homosexuals, old women, and babies who had lived an hour or less.

The novel deals with a war that saw an appalling devaluation of human life, and incredible affronts to human dignity. The Holocaust is alluded to several times in this chapter, as Allied POWs unwittingly use soap and candles made from human for trying to steal a teapot. Prodded by Valencia, Billy reveals in this chapter that Derby was doped up when he was shot, barely aware of what was happening. And then of course there is Billy himself, laughed at by his German captors, insulted with the “gift” of a preposterously small coat, mentally unhinged, berated by his daughter, annoyed by his daughter, annoyed by his mother, married to a woman he does not respect, and made to parade himself naked in an alien zoo. Chapter Five shows us a parade of incidents, great and small, in which human dignity is ripped away. Put on display on Tralfamadore, Billy tells his captors honestly that he is as happy in the zoo as he was on earth. On his home world, the treatment he received was on better than the treatment he has received as a zoo specimen; in many ways, the aliens treat him better.

Billy’s death in the future is described in comic terms. From the high-powered laser beam to the Chicago hydrogen-bombed by angry Chinamen the future looks like a parody of science fiction. The comic and fantastic elements of Billy’s death and his Tralfamadorian experiences suggest that these sections should be understood in playful terms. The comic elements of the story can still instruct, but we should not

necessarily take Trafamadorian wisdom at face value. Vonnegut relieves the pressure of the novel's atrocities by pairing the tragic with the absurd. His sense of humor and imagination are defense against the world. In a similar way, Billy's escape into a science fiction world is a relief from the indignities of his real life:

Chicago has been hydrogen-bombed by angry Chinamen ... Billy predicts his own death with in an hour. He laughs about it, invites the crowd to laugh with him and says, 'It is high time I was dead many years ago, a certain man promised to have me killed. He is an old man now, living not far from here. He has read all the publicity associated with my appearance in your fair city. He is insane. Tonight he will keep his promise ... At that moment, Billy's high forehead is in the cross hairs of a high-powered laser gun. It is aimed at him from the darkened press box. In the next moment Billy Pilgrim is dead. So it goes. (142-43)

Billy's scavenged materials to keep warm leaves him dressed in his ridiculous coat, silver boots, and a red toga. He does not mean to be disrespectful when he dresses himself in the curtain and boots from the Cinderella play. He is cold and needs better shoes. He is also in a real state, mentally. The surgeon who scolds him has a certain conception of war. War is about the loss of human life, and must be dealt with respectfully. Billy should represent his country. War is not funny. But Vonnegut's depiction of war seems at odds with the surgeon's comments, and points out some of the problems with the surgeon's point of view. In the Poetics of Aristotle, Aristotle defines as art in which people are worse than they are in real life. Worse in this case means sillier, more stupid. In these terms, war is a sick comedy on a grand scale. As Vonnegut depicts it, war is darkly humorous. Billy is a buffoon, but his ridiculous

costume is no worse than the millions of other undignified things that happen in Wartime.

The people of Dresden see the pathetic, awkwardly dresses Americans as some of parade. It is a variation on the dullness of their lives as they have been during the war years. It is no more ridiculous then the British offering Americans a huge feast after they have been deprived of food for days, resulting, of course, in everyone getting the shits. It is no more ridiculous that pathetic Paul Lazarro threatening men with death or poor Edward Derby surviving the Battle of the Bulge only to be shot for trying to steal a tea pot. And we already know that Vonnegut is skeptical of the idea of representing one's country. The British behave in ways that the surgeon might respect, but there is something bombastic and hollow about their high spirits. They have hoarded food while the Russians around them starve. They call the Americans weak and dirty when these same American troops have just come in from some of the worst fighting of the war in Western Europe. In all of this, Vonnegut points out how easily human dignity can be taken away; he also questions the idea of dignity itself, and its place in conventional war narratives. Dignity has many forms, and some of these forms are of questionable value.

Irony saturates the circumstances surrounding the American POW camp in Dresden. They are told before they go that Dresden has no significant industries or military force, and so it will not be bombed. They expect to be safe. They also are staying at a slaughterhouse, but ironically, the POWs and their guards are some of the only people who are going to survive the bombing.

Kilgore Trout is a character in the novel who is the author's alter-ego, a mediocre and not very well-known science fiction writer. Billy is first introduced to his books by Eliot Rosewater, his bed-neighbor in the mental hospital he has checked

himself into in his last year of optometry school. Rosewater is an avid fan of Trout's, and writes him unintelligible letters saying he should be the President of the World. Billy ran into Trout, who was bossing around the newspaper boys who work for him, in an alley and brings him to his eighteenth wedding anniversary, where the guests are all impressed that he is a real writer. The story of abduction in one of Trout's books suspiciously closely resembles what Billy insists happened to him on Tralfamadore.

Kilgore Trout is a hit at the party, where the pretentious and wealthy people talk to him enthusiastically because they think he is a famous writer. He is talking to Maggie, the not-so-bright wife of an optometrist, when he laughs at his own joke and spits fish eggs onto her cleavage. "Kilgore Trout laughed uproariously. A salmon egg flew out of his mouth and landed in Maggie's cleavage" (172).

At the party, Trout is obnoxious, but the optometrists and their spouses are still enchanted by having an actual writer among them. A barbershop quartet sings "That Old Gang of Mine," and Billy is visibly disturbed. After giving Valencia, his wife, her gift, he flees upstairs. Lying in bed, Billy remembers the bombing of Dresden. It is funny because he recalls destruction in the celebration.

"Billy went into his bedroom, even though there were guests to be entertained downstairs. He lay down on his bed, turned on the Magic Fingers. The mattress trembled, drove a dog out from under the bed. The dog was Spot. Good old Spot was still alive in those days. Spot lay down again in a corner" (177).

We see the events as Billy remembers them. He and the other POWs, along with four of their guards, spend the night in the meat locker. The girls from the shower were being killed in a shallower shelter nearby. The POWs emerge at noon the next day into what looks like the surface of the moon. The guards gape at the destruction. They look like a silent film of a barbershop quartet.

Black humour contains tragic element. So we are at the destruction of Dresden. Although Billy often seems to bounce through life, at key points he shows the signs of serious damage. The barbershop quartet, the same one that will die on the plane, makes Billy remember the destruction of Dresden. A sentimental song about a gang of friends (the kind of gang, incidentally, of which Billy has never been a part) makes him think of the four guards looking out on their destroyed city. This is not a jump through time. This part is memory. There is a connection between the Tralfamadorian concept of time and memory; in a real sense, memory means that events in the past do continue to exist. Here, we do not see the firebombing of Dresden after one of Billy's leaps through time. He remembers it, an old man unnerved by a song, and the memory is as real as a time leap. The Tralfamadorian concept of time may teach us more than their pain-avoiding philosophy. According to the alien view, massacres that happen are always happening. Time's passage cannot get rid of them. Although Billy and the aliens choose to try to take comfort from the always-existing quality of events, Billy's near-breakdown and the return of his memories of Dresden suggest that things are not always so easy. Atrocities cannot just be ignored.

At the end of the novel, Vonnegut tells us that Robert Kennedy died last night. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated a month ago. Body counts are reported every night on the news as signs that the war in Vietnam is being won. Vonnegut's father died years ago of natural causes. He left Billy all of his guns, which rust. Billy claims that on Tralfamadore the aliens are more interested in Darwin than Jesus. Darwin, says Vonnegut, taught that death was the means to progress. Vonnegut recalls the pleasant trip he made to Dresden with his old war buddy, O'Hare. They were looking up facts about Dresden in a little book when O'Hare came across a

passage on the exploding world population. By 2000, the book predicts, the world will have a population of 7 billion people. O'Hare has a printed notebook which he gives Billy to read:

On an average, 324,000 new babies are born into the world every day. During that same day, 10,000 persons, on an average, will have starved to death or died from malnutrition. So it goes. In addition 123,000 persons will die for other reasons. So it goes. This leaves a net gain of about 191,000 each day in the world. The Population Reference Bureau predicts that the world's total population will double to 7,000,000 before the year 2000.

'I suppose they will all want dignity,' I said. 'I suppose,' said O'Hare.
(212)

The conversation with O'Hare brings up the important theme of dignity. The world's population is only getting larger, and seems as troubled as it ever has been.

Vonnegut's comment is caustic and cynical. It suggests that dignity is something that has always been hard to come by. More people in the world means that more people will be denied dignity, more people will suffer.

Vonnegut points out that "A German soldier with a flashlight went down into the darkness was gone a long time. When he finally came back, he told a superior on the rim of the hole that there were dozens of bodies down there. They were sitting on benches. They were unmarked" (214). The events Vonnegut mentions put the writer in 1968. America is involved in a new war, in which body counts are humorously reported as signs of progress. He is grounding the events of the novel in current history. He is making the link between one unnecessary massacre and another.

IV. Conclusion

Kurt Vonnegut uses a combination of dark humor and irony in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. As a result, the novel makes the reader realize the horrors of war while simultaneously laughing at some of the absurd situations it can generate. Satire and irony are freely used as a means of creating dark humour as well as attacking the atrocities of war. Vonnegut frequently uses the phrase "So it goes" after each statement of death over hundred times in the book. His purpose in doing so is to build its meaning with each incremental refrain. At first, the saying can be looked upon as funny in an ironic way. However, as one reads further, the phrase becomes irritating and irrelevant. The reader cannot understand so many deaths meaning so little. This phrase forces the reader to look at the novel's deaths one after the other.

Ultimately, the repetition creates a feeling of resentment that too many people are killed. The saying "So it goes" is a grim reminder that means exactly the opposite of what its words say. Vonnegut ends the novel with the reminder of the deaths of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and all of those that died in Vietnam. As a result, the phrase that first causes the reader to smile leaves the reader on the verge of tears. It makes all who read this novel feel powerless.

In the novel there are accounts which force the reader to laugh. In one instance, a drunkard Billy Pilgrim is searching frantically for the steering wheel of his car but he was in the backseat of his car, therefore, he was unable to find the steering wheel. In another episode, Billy becomes "unstuck" in time while watching television, so that he sees a war film backwards and then forwards. The most humorous sequence takes place when Billy travels from the zoo on Tralfamadore to his wedding night with his wife, Valencia. He wakes up to find himself in the German prison camp. He then finds himself back with Valencia after returning from the bathroom. He goes to

sleep, then wakes up on a train on the way to his father's funeral. Amidst all the death and destruction that pervades the narrative, this laughter gives a reader a sense of unease, and leaves a feel of disturbances.

Slaughterhouse-Five contains great irony as well. In his own mind, Roland Weary consistently saves Billy from death, when in fact Weary takes delight in beating Billy. The only time Billy is actually saved from Weary is when the Germans capture the two. Also, it is the good soldiers who are killed, not Billy or Weary. An instance that sickens the reader is the shooting of Edgar Derby for stealing a teapot. On the other hand, Billy gets away with keeping a diamond.

Moreover, the most bitter and profound event in the novel is the bombing of Dresden. Dresden was a culturally invaluable city which had no ties with the German war effort, yet it was bombed by the Allies as a stimulus for the Germans to surrender.

From all those points, it can be concluded that through the use of humor and irony, Vonnegut's objectives are effectively achieved. Through its dark humor, the novel forces the reader to become disgusted by deaths that are unnecessary. At the end of the novel, the reader despises war just as much as Kurt Vonnegut himself does.

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