

I. General Introduction

The present research work aims at an analytical study of celebration of meaninglessness in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Unlike modernist writing that is characterized by the lamentation of the purposelessness, meaninglessness and the fragmentation of human life and values in general, postmodernist writings like the novel, on the contrary, is characterized by its ability to celebrate the meaninglessness and fragmentation of human life. As Peter Barry puts it, the dichotomy between modernism and postmodernism, the novel also makes its distinct stand as a postmodernist writing in which "fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating, phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief " (84). The liberating phenomenon is the way the novel comes to terms with unprecedented disaster. It is seen as a therapy to grapple with pain, suffering, and meaningless existence. In a way, celebration of meaninglessness liberates humanity from pain. To be more precise, it is seen as a defense mechanism for the horrors the characters have undergone in the novel. So, Vonnegut's writing of *Slaughterhouse-Five* can be seen as "a therapeutic process" that allow him to "uncover and deal with his trauma in World War II" (Vees-Gulani 175). By using "creative means to overcome his distress", Vonnegut makes it possible for us to trace his path "to recovery" (175).

Such a means is widely seen as celebrating what is there on the ground. It takes place when will power becomes dysfunctional. This dysfunctionality is highlighted by Edward Halsey Foster when he explains, "Vonnegut's novels describe a deterministic, mechanistic world- a world of cause and effect with no overriding purpose or goal . . . in which there is no hope, no purpose, and no salvation for the universe" (873). Vonnegut is a moralist but one who begins with the premise that morality, like

civilization, merely expresses wishful thinking and chance. In this universe, "divine intention" is only "imagined", it "does not really exist" (873). His novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* centers on innocent character, Billy Pilgrim who is victim of both of other people, and, more particularly, of an inability to meaningfully affect his own life. For Vonnegut, civilization's problem is not that people don't, strictly speaking, take responsibility for their lives, but they can't. Vonnegut's novel suggests that if there is any salvation for men, it lies in their innocence or their stupidity and consequently their inability to understand how totally "they are the products of circumstance, not free will" (873).

In the same line, his novel often overlooks what is obvious, showing "true moral choice is, therefore, impossible" (873). Within such impossibility, the celebration of meaninglessness favours status quo. So in one way or the other it takes different forms like passivity, resignation, acceptance and denial, which Vonnegut "offers as solution to the sense of helplessness [that our] life engenders" (Hendin 258). The ways through which characters survive the unprecedented pain are through acceptance of suffering and disengagement from a particular cause. *Slaughterhouse-Five* deals with "the dislocation between one's life and one's feelings" through a violent juxtaposition of "science fiction and realism" (259). In the Dresden fire bombing in 1945, Vonnegut and other prisoners of war spent the night in a meat locker well beneath the earth and survived the firestorm that exploded above them. This real event is Vonnegut's most perfect symbol for the way many of his characters survive by burying themselves the celebration of meaninglessness.

In order to analyze the novel in terms of celebration of meaninglessness, the researcher has applied the theoretical tool of postmodernism to highlight "the alienation of individuals and the meaninglessness of human existence" (*Bedford* 360).

Postmodernism offers "an acceptance of dislocation as a major part of life and perhaps a hope that displacement of traditional ideals might permit new ways of dealing with the human situation" (Hendin 240). Postmodernism is characterized by its' celebratory attitudes. It admits, indeed, the world is meaningless due to the failure of grand narratives, because the world is deterministic with its evolutionary orientation and because of the triumph of machines over man. There is no way we can undo this civilizational process; neither can we reverse technological advancement nor restore the faith on grand narratives nor oust the darwinian evolutionary process. Unlike modernist, postmodernists do not reject fragments, alienation of humans and the void owing to the absence of emancipatory grand narratives. They accept this situation, the void, fragments and attempt to create life out of absence and death. The postmodernist celebrates absence, meaninglessness and nothingness. Thus, postmodernists celebrate death, end, absence, void, meaninglessness. "Man would sooner have the void for his purpose than be void of purpose", Nietzsche writes at the end of the *Genealogy of Morals* (299), and it is a good slogan for the postmoderns' obsessive fixation on nothingness, absence, meaninglessness. That "nothing" of course, is the starting point for the postmoderns, which have been the key to the treasure of a new literature. Literature is nothing, and nothing can save us from a world too insistently material in which existential abyss turns into a virtual geography of literary imagination. In this way the alternative perspective espoused by postmoderns appears more liberating and more emancipatory. Thus, the ongoing research that primarily aims at establishing celebration of meaninglessness as device for grappling with horrors of war is compatible with the liberating spirit of postmodernism. Particularly within postmodernism, the aspects that are touched on here are; how meaninglessness is created with respect to a deterministic world view as underpinned by postmodernism

and how celebration takes place as liberating phenomenon in the postmodern condition. This aspect of postmodernism is analyzed in terms of the individual life of the characters and the overall structural make up of the novel.

However, *Slaughterhouse-Five* has received wide critical acclaim from different perspectives. Christian Moraru sees Vonnegut's novel as an

[e]merging major work in contemporary American fiction and one of its most memorable dystopian fictions. It combines, in a fashion, what many have called postmodern, all sorts of ingredients : narrative plays of location, chronology, and perspective; social and political critique tinged with Vonnegut's famed Black Humor; 'Cosmic [c] irony', as James Lundquist puts it (54), and misanthropic moral philosophy; science fiction as well as mock science fiction; 'historiographic metafiction' (to use Linda Hutcheon's term) and 'therapeutic' autobiography, as Vonnegut scholar Peter J. Reed notes in his contribution. (269)

Similarly, *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* observes *Slaughterhouse-Five*, as Vonnegut's attempts to re-create his Dresden experience in fictional form in which the bombing raid is preserved as a symbol of the "cruelty and destructiveness of war down through the centuries" (430). Vonnegut was a prisoner of war when civilian populated Dresden was devastated by Allied forces. He and other prisoners of war survived the air raid as Germans detained them underground in the slaughterhouse. Symbolically Dresden become a slaughterhouse as hundreds and thousands of people who were killed as the beautiful city Dresden soon turned into rubble. Vonnegut, thus, documents his own experiences of war as he witnessed cruelty, devastation, and untold miseries meted out against the people. He fictionalizes these accounts and transforms

the fire bombing of Dresden as symbol of destructiveness and war immanence in human civilization down through centuries.

According to *Harper Collins Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*, the novel characterizes the post-war world and enacts Vonnegut's view on history:

Slaughterhouse-Five (1969) explores the self-denying post war world that traps both resourceful villains like Howard W. Campbell, [. . .], and baby faced daydreamers like Billy Pilgrim. Vonnegut's fatalistic view of history is suggested by the ubiquitous imagery of the Dresden fire and the frequent recourse to a comic-fictions Planet, Tralfamadore, from which the fates of humans are arbitrarily controlled. (1045)

In this way, as a counterculture hero of the turbulent 1960s, Kurt Vonnegut is at once more traditional and more complicated than his enthusiasts might believe. To a generation of young people who felt their country had forsaken them, he offered examples of common decency and cultural idealism as basic as a grade-school civics lesson. For a broader readership who felt conventional fiction was inadequate to express the way their lives had been disrupted by the era's radical social changes, he wrote novels structured in more pertinently contemporary terms, bereft of such unifying devices as conclusive characterization and chronologically organized plots. *Slaughterhouse-Five* takes as its organizing incident the Allied firebombing of the German city of Dresden late in World War II, as witnessed by the American Prisoner of War Billy Pilgrim. Yet despite its origins in World War II, the manner of its telling is much more akin to the writing of Americans of the time who were trying to understand the Vietnam War. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* claims, "*Slaughterhouse-Five* [. . .] abjured the certainties of an identifiable beginning,

middle, and end; presented a mesmerizing sense of confused, apparently directionless present, with no sense of totalization or conclusiveness" (2181).

Vonnegut's continual mixture of broad American incisive satire and apocalyptic warning has made him a guru to generations of youths since the 1960s. Vonnegut's novels mingle techniques and voices from "memoir", "science fiction" and journalistic essays in books that range from "imaginative universe to dialogues with the reader" about the problems of a changing world, which is found even in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In the course of mixing of genres, Vonnegut's novel turns upside down all the generic conventions. *Slaughterhouse-Five* reverses almost all of the generic traditions of the Hemingway-Mailer-James Jones combat centered line of war fiction: the novel contains no scenes of fighting; its controlling image of war is not the epic sweep of battle but the devastation of a beautiful undefended city and the mass death of its innocent citizens. Whereas previous traditions, and one thinks primarily of its extremities in, say, the Edenic and belletristic metaphors of Alan Seeger in the First World War, often emphasized the litanies of battle as a ritual of initiation, Vonnegut has no time for such celebrations. His novels prefer to flay the enemies of the common soldier in as prosaic a manner as possible. Vonnegut's manner of narration and his prose style exploit the dispassionate and the detached, and the tone of the book is pitched deliberately in a low key (*American War Literature* 198-199). That is why Vonnegut is rated as a novelist of "pessimistic satirical novel" that uses "fantasy and science fiction" to highlight the horrors and ironies of the 20th century (*Merriam-Webster's* 414).

In this way, many critics have interpreted this novel from different perspectives. All of them seem to have been concerned with the novel's preoccupation with black humor, science, fiction, irony, absurdism, mixture of genres and so on.

Hence, most of the enquires of critics are far more negative. However, this research presents an enquiry into an issue that is researchable owing to its celebratory vigor and postmodernist attitude, and in that sense the novel is far more positive. Both thematically and structurally, it presents a critique of conventional narrative.

Thematically it celebrates meaninglessness, void and exhaustion whereas structurally it blows up the linear arrangement of plot. Thus, the issue chosen merits research.

This research not only analyzes the celebration of meaninglessness but also attempts to set it up as a proper defense mechanism in the face of painful experience like the horror of war, which is at once fresh and novel.

In order to prove the above mentioned hypothesis, the present work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents a brief introduction to the research elaborated in the subsequent chapters, it gives a brief outline of the hypothesis, statement of problem, methodology, critical review of literature and claims why it is researchable. The second chapter briefly explains what 'postmodernism' is. It mainly highlights the celebration of meaninglessness of human life in the postmodern condition. On the basis of theoretical modality developed in the second chapter, the third chapter presents textual analysis to prove the hypothesis. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research work. It concludes the explanation and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters. It shows how Vonnegut applies postmodernist elements in the novel and visualizes the predicament of human life in the present world that is full of contradictions. This, on the whole, it indicates the fragmented yet celebratory lives of people of the present era.

II. Methodology

Postmodern Celebration of Meaninglessness

Postmodernism is a term referring to certain radically experimental works of literature and art produced after World War II. The postmodern era, with its potential for mass destruction and its shocking history of genocide, has evoked a continuing disillusionment similar of that widely experienced during the Modern Period. Much of postmodernist writing reveals and highlights the alienation of individuals and the meaninglessness of human existence. Postmodernists frequently stress that humans desperately (and ultimately unsuccessfully) cling to illusions of security to conceal and forget the voids over which their lives are perched. Postmodern works tend to express feelings of anxiety and alienation experienced by individuals living in the twentieth century, but these works tend to be even darker, suggesting the meaninglessness of the human condition in general through radically experimental works that defy conventions of literary cohesion and even coherence.

Because postmodernists works frequently combine aspects of diverse genres, they can be difficult to classify—at least according to traditional schemes of classification. Postmodernist, revolting against a certain modernist tendency toward elitist “high art”, have also generally made a concerted effort to appeal to popular culture. Cartoons, music, “pop art”, and television have thus become acceptable and even common media for postmodernist artistic expression. Postmodernist literary developments include such genres as the Absurd, the antinovel, concrete poetry, and other forms of avant-garde poetry written in free verse and challenging the ideological assumptions of contemporary society. What postmodernist theater, fiction and poetry have in common is the view [explicit or implicit] that literary language is its own reality, not a means of representing reality.

Peter Barry describes postmodernism as characterized by “an eclectic approach, [by a living for] aleatory writing, [and for] parody and pastiche” (83). The word ‘eclectic’ suggests the use of the fragmented forms such as collage of juxtaposed, incomplete stories, or fragments of stories. Also ‘aleatory forms’, means those which incorporate an element of randomness or chance. The use of parody and pastiche, finally, is clearly related to the abandonment of divine pretensions of authorship in the omniscient narratorial stance. Postmodernism gives great prominence to fragmentation as a feature of twentieth-century art and culture. For the postmodernist, fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of beliefs. In a word, postmodernist celebrates the fragmentation.

Similarly describing the tone or attitude of postmodernism Peter Barry writes:

Postmodernism rejects the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ art, and believes in openness, in gaudiness, and in ‘bad taste’ mixtures of qualities. It disdains the modernist asceticism as elitist and cheerfully mixes, in the same building, bits and pieces from different architectural periods a mock-Georgian pediment here, a tongue-in-cheek classical portico there. A similar postmodernist 'edifice' in literature would be [. . .] bizarrely colorful mixtures of imagery, viewpoint, and vocabulary jostle on a surface which seems happy to be nothing but surface, without the depths of significance which a literary education trains us to seek out. (55)

In this way amalgamatory attitude of postmodernism, bears no depth, no significance, which in turn accounts for the playfulness of postmodernism.

Arguably the philosopher who put the first postmodern cat among the modernist pigeons is Jean-Francois Lyotard. His target of attack is ‘metanarratives,’ (the grand ideologies that control the individual); metanarratives are foundational and thus to be avoided, since they work to limit the abuse of language power. Lyotard argues that there must be an attempt to recoup the power of the individual to tell his or her narratives; that is, anti-foundationalism in this guise becomes the access to the control of one’s politics. However, not everyone who can string together a narrative is politically desirable, after all. The principal tenor of Lyotard’s argument is the ‘delegitimation’ of ‘grand narratives’ in modern times (such as Marxism) and he states that:

We no longer have recourse to the grand narratives—we can resort neither to the dialectic of spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for post-modern scientific discourse. But as we have just seen, the little narrative [*petit recit*] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science. (60)

However, Lyotard gradually develops a narrative of the difference between modernist and postmodernist aesthetics which moves away from an historical period. This difference is that postmodernism is characterized by a new concept of the sublime, which attempts to put ‘forward the unrepresentable in presentations itself’. Lyotard makes the paradoxical claim that “A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism, thus understood, is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant” (79). He argues:

The postmodern would be that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share

collectively the nostalgia for the attainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to import a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. (81)

It is clear that Lyotard's concept of the postmodern is aesthetic rather than historical. His emphasis falls on the postmodern as a particular form rather than as a particular epoch, regarding postmodernism less as a period of time than as a set of strategies undertaken by artists to infuse a new sense of the sublime. For Lyotard, postmodernity is an attitude, 'an incredulity towards metanarratives'. This means that 'postmodernity' need not necessarily come after modernity: it means not modernity at its end, but in its nascent state, which is constant. Tim Woods summarizes Lyotard's most important conceptualizations of postmodernism in the following way:

1. It is first and foremost 'an incredulity towards metanarratives' and an anti-foundationalism.
2. Although it presents the unrepresentable, it does not do so nostalgically, nor does it seek to offer solace in so doing.
3. It contains pleasure and pain, in a reintroduction of the sublime.
4. It does not seek to give reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented. In this respect, there is something theological in his concept of representational art.
5. It actively searches out heterogeneity, pluralism, constant innovation. (23-24)

However, Baudrillard's conception of postmodernity is founded upon three principal ideas—simulation, implosion and hyperreality. Baudrillard claims we have entered a new postmodern era of simulations which is governed by information and signs and a new cybernetic technology. In a society where simulations have become

dominant, these models structure experience and erode distinctions between the model and reality. Simulation is where the image or the model becomes more real than the real: as for instance, a television soap-opera actor receiving hate mail for his role in the show. Consequently, Baudrillard argues that the demarcation between image or simulation and reality implodes and of the real world disappears. Simulation is the central concept in Baudrillard's conception of history, which has moved through three stages: (a) the 'counterfeit; the dominant structure of the 'classical' period, from the Renaissance to the industrial revolution, where signs reflected and then distorted reality; (b) 'production', the principal structure of the industrial age, where signs disguised the absence of a basic reality; (c) 'simulation', the reigning social model for the current era, where signs no longer bear any relationship to reality.

With simulation, there is a "generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" where the distinctions between the real and the unreal become so blurred, the word 'hyperreal' is used to signify more than real, where the real has been produced by the model (2). Heperreality is the state where distinctions between objects and their representations are dissolved, and one is left with only simulacra. Media messages are prime examples: self-referential signs lose contact with the things they signify, leaving us witness to an unprecedented destruction of meaning. Baudrillard regards this state of affairs as something to celebrate, because it marks the transcendence of alienated sensibilities: "We leave history to enter simulation [. . .] This is by no means a despairing hypothesis, unless we regard simulation as a higher form of alienation-which I certainly do not. It is precisely in history that we are alienated, and if we leave history we also leave alienation" (23). What Baudrillard implies is that there is no possibility for social change, and that we are all inevitably locked on a course towards "the end of history: everything happens as if we were

continuing to manufacture history, whereas in accumulating signs of the social, signs of the political, signs of progress and change, we only contribute to the end of history” (27).

After concentrating on what postmodernism in general is, let’s now move on to a general review of the postmodern technique in literature so as to explore the playfulness of the postmodernist text. One of the techniques that amount for the playfulness is pastiche. Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray define pastiche as “A term used in art criticism to refer to a work that borrows heavily from a master’s recognizable style, the term describes a work that is deemed highly derivative of someone else’s work or style. Pastiche may have a humorous, satirical or serious purpose, but sometimes authors write pastiche simply as a literary exercise. It involves open and intentional imitations or borrowing” (33). In this way, pastiche is a literary technique that draws heavily on other works with a playful purpose. However, this playfulness is not without specific aim, it tries to interchange the experiences in order to deal with it in one way or the other. Similarly, Steven Connor argues that the postmodern preference for parody and pastiche is not all an obviously unambiguous sign of ethical irresponsibility. His concern is with the contemporary genre of rewriting, as it might be called, in which a well known work of literature is ‘rewritten’ to form a new work. So, it celebrates the procreative abundance of a narrative able to replenish itself ceaselessly out of its own forms and energies. But Fredric Jameson rejects the culture of pastiche: “Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, [. . .]; but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter, and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some

healthy linguistic normality still exists” (56). No matter what the allegations directed against pastiche, it nevertheless becomes an effective means for the celebration.

Parody is another mode of postmodernist representation espoused with satiric intention. It imitates a specific literary work or style but to ridicule it. By imitation it celebrates whereas with satire it makes an attempt to correct certain form of behavior or points to alternative mode of living, that somehow helps to manage our life. “As a literary term, [it] imitates a specific literary work or the style of an author for comic effect, usually to ridicule or criticize that work, author, or style. Parody is often used to make a satiric (and even a political) point. Although the subject of an existing work has occasionally been parodied, parodies that debase the subject of the original generally do so not to ridicule that subject so much as to poke fun at the author or style of the work being parodied” (*Bedford* 328). Therefore, by imitation parody creates a new vision with celebratory reinforcement.

Similarly, postmodern writers and critics give room for playfulness through paradox. It juggles both the normal and abnormal giving equal weight to the opposites. Underlying this, is the view that whether it is normal or abnormal, both provoke the reader to see something in a new way. Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray view paradox as “A statement that seems self-contradictory or nonsensical on the surface but that, upon close examination, may be seen to contain an underlying truth. As a reader’s figure, paradox is used to grab the reader’s attention and to direct it to specific point or image that provokes the reader to see something in a new way”(325). William Rasch takes into account the paradoxical position of the postmodern critics as they “continue to perform paradoxically; they continue to imply, through their persistence, that self-referential paradoxes are not careless oversights and not merely banal. Rather, the presence of paradox makes a claim about the inescapably self-

referential nature of language and therefore of efforts to understand the world” (261). Hence, the self-referential nature of language and our effort to understand the world through it results in celebration.

Intertextuality is another characteristic trait of postmodernism. It refers to the concept of plural text or interconnectedness of those texts. In the view of Murfin and Ray, intertextuality

is the condition of interconnectedness among texts, or the concept that any text is an amalgam of others, either because it exhibits signs of influence or because its language inevitably contains common points of reference with other texts through such things as allusion, quotation, genre, style, and even revisions. The critic Julia Kristeva, who popularized and is often credited with coining this term, views any given work as part of a larger fabric of literary discourse, part of a continuum including the future as well as the past. (219)

Thus, bringing together quotations, allusion and style within the text, intertextuality gives plurality to it. Plurality is the space where heterogeneous voices coexist.

Therefore, the co-existence of multiple voices account for its playfulness. In the same vein, Roland Barthes holds that “The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘source’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiations; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas” (288-289).

Most postwar fictions abound in irony. It is a contradiction or incongruity between appearance or expectation and reality. This disparity may be manifested in a variety of ways. A discrepancy may exist between what someone says and what he or

she actually means, between what someone expects to happen and what really does happen, or between what appears to be true and what actually is true. Furthermore, the term irony may be applied to events, situations, and even structural elements of a work, not just to statements. Irony is commonly employed as a “wink” that the listener or reader is expected to notice so that he or she may be “in on the secret” (*Bedford* 200). The kind of irony mostly in use in postmodern fiction is situations themselves. It typically involves a discrepancy between expectation and reality. Out of this discrepancy, writer explores the methods of grappling with horrific realities like the devastations of the Second World War.

Metafiction is another technique which the postmoderns apply to celebrate the collapse of historic authenticity and to endorse fantasy in which we can take refuge in the face of unprecedented disaster. Describing it as ‘historiographic metafiction’, Hutcheon describes postmodern fiction as a mode which consciously problematises the making of fiction and history. Postmodern fiction reveals the past as always ideologically and discursively constructed. It is a fiction which is directed both inward and outward, concerned both with its status as fiction, narrative or language, and also grounded in some verifiable historical reality. Postmodernism tends to use and abuse, install but also subvert, conventions, through the use of either irony or parody. Hutcheon recognizes a political ambivalence in her description of the way “postmodern texts paradoxically point to the opaque nature of their representational strategies and at the same time to their complicity with the notion of the transparency of representation” (18).

Metafiction is a central plank of any discussion of postmodern literature W. Gass is generally credited with the coinage of the term, which refers to the fact that

the novelist's business is no longer to render the world, but is no longer from language: fiction is no longer mimetic, but constructive.

Henceforth, postmodernists, through their fiction, display a plurality of forms, scepticism towards generic types and categories, ironic inversions, a predilection for pastiche and parody, and a metafictional insistence on the arbitrariness of the text's power to signify.

Postmodernism; a Combative Means

The postmodern writer tries to see man differently. The modernist hero was shaped by the humanistic ethos-political, religious, anthropological and psychoanalytic. The hero of the post war period is shaped by the concern with functioning and behavior that spawned and accelerated the growth of ego psychology in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and is characteristic of an age of increasing technological sophistication. Only a few writers use explicitly technological imagery to describe people; only the most extreme prefer the assembly line and the computer to organic images for the processes of birth and thought. In only the most radical writing is the mind equated with the cyberneticist's feedback mechanism, responding to changing external conditions. But virtually all postmodern fiction is concerned with the mechanism and conduct of the individual's mind and life/with the search for a different adaptation, an angle of vision, a mode of feeling or behavior, which will alter the protagonist's condition. Postwar fiction also exploits the phenomenological aspect of the stream of consciousness style, using it to capture a variety of images and impressions without locating those impressions in a character stabilized by the forces of memory and attachment. The stream-of-consciousness style, for the postwar writer, is used to express discontinuity.

Postmodern man's life is ruled by fragmentation of personality. John Barth, for example, parodies Sartre's idea that man can create himself, and is the sum of his choices by satirizing personality as a set of moveable blocks and momentary structures. Through maximizing emotional disconnection from himself, the character may hope to distance himself from a legacy of pain. In many novels, character and emotion are consciously cut up or manipulated to distance the hero from fear, anger or despair.

Josephine Hendin explains that postwar fiction uses literary devices for defenses against pain:

In the manipulations of [postmodern] fiction, literary devices, frequently serve as psychological defenses. Fragmentation of character and narrative often serve as devices for allaying anxiety. By disassembling the jigsaw puzzle of values, mores and personality, a character can take refuge from the whole picture in its parts. Donald Barthelme's remark 'only trust the fragments', and Thomas Pynchon's advocacy of the 'forcible dislocation of self' reflect the use of fragmentation and alienation as defenses against painful confrontations. The character who can change roles at will, who has minimal memory of or attachment to his past, his nation, or others emerges in many novels not as an antihero but as a wry 'ideal', a shock-resistant man. (241)

So, postmodern fiction uses standard literary devices to achieve unconventional effects. Irony has become the dominant comic style. Irony yokes unlike things and by force of the tension between truths, or between what is true and what is not, both mirrors and organizes conflict, undercutting the emotional impact of each term of its equations. In effect, it makes contradiction a part of perception. Paradox, which may be the dominant intellectual style of much postwar fiction, can also be a technique for giving opposites equal weight. In the experimental novel such techniques are used to challenge traditional distinctions between weakness and strength, good and evil, truth and falsehood, the victim and his characters contain, control and organize emotions or situations. Pastiche may express a sense of the interchangeability of experience.

“The unconventionality or darkness of experimental fiction” has led some to condemn it as “nihilistic or despairing” (Hendin 243). Yet to do so may be to miss the significance of such attitudes in the text and in the novelist’s attempt to describe and integrate experience. In the best postmodern fiction even nihilism can have a reason d’être, providing, in the Aristotelian sense, catharsis-pessimism may serve a “moral purpose as an indictment of an undesirable status quo, or it may have a protective function as a defense against unrealistic hopes” (243). what may seem to the casual observer to be only negativism may be, on closer inspection of the text, part of the novelist’s attempt to achieve unconventional effects. Experimental fiction admittedly leaves out much of the joy and nobility, which exist in the real world, but all art involves exclusion, no single work of art tells the whole truth about all experience. Experimental fiction exaggerates, dramatizes, and probes the problematic. It provides a vision of people under pressure, of desperate measures, of sometimes horrendous solutions, of necessary attempts.

At the core of the postwar experimental novel is a vision of all relations as power relations. Where the novels of the 1930s frequently saw people as victims of the depression or of economic exploitation, the postwar novel sees people caught up in a psychological drama of power and vulnerability. The denouement of this drama will determine not merely financial security but, more significantly, a sense of self worth. War is the metaphor for the world as combat. The postwar experimental novel has an acute sense of cruelty and powerlessness as flip sides of the perception of all relations as power relations.

Postmodern fiction or experimental fiction attempted to devise protective shield against the horror. Josephine Hendin writes:

The experimental richness of postwar fiction lies in the variety of feelings of violence, humiliation and vulnerability. A primary defense against perceiving oneself as a victim is not to put the pieces of experience together, to fragment feeling and act, reality and perception so that there is no possibility of seeing anything whole. Where the modernist writer saw brokenness as a mark of the fall from tradition and order, the postwar novelist employs it as a switch to turn off pain, a way of returning to the innocence of an unfinished canvas. (252)

In an experiment in values, some writers have attempted to reduce the trauma of either violence or humiliation by blurring the difference between winners and losers. In this experiment, all evil and all anger are not internalized but externalized. It means evil and anger are not directed against one self causing self-annihilation as in nihilism but to something or to be more precise it gets expressed into artistic activities which is an outlet to frustration and anger. The hero becomes concerned with avoiding rather than confronting what he perceives to be an unbeatable situation. In contrast to the novel of aggression, these are “novels of passivity” (257).

In the end, art has traditionally provided an escape from the real world. Art can be a tool for survival in the hand of a virtuoso writer. The meaninglessness of life or the fragmentation of personality can be as full of possibility as a roulette game for the writer with the pragmatic imagination.

III. Textual Analysis

Celebration of Meaninglessness in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Slaughterhouse-Five entails the characteristic traits of postmodern fiction such as subversion of narration, celebration of the meaningless, intertextuality, plurality, experimentation and so on. All these techniques are devised in order to adapt in the new circumstances, that is the period after the end of Second World War. The end of Second World War with the legacy of horrific experiences and the threat of nuclear annihilation produced anxiety and challenge to existence quite different from Pre-Second World War period. So with the rise of the new threat to existence, conventional modes of representation, most widely practiced in modernist literature, are also over and new techniques of representation become dominant which are at once unconventional and celebratory. These techniques, in turn, become a most powerful means for allaying anxiety and threat of the period. Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* comes as an effective antidote to the period by celebrating meaninglessness. In this regard, the research work analyzes how all these techniques are applied by the writer in order to respond to the meaninglessness of life in an attempt to rescue life by providing alternative perspectives or alternative adaptation.

Slaughterhouse-Five thematizes the destructive historical event, the Second World War, particularly the bombing of Dresden. It opens with a true claim that "all this happened more or less. The war parts, any way, are pretty much true" (1). This parodies the eighteenth century novelistic convention. At another moment, Vonnegut's outrageous subtitle to *Slaughterhouse-Five* infers the novel's parodic intentions through its self-advertisement as a novel "somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore, where the flying saucers come from" (1). This describes the book as having been written in a 'telegraphic,

schizophrenic' mode. The adjectives are helpful in a number of ways; 'telegraphic' because the novel is short and often cryptic and apocryphal, incomplete and unrealized in the abbreviated manner of a telegram, and 'schizophrenic' in its counterpointing of the two veiled crises in Billy's life. The novel's artistic modes blend elements from realism, fantasy and documentary (extracts from historical studies and speeches are drawn upon together with such facts and events of real history as Robert Kennedy's death), hence, parodying the novelistic conventions. The novel's form, therefore, deploys several disparate and yet conterminous conventions in order both to create the illusion of historical authenticity and simultaneously to break down such an impression. Doing so, Vonnegut enjoys the 'salad bowl', since he incorporates both conventional and radical experimental values in the same text giving it entirely different outlook. So breaking and creating is the way through which celebration takes place and this end is achieved through the technique of parody. Vonnegut continues the parody in his novel when the beginning and end of the novel prefigures early Vonnegut's writes,

It begins like this:

Listen:

Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time.

It ends like this:

Poo-tee-weet? (21)

In the above quote, Vonnegut tries to represent the narration in an alternative way than conventional narrative to adapt into new representative mode. Opening up, new horizons, the writer is making or creating new space where, at least, one can feel sigh of relief from the clutches of convention. Liberating oneself from the clutches of convention and adapting into new space gives room for the free play of other

perspectives. Thus opening up new horizon, creating an alternative perspective, is one way or the other of freeing oneself from claustrophobic convention. Sticking to a convention does not open up alternative perspectives, but forces to live by the same norms. Consequently, it does not open up a new horizon, but produces the same thing, make us live by the same condition. In this way, Vonnegut adopts the technique of parody in the novel for liberation from the conventional mode of representation and gives enough space for playfulness. This parody is implied by Vonnegut in order to contain, control and organize the emotions or situations. Distancing oneself from the convention is the way, postmodernist writer liberates or emancipates oneself from conventions. This in a way celebrates meaninglessness.

Another way, through which Vonnegut celebrates meaninglessness in the novel, is by undermining the genre. In conventional genre, combat scenes are represented with a lot of pomp and celebration. But Vonnegut, speaking in his own voice in chapter one, attacks fiction which treats “war as a glamorous activity” (15). He mocks also the pedantry of the war writer by describing his own ‘clumsy’ attempts to “make fictional capital out of war” (2). Such a task of creating an exciting war novel, proves impossible, since the “memories of war” remain virtually submerged, emergent only in random and unstructured recollections; they stay for the most part unrealized, stubbornly resistant to the writers, mechanistic efforts to order them systematically (2). Vonnegut takes great pleasure in disclosing in chapter one virtually all of the narrative events of the novel “the climax of the novel would be the execution of poor old Edgar derby” in order to dispose right away with the fixities of sequential narration (10). Henceforth, and from the opening pages of the novel, he is released from any obligations to comply with conventional notions of genre. The formal innovation implied by such an undertaking matches the reinvention of his life

undertaken by Billy Pilgrim, the novel's mock hero, who turns to science fiction for help after witnessing the fire bombing of Dresden. Vonnegut mocks his novel by undermining its value thus:

I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and time. When I got home from the Second World War twenty three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write as out the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. And I thought, too, that I would be a masterpiece at least make me a lot of money. Since the subject was so big. (2)

In this he makes it apparent that he has been trying to write a novel about Dresden fire-bombing where hundreds and thousands of people lost their lives. But for twenty three years he could not write because memory does not come in full swing since “not many words about Dresden came from my mind” (2). Absence of memory makes him difficult to write the novel. Yet he has been trying, writing over and over again but could not finish it. In a sense, he is trying to write about the absence which does not come easily. Absence, and memory are the issues most contemplative for the postmodernist. By reinventing and reconstructing memory, they are exploring, even if memories are devastated, to find a new way of dealing with them. Recreation and reinvention are used by Vonnegut in his novel to celebrate the meaninglessness that he experienced in the war. Thus, Vonnegut celebrates meaninglessness by recreating a horrific experiences in the novel. Substitution of experience into another form, release of pain on to another form, is the way Vonnegut celebrates playfulness, and that becomes an antidote for his immense pain. Writing a book about the most horrific

experiences of his life, Vonnegut substitutes his experience and thus celebrates meaninglessness.

Another motif in Vonnegut's fiction that helps celebrate meaninglessness is that of repetition. For instance, characters reappearing in different novels, and phrases is most apparent in *Slaughterhouse-Five* where the phrase "so it goes" appears 106 times, following immediately after the report of any death or anything approximating a death in the text (2). The mechanical regularity of the appearance of this phrase is a denial of any form of development and progression. This denial is entirely appropriate as it encapsulates the philosophy the Tralfamadorians persuade Billy to accept, that everything is predetermined, and individuals are unable to make any differences on the course of events. This belief involves the denial of any meaning to change over time: things just are; each moment is already set before we reach it. By repeating one thing over and over again one is celebrating the same thing. Repetition amounts to playfulness; playfulness is what is seen as celebration. By repetition over and over again, one is celebrating death or anything approximating death. Ignoring, death, is the only way one can celebrate it. Spacing out is Vonnegut's answer to death, war. In Vonnegut's many descriptions of Pilgrim's trips to Tralfamadore, space-time travel, is the ultimate withdrawal, the burial of suffering in meaninglessness. When we look at life from Tralfamadore, it provides not merely the vantage point, but the chance to see life in the context of intergalactic pointlessness.

Celebrating meaninglessness is an adaptation practiced by postmodern writers like Vonnegut to look into life and the world from alternative perspective, particularly a mechanism to come to terms with horrific experiences like that of war. This novel too, is concerned with mechanism and conduct of the individuals mind and life with the search for a different adaptation, and angle of vision, a mode of feeling or

behaviour which will alter the protagonist's condition. The protagonist of the novel, Billy Pilgrim takes recourse to different modes of adaptation in his life as a mechanism to keep going. He does not lament even though he is alienated and finds himself helpless, but finds a new adaptation, a mode to keep going. Passivity and traveling in time are his adaptations, while Billy is in the war. Billy does not fight in the war, he bears no weapon, has no combat dress. He simply remains a figure of fun. In that way "Billy was powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends" (29). Thus Billy's presence in the war bears no meaning at all. He did not "look like a soldier at all, but looked like a filthy flamingo" (31). This shows how disgusting Billy is in the war. Billy's passivity becomes more evident in war when Vonnegut reports that another character, Roland Weary has been saving Billy's life by using all forms of cruelties. Vonnegut writes:

He had been saving Billy's life for days, cursing him, kicking him, slapping him, making him move. It was absolutely necessary that cruelty be used, because Billy would not do anything to save himself. Billy wanted to quit. He was cold, hungry, embarrassed and incompetent. He could scarcely distinguish between sleep and wakefulness now on the third day, found no important differences, between walking and standing still. (32)

In that way Billy has no enthusiasm for war. He accepts all the cruelties meted out against him. He neither protests nor reacts against it in any form. So, detaching oneself from the emotion, Billy remains passive throughout the war. Actually, passivity is his method of keeping alive.. Every body in the war, who are active, intelligent, have strong fascination with the war like Roland Weary and Edger Derby, are killed except Billy Pilgrim. Thus, pessimism may serve a moral purpose as an

indictment of an undesirable status quo or it may have a protective function as a defense against unrealistic hopes. In that way, by maximizing emotional disconnection from himself, Billy hopes to distance himself from fear, anger or despair.

Billy's other method of adaptation is his travel in time. He starts traveling in time "while World War Second was in progress" in which he has seen his birth and death many times, and pays random visit to all the events in between. Whenever he encounters most appalling moment in the war, he travels in time. Just as when he is "beaten and terrified" severely by Roland Weary he travels in time, "his attention began to swing grandly through the full arc of his life, passing into death, which was violet light" (41). This provides him temporary solace, at least for the moment he would be away from the pitiful condition of the present. So traveling in time is adaptation devised by Billy to come to terms with the pain of war.

After the war, science fiction is his adaptation. What he has seen in the "Dresden massacre made life meaningless for Billy" (96). So to "reinvent himself and his universe, science fiction was a big help" (96). The only tale he could read is science fiction, it becomes a tremendous help for him to mitigate pain. So science fiction helps Billy to some extent in dealing with his meaninglessness and to lessen his pain. In this way, science fiction becomes appropriate adaptation for Billy in post war period. Another method, devised by Billy is a prayer hung on his office:

Billy had a framed prayer on his office wall which expressed his method for keep going, even though he was unenthusiastic about living. A lot of patients also saw the prayer on Billy's wall told him that it helped them to keep going, too. It went like this:

GOD GRANT ME

THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT
 THE THINGS I CAN NOT CHANGE,
 COURAGE
 TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN,
 AND WISDOM ALWAYS
 TO TELL THE
 DIFFERENCE

Among the things Billy Pilgrim could not change was the past, the present, and the future. (58)

In this way Billy forms a prayer to help him keep going by accepting what he could not change. Thus prayer is another adaptation for Billy in the postwar period.

In the end, after his airplane crash, his method of adaptation is trips to Tralfamadore, which “are simply able to give him insights into what is really going on” (29). He knows many things from these trips like nature of time, world and about the death. Now he starts giving lecture, writing of his trips to Tralfamadore and their gospels of time which parallels the postmodern view on time. Postmodernism rejects the neat compartmentalization of time into past, present and future so for Tralfamadorians “all moments, past, present, and future, always have existed always will exist” (25). Billy, in this way, writing about a non-existent planet, writing about what others, his daughter, find nonsensical, celebrates meaninglessness. Hence, by various adaptations like passivity, time travel, prayer, science fiction, writing and lecturing Billy celebrates meaninglessness.

Through maximizing emotional disconnection from himself, the character may hope to distance himself from the legacy of pain. In postmodernist novel, character and emotion are consciously cut up or manipulated to distance the hero from fear,

anger or despair. Emotional disconnection is another way through which Billy tries to mitigate his suffering. For instance, no matter how much pain he sustains, he does not react in any way. It seems as if he is distancing himself from the emotion. He does not fight in war but rather becomes “bleakly ready for death” (31). Billy does not get angry at anything but tolerates everything, “he never got mad at anything” (28). Thus no matter what happens to him he does not respond promptly but remains quiet as if nothing has ever happened to him. Roland Weary in the war kicks him, slaps him, even insults him as “mother fucker and bastard” but nothing stirs Billy (32). In the war he receives mistreatment from everybody, but does not respond to it. It seems, he is not himself. As a result of emotional disconnection, Billy does not fear death. For instance, when German fires at Billy, he quietly stands on the street for bullet but fortunately it misses Billy. He is fearless, and does not have any anger or despair at anything. Even after the death of his wife, his father-in-law and his terrible scars across his skull, he acts in a way nothing has happened to Billy. He promptly engages himself in writing and preaching about the Tralfamadorian gospels. All these characterize Billy’s emotional disconnection. And this helps Billy to grapple with the pain. Therefore, consciously Billy distances himself from the emotion by playfulness which frees Billy from fear, pain and despair.

Alienation is one way through which Billy avoids painful confrontations, in a way it makes him suffer less. In the war, Billy wants to quit, time and again he asks his friends in the war to “leave me alone. You guys go on without me” (32). He is alienated in the war, since Roland Weary and two other scouts regard themselves as “Three Musketeers” (40). Because of this alienation Billy suffers less, than these three soldiers. They are all killed but Billy survives. After the war, he has a relatively settled life, but is alone. He does not tell any body what he has experienced in the war,

even to his wife. So she feels he is “full of secrets” (115). He is himself, occasionally suffering from nervous collapse without anybody’s knowledge visits doctors. This alienation at home helps Billy somehow to deal with his pain in his own way. The alienation of Billy becomes more intense, after he is in an airplane crash, in which he loses his father-in-law and his wife and himself sustains terrible injury. Now he has nobody with him, he becomes unfit for his official work, his daughter gets married, his son is in Vietnam. However, Billy does not lament his alienation but celebrates it by writing and preparing lectures; “actually, Billy’s outward listlessness was a screen. This listlessness concealed a mind which was fizzing and flashing thrillingly, was preparing letters and lectures about the flying saucers, the negligibility of death, and the true nature of time” (181).

So, Billy’s alienation in the war protects Billy from painful confrontation, his alienation back at home makes Billy a creative genius. He stays hours, writing, letters “devoting himself to the calling much higher than mere business” in order to provide corrective lenses to the wretched souls on earth (27). This helps Billy from further devastation.

Similarly, fragmentation of character and narrative often serve as devices for allaying anxiety. By disassembling the jigsaw puzzle of values, mores, and personality, a character can take refuge from the whole picture in its parts. Fragmentation of character in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is characterized by Billy’s travel in time. Instead of presenting a consistent and coherent character of Billy, Vonnegut represents him as a fragmented character. For instance Vonnegut writes about Billy’s time travel thus:

LISTEN:

Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time. Billy has gone to steep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding day. He has walked through a door in 1955 and come out another one in 1941. He has gone back through that door to find himself in 1963. He has seen his birth and death many times, he says; and pays random visits to all the events in between. (22)

This fragmented Billy appears a different man or acts a different part of his life randomly in various circumstances. Sometimes Billy becomes a senile widower, sometimes a prisoner of war, sometimes acts the part of death, wedding, birth. So at one moment he experiences several things or part of his life ranging from birth to death. In this way Billy visits and takes recourse in fragments that provides him temporary solace. Tralfamadorians also teach Billy to rest his self on fragments particularly on pleasant moments. They say “ignore the awful times, and concentrate on the good ones” (112). Thus, by presenting fragmented self of Billy, Vonnegut serves the special function of reducing of Billy’s pain for providing him enough space to take refuge in different fragment if one does not help him. Another aspect of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, is the fragmentary narrative structure in which there is no sequential narrative development. Vonnegut deconstructs the linear development by writing early in the novel how he is going to begin and end this story, what would be its climax. End, middle and beginning come together in the novel, actually blurring their differences. It is so "short and jumbled and jangled" Vonnegut writes about this novel in the first chapter (18). Hence, Vonnegut attempts to make the pain less severe by presenting fragmented character and fragmented narrative structure. So by presenting Billy’s fragmented character, he provides Billy space for temporary refuge and by deconstructing the linear narrative structure, Vonnegut grapples with the

clutches of conventionality. And, thus, going from one fragment to another Billy celebrates his meaninglessness. The character who can change roles at will, who has minimal memory of or attachment to his past emerges as a wry ‘ideal’ for a shock-resistant man.

The novel uses standard literary devices to achieve unconventional effects. Irony is the dominant comic style. Irony yokes unlike things and by force of the tension between truths, or between what is true and what is not both mirrors and organizes conflict undercutting the emotional impact of each term of its equations. Vonnegut’s orchestration of World War Second with science fiction flights to Tralfamadore juggles public catastrophe with personal anguish as it develops a working defensive system against pain in all its intensities. Vonnegut tries to yoke World War II experiences of Billy with his trips to Tralfamadore. Part of World War II experiences are “partly true” as Vonnegut claims and Billy’s trips to Tralfamadore are more fictitious (1). In this way, by bringing together, truth and fantasy, Vonnegut provides a space for celebration. This, in turn, becomes a tool of survival in the novel for Billy.

Such a survival tool is supported by paradox, which is the dominant intellectual style of much post war fiction. It is a technique of giving opposites equal weight. Paradox is used to grab the reader’s attention to see something in a new way. Viewing the world and life in a new way contrary to normal expectation, is what played out in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. For instance, when Billy is admonished by the Tralfamadorian, to look at life and the world in a different way, they ask him to “concentrate only on pleasant moments” and avoid the darkest moment (112). Back on earth Billy is spreading these Tralfamadorian gospels by writing and lecturing on it. Every body including his daughter and others find it all nonsense but Billy insists

“that everything he had said on the radio was true” (24). Here, Billy is playing with the paradox, what others claim to be false, for Billy is truth. That way Billy is exploring new way to give equal importance to alternative perspective as to the mainstream. This alternative perspective to which Billy promptly sticks is the result of his disbelief in the mainstream and his temporary refuge in fantasy which he found most appropriate to his condition. Thus, such techniques in postmodern fiction are used to challenge traditional distinctions between weakness and strength, good and evil, truth and falsehood, the victim and his oppressor.

Another technique used in the novel to express a sense of the interchangeability of experience is the pastiche. For instance, Billy has long before read a science fiction, *The Big Board* by Kilgore Trout when he is in the veteran’s hospital. This novel “was about an Earthling man and woman who were kidnapped by extra-terrestrials. They were put on display in a zoo on a planet called Zircon-22” (192). The story of this novel and the story that is told by Billy about his life correspond to a considerable degree. Billy also tells the same story of being kidnapped by Tralfamadorians who put him and another woman on display in a zoo. Billy, in that way, interchanges the story of the novel with his own, assuming himself as the abducted man. This interchangeability of experience helps Billy to replace his painful experience with something that gave him solace. Pastiche, thus, operates on the life of Billy as a means of celebration. In effect, it helps Billy to lessen his painful experience.

Intertextuality is another technique that gives room for the free play of various ideas or fragments. Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* abounds in intertextuality. It is a condition of interconnectedness among texts or the concept that any text is an amalgam of others either because it exhibits signs of influence or because its language

inevitably contains common points of reference with other texts through such things as allusion, quotation, genre and style. Vonnegut takes into his novel extracts from history books, from poems and from the Bible. He even has pictorial illustrations. He includes a few quotations from history book as “it was *Dresden, History, Stage and Gallery*, by Mary Endell. It was published in 1908, and its introduction began: *it is hoped that this little book will make itself useful*” (16). Here Vonnegut tries to explore the history of Dresden. In many instances he turns to the pages of history like this throughout the novel, and brings different historical references. Another historical reference he brought in the novel is from the book “*The Destruction of Dresden* by an Englishman named David Irving” in which he wrote “*I deeply regret that British and U.S. Bombers killed 135,000 people in the attack on Dresden*” (179). Vonnegut is writing a novel about Dresden but at the same time bringing historical facts about its destruction. By doing so Vonnegut is bringing together fact and fiction, making text over text. Similarly, in the novel Vonnegut inserts lines of poetry from others. Not only that he quotes from science fiction of Kilgore Trout, but also includes an illustration of a chain hung from the neck of a woman over her breast. Few lines from Gideon Bible are also there in the novel. In this way, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is seen as history within history, fiction within fiction, quotes, mixture of genres giving somewhat amalgamatory texture to the novel. And this intertextuality and text within text is widely seen as something unconventional, playful and something celebratory. They are inserted in order to make the novel more playful, and to add something, when there is absence or exhaustion. In this way, intertextuality gives way to alternative vision of life different from conventional to fragmentary and playful.

So Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a postmodern text in that it uses and also subverts the conventions of both of science fiction and of war fiction and features

a non-linear plot with jumps both in space and time and confuses the identity of ostensible author and “I” of chapter 1. Is the “I” Vonnegut? Another character? Planting the seeds of uncertainty in the reader regarding the identity of authors and their relationship to the text is one of the hallmarks of postmodernism.

Metafiction is one of the techniques that postmodern writers use in their novels in order to find a way out of their dilemma that is writing novels when some critics have announced its death. Metafiction, instead of putting a mirror up to human nature or reality, puts a mirror to the art of novel writing itself so that readers may understand that some concepts such as [History] or [Reality] are human constructs and it is absolutely impossible to get hold of the absolute truth. Kurt Vonnegut is one of the prominent novelists of our era and his novels mainly aim at criticizing the culture of contemporary American society and criticizing the catastrophes such as war. Vonnegut by using the concepts of [History] and [Reality] to give the readers a better understanding of the authenticity of these abstract terms. Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of the novel, accidentally has to share a room with a Harvard History Professor named Bertram Copeland Rumford in the hospital. Rumford is working “on a one volume history of the United States Army Air Corps in World War Two” (184). Also Rumford is “a retired brigadier general in the Air force Reserve, the official Air Force Historian, a full professor, the author of twenty-six books” (184). Rumford is supposed to write a ‘condensation’ of the twenty-seven-volume official history of the army Air Force in World War Two. But he cannot find anything about the fire-bombing of Dresden in twenty seven volumes of that book. Here Vonnegut openly foregrounds the role of historians in making history. Those who are in power create history according to their interest. Dresden has had more casualties than the atomic bombs, and it has also been the seat of a real catastrophe, but merely because some

people have labeled this event as “top secret”, they have tried to eliminate the fire-bombing of Dresden by not bringing it in the official history book. With all these, Vonnegut cannot claim that his account of this event is at the same time objective, and especially as this event is seen through the eyes of Billy Pilgrim, it can be said that this event is as real as Tralfamadore and even Vonnegut’s own presence in the novel cannot give the reader any more hints about that. However this fictional world is made of words and sentences, and this is the same tool that one has to write history, to omit something from that. Such a doubtful view toward what has been rendered as ‘reality’, makes us doubt the authenticity of what is called “official history” too. Moreover, Vonnegut wants readers to learn an important lesson about history: history is nothing but human construct and it is as fictional as a novel. Thus by treating history as novel, Vonnegut is trying to deal with the painful facts of World War Two as if it was fiction as novels are. In that way, it would become quite easy to forget it and the impact of the World War would be less severe.

The next major implication of metafiction refers to the problematic role of the author. The author in a metafictional novel loses his privileged position and almost becomes powerless. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut is the omniscient narrator of the text. The god-like position of the author in the text is challenged. For instance, the stories of Billy Pilgrim, being unstuck in time and his experiences in the Second World War and the planet Tralfamadore are intruded upon by the author. When Billy is experiencing the tragic moment of the dying of the colonel, Wild Bob, Vonnegut interrupts it by reminding the reader that “I was there, so was my old war buddy, Bernard V.O. Hare” (67). When Billy eyewitnesses the American soldiers’ sickness in the latrine, the scene is shattered by an interruption: “An American near Billy wailed that he had exerted everything but his brains [. . .] That was I. That was the author of

this book” (125). Therefore, by interrupting the flow of narrative development, Vonnegut is underestimating his own authenticity, that means bringing him to the plank of common folk. So, with this underestimation he somehow manages to release his trauma.

In the novel, with the act of narrative intrusion, the identity of the author becomes doubled, fictitious and trivialized, and this is compared to the author in realist or modernist narrative tradition, their omniscient and omnipotent power is greatly reduced. Thus the pressure on the writer is less than it used to be before. This gives tremendous relief to the author. As Waugh points out clearly:

The author attempts desperately to hang onto his or her ‘real’ identity as creator of the text we are reading. What happens, however when he or she enters it, is that his or her own reality is also called into question [. . .]. The ‘author’ discovers that the language of the text produces him or her as much as he or she produces the language of the text.

(133)

While the author, in this way, breaks the border line between the creator and the created by descending from his superior position and entering the very text he is composing, he is not only questioning the god-like power of the realistic author but also breaking the narrative coherence and structural control by the act of authorial intrusion. This, authorial intrusion makes the author powerless in terms of the author’s position in the text and structural control over text. When author in such a way dismantles his power and control over text, by putting himself in the text, he is doing nothing but celebrating the act of collapsing and reconstructing from the bits and fragments.

In a nutshell, the themes of detachment and meaninglessness are celebrated in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* as device for diminishing the emotional charge of painful experience through postmodern technique of subversion of narration, irony, intertextuality, paradox, parody, adaptation and so on by opening up new window of opportunity for the protagonist and the author alike.

IV. Conclusion

Kurt Vonnegut in his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* celebrates meaninglessness through different postmodernist techniques such as the use of the subversion of narration, pastiche, parody, intertextuality, adaptation, alienation, paradox, fragmented character and narrative structure as the devices for diminishing painful experiences of World War Second.

All these techniques have a specific aim of celebration. For instance, Vonnegut undertakes the act of parody by blurring the distinction of the narrative coherence. He brings middle, end and beginning of the novel together, or rather starts with the end of the novel, and then randomly concentrates on the middle, and the beginning of it. By challenging linear development of novelistic tradition, he provides free play for different fragments of his novel. And this free play is what amounts to the celebration. At another moment, he parodies the novelistic convention by making reader aware of how the novel is going to begin and end. In that way, Vonnegut prepares them to cope with painful evocations of the novel. Thus, Vonnegut's use of parody has the specific aim of celebration to deal with trauma of the World War II.

Like parody, Vonnegut uses pastiche to interchange his painful experiences as prisoner of war by writing a novel on it. Vonnegut causes his protagonist Billy Pilgrim to interchange his experiences similar to author with science fiction. Billy Pilgrim reads great deal of science fiction to deal with his pain of the Second World War. Not only has Billy assumed he is the hero of science fiction by taking recourse to fantasy, Vonnegut reduces the pain of himself and the character by the interchangeability of their experiences through the postmodern techniques of pastiche. Intertextuality is another technique adopted by Vonnegut for celebration in which he inserts quotations from history, poetry, science fiction, pictorial illustration and

references from Bible jumbling everything together in a way creating text over text and intermingling them. Celebration of meaninglessness is also a mode of adaptation, devised by author. After Vonnegut finds life meaningless because of war he celebrates it adapting himself to new circumstances by choosing the career of writer and writing novel on it. Vonnegut's hero in the novel adapts himself by taking refuge in different modes of adaptation like passivity, time travel, science fiction, prayer in his office and at last like Vonnegut writing and lecturing on his fantastic trips to Tralfamadore.

Hence, *Slaughterhouse-Five* entails the characteristic traits of postmodern fiction such as subversion of narration, celebration of the meaningless, intertextuality, plurality, experimentation and so on. All these techniques are devised in order to adapt new circumstances that is in the period after the end of Second World War. The end of Second World War with the legacy of horrific experiences and the threat of nuclear annihilation produces anxiety and challenge to existence quite different from Pre-Second World War period. So with the rise of new threat to existence, conventional mode of representation, most widely practiced in modernist literature, are also over and new techniques of representation become dominant which are at once unconventional and celebratory. These techniques, in turn, become most powerful means for allaying anxiety and threat of the period. Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* comes as an effective antidote to the period by celebrating meaninglessness. In this regard, the research work analyzes how all these techniques are applied by the writer in order to respond to the meaninglessness of life in an attempt to rescue life by providing alternative perspectives or alternative adaptation.

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