

76. Dispersal of time and trauma in postmodern novel: *Slaughterhouse-Five*¹**Samet KALECİK²**

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Abstract

Wars cause trauma and disruption of temporal sequencing, leading to fragmentation of memory in survivors. This fragmentation leads to negative changes in the victims' posttraumatic relationships and character traits. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) is a novel about war trauma in which WWII is satirized with the use of a nonlinear narrative and post-war traumatic self. The novel presents to the reader how an innocent man survives in a drastic war atmosphere by chance and how his life changes after the war in both a playful and critical manner. Although *Slaughterhouse-Five* broadly delineates the theme of the destructiveness of war, specifically Vonnegut draws attention to the distorted memory of a traumatized young man with an ironic stance. Thereby, presenting the reader an opportunity to delve into a mind in which the compulsory conditions about temporality and liminality are abolished, Vonnegut turns his narrative into a play that reflects both joy and suffering owing to the collapse of sequence in time. Making extensive use of the means of metafiction, the author reveals his war experiences and the hidden sides of WWII. Therefore, this study aims to analyze Vonnegut's ironic approach to war trauma, distorted perception of time, and their reflection on fiction in a postmodern sense.

Keywords: Trauma, distorted memory, nonlinear time, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut.

Postmodern romanda zaman ve travmanın dađılıřı: *Mezbaha Beř***Öz**

Savaşlar travmaya ve zamansal sıralamanın bozulmasına neden olarak hayatta kalanlarda hafızanın parçalanmasına yol açar. Bu parçalanma da kurbanların travma sonrası ilişkilerinde ve karakter özelliklerinde olumsuz deđişimlere neden olur. Kurt Vonnegut'un *Mezbaha Beř* (1969) adlı eseri, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın doğrusal olmayan anlatı ve savaş sonrası travmatik benliđin kullanımıyla hicvedildiđi bir savaş travması romanıdır. Roman, çetin bir savaş ortamında masum bir adamın tesadüfen nasıl hayatta kaldıđını ve savařtan sonra hayatının nasıl deđiřtiđini hem oyunsal hem de eleřtirel bir dille okuyucuya sunar. *Mezbaha Beř*, savařın yıkıcılıđı temasını geniř bir şekilde ele alsada, özellikle Vonnegut, ironik bir yaklařımla genç bir adamın travmatize edilmiř yařamına ve onun çarpık hafızasına dikkat çeker. Vonnegut böylece okuyucuya zamansallık ve mekansallıđa dair zorunlu kořulların ortadan kalktıđı bir zihni inceleme fırsatı sunarken, anlatısını doğrusal zamanın çökmesi nedeniyle hem sevinci hem de ıřtırabı yansıtan bir oyuna dönüřtürür. Üst kurmacadan da yođun bir şekilde yararlanan yazar, savaş deneyimlerini ve İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın gizli kalmıř yanlarını ortaya koyar. Bu nedenle bu çalıřma, Vonnegut'un savaş travmasına ironik yaklařımını,

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bozulan zaman algısını ve bunların kurguya yansımalarını postmodern anlamda incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Travma, hasarlı bellek, doğrusal olmayan zaman, *Mezbaha Beş*, Kurt Vonnegut.

Introduction

Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade, A Duty-Dance with Death (1969), written as an experimental fiction about the criticism of WWII, lays bare the complex psychological condition of a naïve young man who witnessed the Dresden bombing in 1945 and his adaptation to casual life. "Centered on his capture and imprisonment by the Germans during the waning months of World War II, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) is Vonnegut's signature achievement" (Sumner, 2013, p. 123). The novel discloses the fragile and traumatic view of a young chaplain assistant whose life was greatly affected by WWII. In the novel, regarded as one of the major canonical texts of postmodern literature, the author scrutinizes the appalling condition of man in the war and post-war period with not just comic but most of the time sarcastic manner. Besides, in the novel, Vonnegut presents new perspectives regarding war trauma and the fluxional concept of time after a ferocious campaign that dramatically influenced the lives of people who were psychologically wounded and conceded to the casualties. Particularly, the author strives for accentuating that the traumatic self is unshielded and open to change concerning the perception of time. In line with this, the matters related to traumatic self like memory and post-war psychology are presented critically with the problematic approach to the nature of time and its perception which is liable to transform because of unavoidable circumstances. Furthermore, Vonnegut perceives time as a space of free travel and he dissolves the solidity, and boundaries of time in the novel. Thereby, presenting the reader an opportunity to delve into a mind in which the compulsory conditions and limitations about temporality and liminality are abolished and turn into a play that shows both joy and suffering of Billy Pilgrim owing to the collapse of time sequence, Vonnegut fictionalizes his wartime experiences and the hidden side of the WWII with a metafictional style. Therefore, this paper aims at dismantling how Vonnegut deals with the distorted meaning of time, which is caused by trauma and results in unresponsiveness in a tragicomic postmodern novel.

Among the contemporary American writers, Kurt Vonnegut's life is perhaps one the most reflected in his literary works. Before being a renowned writer, Vonnegut, who was born in Indianapolis in 1922, studied biochemistry at Cornell University. "Having enlisted in the U.S. Army in November 1942, a few months before he actually left Cornell, Vonnegut was sent to basic training in 1943" (Farrell, 2008, p. 5). Similar to the writers who actively took part in the war, Vonnegut also was destined to witness the devastations and the tragedies of the war, which had a significant influence on his literary output.³ As literary critics agree that the most critical event that changed and shaped the literary style of Vonnegut was WWII because he was taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans at the end of the war and was taken to a camp in Dresden, Germany. The Dresden attack might be regarded as one of the last and the most controversial actions of the allied bombers in terms of timing and location. However, when Vonnegut was a war prisoner, Dresden was bombed by Allied Air Forces, and though the specific numbers were not accurately confirmed, approximately 25,000, in some accounts 200,000 innocent civilians died. In a letter that he wrote to his family on May 29, 1945, Vonnegut claims that "On about February 14th the

3 For writers who took part in the war in one way or another, the representation of war in a literary text, rather than a painter's depiction of an object and an event on his canvas, means questioning the destructions and changing social dynamics caused by the war, and showing what these sufferings can lead to for people from all walks of life who take part in the war (Kalecik, 2021, p. 27).

Americans came over, followed by the R.A.F. Their Combined labors killed 250,000 people in the twenty-four hours and destroyed all of Dresden- possibly the world's most beautiful city" (Vonnegut, 2011, p. 794). For that reason, Vonnegut, who thought that the Dresden bombing was a shameful event, and that the American state covered it up for a long time, wrote a novel about the atrocities of war for the sake of warning the next generation and the whole world against the massacres and death of the civilians. Therefore, it is possible to infer that Vonnegut's own experience of war, and observations feed his literary side as he stimulates a discussion about a historical event.

Not surprisingly, Vonnegut outbursts his traumatic experiences to his style, and he obtains an experimental outlook while creating his works. He is "[r]egarded as a major postmodern novelist, his constantly innovative explorations of narrative structure, the politics of representation, the destructiveness of technology, the art world and nature of comedy, have elevated him to the first rank of American writers" (Klinkowitz, 2000, p. 345). Being an innovative writer who pretends to have nothing meaningful to tell about a world war-at least as he stressed in the novel a couple of times-, Vonnegut embellishes and enriches the scope of the discussion of *Slaughterhouse-Five* with his employment of flashbacks, flash-forwards, non-linear and non-sequential use of time. Therefore, although the novel invokes the impression that it is fiction written with randomly selected structures at first reading, its condensed meaning is hidden beneath the selection of words and phrases that depict a traumatized self. In this sense, Vonnegut poignantly prefers a corrugated narrative that contributes to the perceptions of the historical events that should seriously be reconsidered. For that reason, the writer allows the unusual protagonist of the novel, Billy Pilgrim, go to and fro between past and present in the narrative for the sake of depicting mental disorientation, which is the most noticeable effect of war.

In line with this, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut opens a discussion and gives a chance to the reader to reconsider the truth about the pre and post-war period and its disturbing influences on both the protagonist's and the society's cultural and intellectual background. He humorously criticizes the war as a destructive phenomenon whose prolonged consequences dramatically influence victims in unredeemable aspects. However, what makes Vonnegut's novel different from other war novels is his employment of the sarcastic tone of the narrator as a writer. As a conscious novelist, the author establishes the passive struggle of an ordinary man who faces up to unusual and unheroic events in and after the war with an eclectic style violating the boundaries of fiction to openly indicate that what is narrated does not deserve respect. Todd F. Davis (2006) argues that "Vonnegut offers a new kind of fiction, a paradigm of postmodernity that allows the author to struggle with philosophical ideas concerning our condition in a form that reflects this very struggle" (p. 6). Furthermore, complexity and nonlinear narrative time strengthen the tone of the novel as a trauma story that limns the loss of integrity in consciousness. Therefore, Vonnegut changes the concept of time, and he lays bare that time is a scattered entity on which a traumatic self does not possess stable control. He brings together the characteristics of autobiography, satire, historical fiction, and science fiction in his work but his depiction of history and traumatic memory is much more conspicuous. For that reason, it is highly possible to conceive *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a postmodern historical satire in which Vonnegut creates his own story by blending his real memories with a schizophrenic time sequence to give a different insight into how world wars should be understood and evaluated.

Donald B. Veix (1975) states that *Slaughterhouse-Five* "[s]ays things about our society, real things, in a very funny way. Structurally, it is contemporary in the way that the past, the present, and the future drift and blur together" (p. 25). The use of time in the novel refers not only to a span in the structure of experimental fiction but also to the schizophrenic psychology of a traumatized person because there is

not any limitation among the time shifts. Also, this indecisive condition invokes the idea of relativity of time, which may cause a captivation for the protagonist. As a chaplain assistant, he does not play a heroic role in the war with his absurd attitude and that makes him an outsider figure among other soldiers. In other words, although Billy Pilgrim is free of the limitations of temporality in his imagination, he has to face up the difficulties that his mind urges him in daily life and he cannot cast aside the traumatic experiences and fears of war. For that reason, Billy is not able to live in the present and he cannot imagine and design his future with his conscious decisions. The gates of time are mixed in his imagination, and though he looks like a businessman in post-war years, his memory is frequently interrupted by his fears which are mostly related to the fear of death and injury. Although Billy Pilgrim had survived WWII, he had to bear the crumbles of his drastic memory in his new life after the war. As the novel discloses, it is revealed that Billy is a character who is “unstuck in time”, but he cannot control his memory, and he daydreams as a way to escape from the realities (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 19,35).

Trauma and Time Perception in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

The reality is such an indefinite and undecidable subject that discussions on it continue in various branches of art. Postmodernism is always in pursuit of the representation of what is extreme in life. Hence, it is possible to comment that the usual but non-habitual things are likely to be portrayed quite openly in postmodern texts such as death, trauma, and alienation. Since postmodern literature is considered as crisis literature which is against all kinds of standards and dogmas, it is natural that postmodern literary fiction deals with themes and characters excessively in dismal and extraordinary situations. Although it might be a broad generalization to name it as crisis literature, the novelists entitled as ‘postmodern’ vocalize what seems unspeakable and unable to be portrayed because his/her discourse should be discordant with both social and moral codes for the sake of making a revolutionary attempt. In other words, they consider literature, especially novels as a space of free speech in which hegemony, control of society, history, and policy are abolished. Thus, what remains in the works of postmodern writers is the limitless and uncontrolled traits of imagination and “pure and random play of signifiers” (Jameson, 1992, p. 96). The destructive side of this literature appears at that point because the purpose of postmodern literature (if any) endeavours to define itself without any root or starting point.

However, this falsified method of definition is away from reaching a specific point of finding an accurate picture of contemporary society, man, and art as well. Postmodern writers approach even the most severe subjects playfully but this does not mean that they underestimate the subject they deal with. It is a mere digression from the previous methods and styles to strengthen its effect of experimental narrative on the reader who should be considered as postmodern too. For that reason, almost every postmodern writer is actively interested in a complex theory in his work. Without a doubt that Kurt Vonnegut is one of the essential representative novelists of postmodern literature since he is perceived as an “experimental writer” who deals with the idea of reality in a playful manner as befitting the postmodernist argument that the truth is subjective and it depends on individual experiences and thoughts (Marvin, 2002, p. 16). Although Linda Hutcheon (2004) considers the novel as a “blend of war documentary and science fiction”, it proposes deeper insights into temporality and the representation of reality (p. 44). Also, Vonnegut questions the real behind the form of truth, which appeared as an objective thing. However, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, trauma and the concept of time are the intrigue theories blended with satire and black humour.

In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary trauma is defined as “an injury (such as a wound) to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent and a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2021). In line with this, considering the preliminary definitions of trauma, the focus was on the physical wound but later than in the 19th century, the definitions encapsulated psychological wounds which reiterate and affect the lives of trauma victims. Events like death, separation, rape, murder, environmental disasters and war inscribe enduring memories that distort the witness’s equity of emotions and actions. On the condition that one’s sense of security is jeopardized, he/she feels intensely confused and this enforces him/her to create a sense of helplessness. Therefore, trauma victims intermittently suffer from rather persistent symptoms such as anxiety and distress and as a negative consequence, they cannot continue their life as psychologically healthy individuals.

Trauma studies fundamentally deal with psychological aspects of the trauma such as language, memory, and identity. Born as a reaction to unusual incidents, trauma is a phenomenon discussed in sociology, psychology, and literature. When the modern trauma studies were considered to have been initiated in the 1990s, they basically focused on Freud’s approach to the “trauma that imagines an extreme experience which challenges the limits of language and even ruptures then meaning altogether This model of trauma indicates that suffering is ‘unpresentable’” (Balaev, 2018, p. 360). As one of the early definitions of trauma, Lindeman highlights that it is “the sudden uncontrollable disruption of affiliative bonds” (Lindeman, 1944, p. 144). Here he suggests that the close relationships of the traumatized is interrupted and the usual connection of him with his/her social relationships deteriorates. The umbrella term trauma was overtly studied by psychologists and it was identified as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which briefly means a mental disorder stems from a traumatic event such as an accident, war, abuse, death, etc., first coined in 1980 with the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1980).

As in substantial models on the human psyche, Sigmund Freud can be counted as the fundamental theorist who analyses the main sources and structure of psychological trauma with his studies such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Following Freud, trauma studies gained a more comprehensive outlook with the other disciplines of humanities such as history and literature which manifest themselves with the studies of Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman. In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Cathy Caruth has a new perspective with limited substantial studies on trauma by investigating language and silence moments. Caruth has noted that, having read *Gerusalemme and Liberta*, Freud realized that “the experience of trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will” (1996, p. 2). Further, she reinterprets Freud’s reading of Tasso’s poem from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and expands the limits of the structure of trauma. According to Caruth, trauma, which means bodily wound in ancient Greek, is a wound in the mind that cannot heal easily like a physical scar but “haunts the survivor later on” (1996, p. 4). Therefore, she reminds that trauma cannot be oversimplified because it is not an ordinary pathological condition but a repetitive and obstinate phenomenon. Being conscious of the unclear points in the structure of trauma Caruth aims at investigating in a large context certain texts except for Freud’s writings such as Hiroshima Mon Amour and Lacan’s philosophical studies. However, Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events occurs in the delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (1996, p. 11). She claims that a ‘soldier’ with repetitive ‘nightmares’ is an example of the very common image of contemporary reference for trauma (p. 11). More importantly, the idea that the survivors of traumatic events have some serious problems with the

perception of time except for serious and repetitive emotional neurosis and disorders were claimed by Caruth who states that trauma is “a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time” (1996, p. 61). Additionally, although she continues with a traditional model for the understanding of trauma as a belated and unspeakable event that disrupts and dissociates consciousness, “the emphasis in Caruth’s model on the intrinsic relationship between the individual and cultural group as well as the dissociative and silencing effects of trauma continues in criticism [...] but widens the theoretical framework to include feminist, race, and postcolonial theory” (Balaev, 2018, p. 365).

In psychology literature trauma victims’ time perceptions are distorted because the tragic event that the victim experienced recurrently influences both cognitive and emotional conditions. The trauma victim continually goes back to the past but he/she remembers the past with either scattered images or less detail compared to a psychologically healthy individual. As R.D. Stolorow (2007) puts it, there is a discrepancy between a healthy individual and the victim of trauma since he/she discerns presence regardless of the sheer borders of ordinary living, and “it is in the sense that the worlds of traumatized persons are felt to be fundamentally incommensurable with those of others, the deep chasm in which an anguished sense of estrangement and solitude takes form” (p. 16). A traumatized person is alienated both from society and his own self. Moreover, the basic limit of everyday living that the individuals apply for in order to organize their actions and use as an auxiliary element that shapes sequencing personal history and identity, time, discerned with scattered slices in the mind of a traumatized one. As Balaev (2018) argues “[t]he dissociative break in time causes both the emotional suffering and the inability to identify or “locate” the meaning of the event” (p. 365). Therefore, “in the region of trauma all duration or stretching along collapses, past becomes present, and future loses meaning other than endless repetition” (Stolorow, 2007, p. 20).

Being a complex concept on which discussions and research continue, the representations of trauma in fiction tacitly provide insights because as a free space in fictional works, especially writers who become the victims of trauma not only try to depict trauma but also mention the hardships of representing it. However, some novels spawn a distinctive style by being detached from others because they have their entire plot based on the experiences of a traumatized character. According to Michele Balaev, “[t]he term ‘trauma novel’ refers to a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels. A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world” (Balaev b, 2008, p.150). Also, Anne Whitehead (2004) in *Trauma Fiction* states that “the rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualizing trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past and why it is remembered” (p. 3).

In this context, his war experience led Vonnegut to be more aware of the ineffaceable adverse impacts of wars. These effects continued in the later years, and many soldiers continued to suffer from both psychological and physiological results of the war as in the case of shell shock. Although physical deformation seems to have a long-lasting and permanent effect on the soldiers, mental deformation influences their later life more than expected because dramatic memories about death, fatal injuries and massacre are so drastic in the victim soldiers’ minds that they have substantial adverse consequences on them considering their adaptation to life in society again. The war trauma victims are so alienated from themselves and their society that it is not conceivable to expect them to maintain their life as psychologically wholesome individuals in their future lives.

When Vonnegut published the novel in 1969, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder had not been coined in psychology literature. Therefore, the novel gives insights into the understanding of people who have witnessed death and survive. “In the self-reflexive first chapter” (Kunze, 2012, p. 46) there is a mirror reflection of Vonnegut himself in *Slaughterhouse-Five* because the novel's narrator is an older man who aspires to write a novel about the war and he intentionally or unintentionally reflects that he has some difficulties remembering the past events accurately. Rather than writing a pure account of what he had witnessed in the war atmosphere, Vonnegut prefers reflecting the dramatic emotions in a humorous and satirical way. During and after the war he tried to emphasize that the people of the triumphant countries did not become aware of the tragic situation in the defeated countries. For that reason, Vonnegut, who had been profoundly influenced by the war trauma, created Billy Pilgrim as his avatar in the novel and he gives the reader a chance to ponder on the trauma that might be considered as an incurable disease disrupting the wholeness of not just individuals but all the society.

Hence, considering the structural aspect of the novel, time and its recognition are impenetrable to define, so Vonnegut offers more than an exceptional understanding of time. On the surface level, it is possible to conclude that the Dresden bombing is a milestone for Billy Pilgrim in the novel, but it is a limited way of apprehending it as ordinary people or the earthlings do. In this regard, for Vonnegut, time is an essential but problematic concept for individuals who had confronted severe disasters such as war, mass killing, poverty, and alienation. However, on one hand, it is claimed in the novel that people confronted with tragedies cannot recuperate from trauma. It can be inferred that deterioration in the understanding of time owing to war and trauma is the focal point of the non-successive time in the novel. On the other hand, Vonnegut puts forth the idea that it is conceivable to view time as a complete unity because its fundamental parts as past, present, and even future may have tightly adhered to each other and it may be perceived not as continual progress but as a newly built singularity.

It is possible to infer in the first chapter that *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a novel about writing a novel on the war which makes it a postmodern novel with historical accounts that helps it be analysed as a ‘historiographic metafiction’ in Linda Hutcheon’s terms (2004, p. 5). To reflect the abnormal psychology of the individuals before and after the war, Vonnegut prefers narrating a soldier’s life in a spatial temporality because he believes that war trauma is a never healing wound which distorts the sense of belonging and perception of time. For that reason, in the novel, Billy Pilgrim is narrated as a character whose control over time is diminished because of war trauma. As Vonnegut describes, Billy becomes “unstuck in time” following his abduction by the Tralfamadorians, - extraterrestrial beings in Billy’s imagination as an effect of his science fiction novels of Kilgore Trout-, and he goes to and fro among some time spans in his life (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 18). Extraterrestrial bodies, who are called the Tralfamadorians in Billy’s mind, have a different understanding of time compared to humans. In other words, time is perceived by the Tralfamadorians as a totality with no beginning and no end, which makes the war hollow and meaningless from their point of view (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 22). However, humans, who have to put up with both psychological and physical difficulties, pretend to go on with their lives as if they have not been influenced by war. The only person who has a different understanding of war is Billy himself contrary to society. Therefore, he is obliged to set up a family in which he tried to lead a different life following the war. Although Billy himself was a POW in Germany, his imprisonment changes shape and it turns him out to be a prisoner afterward. By narrating the events that Billy witnessed in his lifetime, Vonnegut expects the reader that they see the events ignoring the human perception of time and prefer the Tralfamadorians who observe any difference among past, present, and future. Furthermore, Vonnegut aims to explain the events and conditions that must be surmounted during and after the war. For that reason, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a mirror reflection of a traumatized

self that has lost its authority over the concepts which regulate and make life meaningful. Since time determines the identities and destinies of individuals in real life, it is an indispensable part of the characters in the novel. Vonnegut argues that if the mechanism of linear/regular time is damaged by war trauma as in the case of Billy Pilgrim, one cannot have control over his actions.

At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator or Vonnegut himself like in other metafictional novels attempts to present his intention to convey a problematic story that is closer to fiction than reality.

ALL THIS HAPPENED, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true. One guy I knew really *was* shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his. Another guy I knew really did threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunman after the war. And so on. I have changed all the names. (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 1)

Vonnegut's narrator or he himself reminds the reader that he is going to reveal a real story with defects. The writer also accepts that not all but most parts of the story are real. He highlights that he changed the names intentionally to present the fictional account of wartime experiences in order to benefit from the power of literature, which opens a free space. Primarily, Vonnegut points out to the reader that what is written is an accurate account of WWII and the novel is in a place between fiction and reality as he writes some parts other than the war. Being an unorthodox writer, he gives clues about the humorous tone of the novel by stating that an ordinary soldier was sentenced to death because of plundering a teapot among the ruins of war, which created a verbal irony because although the military authorities killed many innocent people and stole their life right at war; they give a death penalty to a harmless, simple soldier for breaking a simple rule (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 177).

The narrator casts doubt on his memories of war, so he claims that if the past is to be narrated through fiction, it will lose its credibility as fact and fiction will intertwine. Thereby what appears is an experimental reflection of war whose rational message is transmitted emotionally. Vonnegut also stresses that he initially creates anonymity to increase the tone of the reality of the novel. However, as a metafictional element, Vonnegut asserts his restlessness about the book itself because he cannot write it as quickly as he expects due to his deteriorating memory depending on his old age.

I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money 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 about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. And I thought, too that it would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was too big. But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then- not enough of them to make a book, anyway. (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 2)

As befitting the outcomes of trauma that are presented with metafiction, Vonnegut's crippled narrator claims that though he believes that the book about the war in Dresden will provide him money and reputation, he cannot attain his goals because his old age does not provide him with a clear memory to remember such an important event in a detailed way. Therefore, he faces difficulties in writing as he consciously believed that it is harder to give a true account of the past in practice than the theory. For a writer like Vonnegut who desires to reach enormous fame and wealth from a tragic event, grasping the difficulty of bringing back the past events and turning them into a readable unity are the sources of considerable disappointment. "The Vonnegut of Chapter One appears simultaneously obsessed with and oppressed by time, past, and death-particularly death" (Harris, 1976, p. 229). However, he is not aware of the healing power of time which stems from the oblivescence of either distressing or salutary experiences. On the other hand, the writer would like to assert that time relieves his traumatic memory to some extent.

In the novel, Vonnegut as the narrator announces that “One of the main effects of the war, after all, is that people are discouraged from being characters” (Vonnegut, 2016, p.134). The characters in the novel are so superficial that they function as decor and because of trauma, nobody is represented as faithful and refined as well. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim is portrayed as a weak and powerless man who can be regarded as a representative of the helpless condition of civilians against the war. As the protagonist of the novel, Billy Pilgrim is an awkward time traveller in the mind of the narrator. Even though he is a civilian and not a suitable person for war conditions as a chaplain assistant who does not possess even a proper dress and gun, he survives the war by chance. Since he has no self-control over his actions, Billy invokes a sense of humane sentiment in the other soldiers’ minds. The description of Billy’s physical and psychological conditions is absurd because of their incompatibility with the time and place he is in. Therefore, due to his physical weakness, Billy has become an individual who is alienated and diffident. In the second chapter, he is amusingly described as a physically disabled man whose “shoulders [are] like a box of kitchen matches” (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 26). He is also called a ‘Filthy Flamingo’ because of the lack of proportion of his body (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 27). This physical disadvantage causes him to be a proper part of the team because “he couldn’t even walk-kept bobbing up-and down, up-and down, driving everybody crazy, giving their position away” (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 34). Billy has to bear the other soldiers’ brusque actions for being an inefficient and useless one at war (Vonnegut, 2016: p. 25-27). Other than his physical inefficiency, Billy is also characterized as a sensitive and emotional person who liquidates from all the dreadful circumstances because he has not got a great deal of fear of death. As his surname ‘pilgrim’ implies, Billy, embarks upon a pathological, spiritual, and didactic journey in the war atmosphere. His mythical journey during the war represents the fragmentation and loss of a sense of meaning in life.

Vonnegut suggests a tragic atmosphere by blending comic and even absurd scenes in order to depict and criticize the meaninglessness of WWII. By creating a clownish character like Billy, Vonnegut violates the common understanding of a war hero and puts forth the idea that the war is not a heroic event to be proud of for the common citizens. Therefore, what Vonnegut attempts to highlight in the novel is that the reality is not so epic but tragically absurd one in WWII. Billy is a young man bestowed with the ability to overwhelm harsh conditions at war by chance. His actions and passive attitude towards his environment both at war and afterward create an incongruity that provides laughter. Just as Billy is not only a proper soldier, he also looks like an ordinary citizen who is victimized by the war psychologically. What makes Billy come back to his country after the war is his fear of death which more or less influences his later life. As Simmons (2008) states “[i]n the character of Billy we observe the anti-heroic figure refusing the rules of an unjust society; in this case refusing to fight just because society orders him to. Billy’s is not a petulant rebellion but a conscious and compassionate stance against the war” (p.123). Therefore, Vonnegut portrays a fiction in which all the characters have defects and they are superficial considering that they are not able to change anything positively in their lives.

Considering the characters with defects in the novel, each one of them displays some kind of sympathy in readers’ minds for the fact that they do not live their conscious choices but they are impelled to do manners and actions that they are not accustomed to. Although for some characters, the warfare atmosphere feeds their savage side, which is inevitable to survive in combat, for Billy the conditions of war strengthen depersonalization. Notwithstanding the use of time travel as part of a complicated philosophical outlook, the writer positioned an antihero at the centre of the novel to discuss the structure of time by referring to his deteriorated psychology. As Alan Gibbs (2014) accentuates that “[I]like Vonnegut, Billy witnesses the devastating fire-bombing of Dresden, which leaves him in a permanently dissociative traumatised state. He is prone to fantasies [...] that he travels, albeit involuntarily, in time,

and is regularly abducted by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore” (p. 56). Vonnegut discusses time in the novel as both real space and psychological space. Furthermore, except for time, Gallagher (2012) posits that “Vonnegut utilizes the anti-hero figure in his work to provide commentary on contemporary society, and in the case of the novels with which we are here concerned to satirize the absurdity of war. Vonnegut’s novels celebrate the heroism of the everyman” (p. 76).

Aside from trauma and unusual use of time in the narrative, tragicomic scenes contribute to the postmodern tone of the novel. In line with this, black humour attributes to an author’s intentional use of humour in expressing what would initially be considered a situation too drastic and austere to laugh about. The use of black humour accompanied by tragicomedy in the novel functions with the reiterated depiction of meaninglessness in war and death; for example, Edgar Derby’s ironic execution by a firing squad due to stealing a teapot from the wreckage of Dresden is among the most tragic and meaningless events reiterated in the novel (Vonnegut, 2016, pp. 1, 4). Although Vonnegut accounts that Derby’s death will be the climax in the novel, it functions as an anti-climax because it just left three lines at the end (2016, p. 177). This meaningless death increases the tone of the absurdity of war in the novel. The phrase ‘So it goes’ is reiterated even after every depiction of death in the novel. This can be considered as an expression of futility, helplessness, or the sign that nothing can be done to reverse death.

The scattered pieces of events from different years are the moments in which Billy’s self-confidence and his trust in the others around him deteriorated. These moments that are haphazardly distributed in the novel are mostly unfavourable events. To begin with, one of the most critical moments of trauma was when Billy’s father threw him into the pool. This event, perhaps, is considered the first trauma which leads him not to trust anybody and to be an inefficient person (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 35). As for the other moments, it is possible to divide them into two as tragic moments in and after the war. The second most traumatic event for the protagonist is his joining the army as a chaplain assistant because he has lack of necessary training for combat. Although the chaplain’s assistants were not expected to fight at the front because their military education was insufficient, Billy had to take part in a group of combatant soldiers (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 26). He is usually bullied by Roland Weary who moves with a sense of heroism at war. More importantly, the feeling of inadequacy has made Billy humiliated among the other soldiers. He was convicted by another soldier, Paul Lazzaro, about Roland’s death. Also, Billy’s family relations, his career plan, his abduction by aliens, being a war prisoner, and even his death include tragicomic elements. Finally, Billy’s war buddy from infantry scout, Edgar Derby’s death can be regarded as one of the most tragicomic and ironic events since he was sentenced to death even after the war because of plundering a teapot that he found among the ruins of Dresden (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 1). Along with the tragic and tragicomic elements in the novel, Vonnegut satirizes the war and tries to depict the futility of war experimentally by highlighting the idea that there isn’t any ideal to be exalted. Exceeding the limits of time and space in *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the reflection of Vonnegut’s experimental style as a postmodernist writer because he wants to indicate that time is a constructed and transformable concept. Therefore, to attain his goal, he blends tragedies and historical accounts as a form of postmodern novel in which classical elements are blurred. Moreover, the ideas on society, religion, and the idea of bravery at war are frequently questioned with the help of trauma and which is the leitmotif of the novel as a whole.

In addition to Billy’s extraordinary war experiences, the science-fiction elements change not only the style but also the mood of the novel. Science fiction and utopia writers make use of time travel to show the limits of humankind, the far-fetched possibilities, progressions in technology, and social life in the future. Vonnegut makes use of science-fiction for the sake of reflecting the idea that human progress

comes to stagnation, and there is nothing to be changed in human life since the past, present, and future are already predetermined. However, Vonnegut makes use of Tralfamadorians to discuss the concept of time, which leads the reader to make a comparison between the persistent idea that there are discrepancies between the past and the future. Billy gives voice to the disparity between alien time and human time by presenting a Tralfamadorian tradition of perceiving death as follows:

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. All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever. (Vonnegut, 2016, p. 22)

Amanda Wick (2014) states that “Vonnegut found a unique way to recount an experience that lies outside the bounds of normative human consciousness by turning to the generic characteristics of science fiction” (p. 329). Although the human perception of time is a continual one, the aliens in the novel regard time as an inseparable unity in which they have no control or right to alter it. So, Vonnegut emphasizes that human beings cannot change past events and it is futile to mourn for past losses. What is more important than that is to design the future for the sake of not being a victim of tragedies like wars. As Billy learns in the alien world of Tralfamadore that all time happens simultaneously; thus, no one really dies. But this permanence has its dark side: brutal acts also live on forever.

Memory is one of the novel's important themes; because of their memories, Billy cannot leave behind the Dresden massacre. He leaps back in time but he visualizes events about war which is the source of trauma. It is expected that the difference between time spans provides the protagonist with the right to make a difference between the causes and effects of his actions even if he is oblivious of that throughout the novel. Nonetheless, in Billy's case, losing control over the sense of time, which restrains him from making correct decisions, keeps his war-exhausted psychological wound fresh which is one of the fundamental reasons for his estrangement. By sharing both the physical and intellectual world of a traumatized man who is mostly alienated from society before the war, Vonnegut complicates the matter of time that is composed of a vicious cycle. It is possible to conclude that the time leaps mechanism in the novel operates with both pleasures and sufferings.

Furthermore, the Tralfamadorian view of lamentation is atypical in terms of their appreciation of time, which is united with positive and negative aspects.

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. Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is "so it goes" (Vonnegut, 2016, p.22)

As it is understood from the quotation, any moment is important in the life of a man because as well as positive and happy; negative and sad moments are a part of reality that should be considered important. “The Tralfamadorians are the voice of reason: their attitudes toward right and wrong, time and space, and free will are more radical, and yet somehow more credible, than anything Billy Pilgrim, or any other human character, could offer” (Fay, 2011, p. 16). According to the Tralfamadorian's perspective, since human life is a combination of these little but considerable parts of time, it is necessary that death should be accepted as an ordinary part of the human timeline in life.

Vonnegut considers traumatic moments, especially the ones related to WWII that lead Billy to make time travel psychologically as the most important time-spans for his life. It is possible to obtain meaningful messages from the flashbacks which represent the causes of Billy's catastrophic life.

However, flash-forwards distort the sequence and with all the items of the narrative, the story turns out to be a nonlinear personal history. Moreover, in the novel, all the time can be viewed without any cuts which makes it a space open to travel like space travel. In this sense, the oscillation between fictional and fantastical texts reinforces the idea that all our philosophies about time are constructed and open to debate.

As for the time travels, Billy's nonlinear timeline is composed of events most of which have traumatic influences on his psychology. These traumatic events contribute to the deterioration of his perception of time in his life. In this respect, Vonnegut makes use of time as a means of reflecting the reader's opinion of what his main character, Billy's life was like during and after the war. In the novel, as in Billy's life, most of the events are narrated out of sequence in order to strengthen the tone. In Vonnegut's words:

BILLY PILGRIM has come unstuck in time. Billy has gone to sleep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding day. He has walked through a door in 1955 and come out another one in 1941. He has gone back through that door to find himself in 1963. He has seen his birth and death many times, he says, and pays random visits to all the events in between. He says. (2016 p. 19)

Social and psychological concerns are amalgamated in quite an unusual style in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Since Vonnegut brings together various timelines of the protagonist, it is not possible to follow a linear order for the plot. For example, in the second chapter, Billy's birth date, 1922, is given but a couple of paragraphs later his plane accident in 1968 is narrated (Vonnegut, 2016, pp. 19-21). Later his abduction by the Tralfamadorians is mentioned only a few pages later. In the same chapter, Billy's visit to his mother in a nursing home in 1965 is recounted (Vonnegut, 2016, p.36). As a flash-forward, his son's Little League Banquet in 1958 is depicted (2016, p. 37). This expression of temporality in an experimental manner continues in the other chapters. For instance, in chapter five, Billy's experiences, when he was with other English soldiers in a German prison camp, are described (Vonnegut, 2016, pp. 71-112). However, as a flash-forward, Billy's meeting with his famous science fiction writer, Kilgore Trout in 1964 is recounted in chapter eight as well (Vonnegut, 2016, pp. 136-141).

Billy's life uncontrollably changes in different stages of his life, and he is open to both positive and negative shifts because of the defects in his character and due to the war trauma. It is plainly understood that Billy's unusual experiences, such as being a prisoner of war at war and his abduction by the aliens in his dream world stem from his being impotent. This also indicates that there is not a proper balance between his fantasy world and the real world. Billy has not got an active role against the tragedies of his life because the events direct and define his life. The major leaps in time and time travel not only manifest -as indicated in the title- "the telegraphic schizophrenic manner" (Vonnegut, 2016) structure of the novel but also work as a metaphor for human predisposition embodied with Billy's experiences to avoid the grim realities of life.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut presents the story of the main character, Billy Pilgrim, from the birth of 1922 to the assassination of 1976 in an assassination attempt, sometimes rewinding. The first part of the novel is devoted to Vonnegut's experience of writing novels, while the other ten is devoted to the pre-war, war and post-war experiences of the main character, Billy. When the second chapter is considered, it is clear from the beginning of the novel that Billy's fifty-four years of experiences are mentioned from time to time, but Vonnegut has deliberately distributed the sequel in such a way that it becomes challenging to find a focal point. Vonnegut offers a schizophrenic narrative, as stated in the title of the novel. Since the linear order of time in the novel is poignantly dispersed, the narrator haphazardly displays scenes with flashbacks and flash-forwards which might be considered as the effects of Billy's

nervous collapse. Therefore, whether essential or trivial, Billy's life is composed of incongruities. To intensify the postmodern tone of the novel, Vonnegut makes use of both trauma and the aliens' ideas on the true nature of time, employing metafiction to indicate that the socially constructed meanings could be subverted. The author also creates a tragicomic atmosphere in the novel because he would like to understand the absurdity of all earth wars, and this portrays his satiric approach to world wars and massacres. By doing this, Vonnegut blends historical accounts, and he demands from the reader that every historic event is open to discussion like the Dresden bombing. Moreover, he reflects how a man who is both a traumatic chaplain assistant and a schizophrenic optometrist exerts himself to live before, in and after WWII. These qualities are handled through this article indicating the distorted meaning of time, which is generated by trauma and results in unresponsiveness in a tragicomic postmodern novel with an unusual style of Vonnegut.

Conclusion

Kurt Vonnegut, as a writer who witnessed WWII, writes a novel about how his psychology is affected by war trauma. "While *Slaughterhouse-Five* superficially offers the reader a conventional trauma-and-recovery narrative, any form of recovery is actually equivocal" (Gibbs, 2014, p. 58). It is possible to infer that it is not possible to standardize the concept of time of a traumatized self because trauma abolishes the solid boundaries between the past and present in the consciousness. The novel depicts the psychological condition of the soldiers over a harmless, naïve, and idle character whose sense of time is blurred. Besides, the narrator who reminds his war memories narrates the life of Billy without following a linear order implying the psychological instability of the character and the destruction of the sense of time. Therefore, the novel is stylistically a metafiction but a satire in terms of content but with the representation of the traumatized character in an absurd manner, it displays the fundamental characteristics of comic fiction. However, as Vonnegut skilfully depicts, the time of a traumatized self is always relative and cannot be normalized as in the case of Billy whose life is emblematic of an innocent and psychologically isolated person suffering from tragic war trauma. In engaging with *Slaughterhouse-Five*, it is possible to conclude that private experiences of war trauma ensure the survivor to be the writer of his personal history which is a way of compounding past and present and a mode of providing new perspectives on the tragedies and their effects on the individuals and all of humanity respectively.

In the novel, Billy's perception of time and its portrayal are quite variable, akin to the Tralfamadorian understanding of interweaving past, present, and future. This distorted perception of time, which must be accepted as one of the effects of the war, elicits alienation of Billy from his friends, family, and society. Therefore, it can be argued that wars cause trauma and distortion of temporal sequence, resulting in the fragmentation of memory in the survivors, which is illustrated through the postmodern style of Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

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