Abstract

The influence of Vonnegut’s didactic purpose of writing on the treatment of theme and structure in Slaughterhouse-Five is investigated in this study. The following elements of structure are studied: point of view, the treatment of time, characterization, the use of other sources, and imagery. These are constantly related to the novel's themes, such as war, cruelty, death, time, innocence, survival, free will, fantasy and regeneration. Since Vonnegut himself survived the Dresden bombings during World War Two, his novel is very personal, which is particularly reflected in his point-of-view technique, the subject of Chapter One. Vonnegut creates double narrators in Slaughterhouse-Five: a personal one, including authorial intrusions, and an impersonal one. This division is a direct reflection of the dichotomy between reality and fantasy that prevails in the novel.

In Chapter Two, Vonnegut's treatment of time is demonstrated to be a process of spatialization. Structurally, this means a fragmented narrative split into several time levels that chiefly form what the author calls his "telegraphic schizophrenic" style. Thematically, the protagonist comes "unstuck" in time, thus succeeding in confronting an absurd world and finally transcending death.

Vonnegut uses the depiction of character mainly to express ideas and to reinforce themes, since he regards his characters as "bugs in amber," involuntarily stuck, excepting their capacity for fantasy. To facilitate the reader's recognition of these sketchy characters, Vonnegut has equipped them with marks of recognition, often repeated, and names that provide clues to their personalities. All characters are shown to be isolated and lonely, except on Tralfamadore where a dream world exists.

In the fourth chapter, Vonnegut's use of other sources is examined. His carefully chosen quotations fall into two groups: first, historical sources that verify facts, such as the Dresden catastrophe; second, fictional sources that stimulate the human imagination, which turns out to be the protagonist's means of survival.

Finally, imagery in Slaughterhouse-Five, studied in Chapter Five, is found to be used for enrichment of a style otherwise characterized by great economy. Much of the imagery strikes a humorous tone. A simple, quotidian vocabulary is developed. War imagery is used to devalorify war. Animal imagery is invoked to ridicule and to show man's true place in the universe. Several oxymora further reinforce the incongruity prevailing in the Vonnegutian world. The negative effect of imagery is also found in symbols pertaining to Billy's life situation. As a contrast, however, there are also positive symbols emphasizing nature's annual cycle of rebirth signifying hope and regeneration.

Many of the stylistic elements studied reveal that Vonnegut has chosen thematic and structural solutions that make his novel accessible to a large reading audience. The fragmented, at times circular, structure of Slaughterhouse-Five is indeed a "dance with death." In a thematic sense, death is the writer's own muse that he must dutifully dance with in order to create his work of art. Slaughterhouse-Five is not only Vonnegut's account of his own war experience but also a statement on the human condition.

Key words: Didactic purpose, theme, structure, point of view, characterization, use of sources, imagery.
Monica Loeb

VONNEGUT'S DUTY-DANCE WITH DEATH -
THEME AND STRUCTURE IN
SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

With a summary in English

UMEÅ 1979
Abstract

The influence of Vonnegut's didactic purpose of writing on the treatment of theme and structure in Slaughterhouse-Five is investigated in this study. The following elements of structure are studied: point of view, the treatment of time, characterization, the use of other sources, and imagery. These are constantly related to the novel's themes, such as war, cruelty, death, time, innocence, survival, free will, fantasy and regeneration. Since Vonnegut himself survived the Dresden bombings during World War Two, his novel is very personal, which is particularly reflected in his point-of-view technique, the subject of Chapter One. Vonnegut creates double narrators in Slaughterhouse-Five: a personal one, including authorial intrusions, and an impersonal one. This division is a direct reflection of the dichotomy between reality and fantasy that prevails in the novel.

In Chapter Two, Vonnegut's treatment of time is demonstrated to be a process of spatialization. Structurally, this means a fragmented narrative split into several time levels that chiefly form what the author calls his "telegraphic schizophrenic" style. Thematically, the protagonist comes "unstuck" in time, thus succeeding in confronting an absurd world and finally transcending death.

Vonnegut uses the depiction of character mainly to express ideas and to reinforce themes, since he regards his characters as "bugs in amber," involuntarily stuck, excepting their capacity for fantasy. To facilitate the reader's recognition of these sketchy characters, Vonnegut has equipped them with marks of recognition, often repeated, and names that provide clues to their personalities. All characters are shown to be isolated and lonely, except on Tralfamadore where a dream world exists.

In the fourth chapter, Vonnegut's use of other sources is examined. His carefully chosen quotations fall into two groups: first, historical sources that verify facts, such as the Dresden catastrophe; second, fictional sources that stimulate the human imagination, which turns out to be the protagonist's means of survival.

Finally, imagery in Slaughterhouse-Five, studied in Chapter Five, is found to be used for enrichment of a style otherwise characterized by great economy. Much of the imagery strikes a humorous tone. A simple, quotidian vocabulary is developed. War imagery is used to de glutify war. Animal imagery is invoked to ridicule and to show man's true place in the universe. Several oxymora further reinforce the incongruity prevailing in the Vonnegutian world. The negative effect of imagery is also found in symbols pertaining to Billy's life situation. As a contrast, however, there are also positive symbols emphasizing nature's annual cycle of rebirth signifying hope and regeneration.

Many of the stylistic elements studied reveal that Vonnegut has chosen thematic and structural solutions that make his novel accessible to a large reading audience. The fragmented, at times circular, structure of Slaughterhouse-Five is indeed a "dance with death." In a thematic sense, death is the writer's own muse that he must dutifully dance with in order to create his work of art. Slaughterhouse-Five is not only Vonnegut's account of his own war experience but also a statement on the human condition.

Key words: Didactic purpose, theme, structure, point of view, characterization, use of sources, imagery.
Bild borttagen - se tryckt version
Image removed - see printed version
To ULRIKA and NATASHA
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION** ......................................................... 1

**CHAPTER 1: "SO IT GOES" - POINT OF VIEW** ............................ 6

I THE AUTHOR - NARRATOR .................................................... 8

II THE IMPLIED AUTHOR .......................................................... 11

III THE INTRUSIVE NARRATOR ................................................ 13

IV INDIRECT INTRUSIONS ...................................................... 16

**CHAPTER 2: "UNSTUCK IN TIME" - VONNEGUT'S TREATMENT OF TIME** .... 21

I THE STRUCTURAL IMPACT OF THE TREATMENT OF TIME ............... 24

A Spatialization of time ....................................................... 24

B Time levels ........................................................................... 27

  1 Author's level .................................................................. 28

  2 Billy's level .................................................................... 29

    a) War ............................................................................. 29

    b) Private life ................................................................. 31

    c) Fantasy life .................................................................. 32

II THE THEMATIC IMPACT OF THE TREATMENT OF TIME ............ 37

A Influence from Murchie's Music of the Spheres .................. 37

  1 Time ............................................................................. 38

  2 Death ............................................................................. 40

**CHAPTER 3: "BUGS IN AMBER" - VONNEGUT'S WAY OF DEPICTING CHARACTER.** 44

I CHARACTERS ON THE AUTHOR'S LEVEL ..................................... 48

II CHARACTERS ON THE PROTAGONIST'S LEVEL ......................... 52

A Military level ....................................................................... 52

B Private level ......................................................................... 60

  1 Family ............................................................................. 60

  2 Hospital group .................................................................. 64

C Fantasy level ......................................................................... 67

III BILLY PILGRIM ................................................................. 68
CHAPTER 4: VONNEGUT'S USE OF SOURCES ........................................ 75
I HISTORICAL SOURCES ........................................ 77
II FICTIONAL SOURCES ........................................ 84
A Literary sources ........................................ 85
B Popular sources ........................................ 89
C Fictitious sources ........................................ 92

CHAPTER 5: "POO-TEE-WEEN?" - IMAGERY ........................................ 97
I METAPHORS, SIMILES AND OXYMORA .................................... 99
A Imagery pertaining to war ..................................... 99
1 Auditory imagery ........................................ 101
2 Olfactory imagery ........................................ 102
B Imagery pertaining to human beings ....................... 104
1 Animal imagery ........................................ 104
2 Every-day imagery ........................................ 105
C Oxyymora ................................................ 107
II SYMBOLS .................................................. 109
A Symbols pertaining to Billy's life situation ............... 111
1 War ................................................ 111
a) Dresden ........................................ 111
b) Sirens ........................................ 111
2 Adjustment to life ....................................... 113
a) Pilgrim ........................................ 113
b) Time-travels ........................................ 114
c) Optometry .......................................... 114
d) Caves ........................................ 115
B Symbols pertaining to renewal, hope and rebirth ........ 117
1 Syrup for pregnant women ................................ 117
2 Die Frauenkirche ...................................... 118
3 Springtime and the color green .......................... 119
4 Birds singing "poo-tee-WEEN?" ......................... 119

CONCLUSION ...................................................... 124

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................... 129
INTRODUCTION

Vonnegut has admitted that he used to worry about why he or anyone else should write books "when presidents and senators do not read them, and generals do not read them." Finally, however, he discovered the reason why he should continue to write when teaching creative writing at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and at Harvard: "You catch people before they become generals and presidents and so forth and you poison their minds ... with humanity, and however you want to poison their minds, it's presumably to encourage them to make a better world." I interpret this as a didactic purpose of writing. Vonnegut wants to present the reader with a picture of the world as he sees it, a rather gloomy picture, which should awaken the reader and make him realize what is lacking in the world. In this sense, artists are extra sensitive and useful to society in that they attempt to warn the reader. Vonnegut feels that artists "should be treasured as alarm systems." My intention in this study is to investigate how effective Vonnegut's own alarm system is and how this stated didactic purpose has influenced his treatment of themes and structure in Slaughterhouse-Five.

These ideas on the function of the writer and his purpose of writing have obviously left an impact on Vonnegut's style of writing. In an interview, he acknowledges the fact that in any literary communication "the limiting factor is the reader. No other art requires the audience to be a performer. You have to count on the reader's being a good performer ...." In order to reach the reader, he admits that he has ad-

justed his writing accordingly. For example, he writes short novels. He feels "the reason novels were so thick for so long was that people had so much time to kill." This is no longer true. Also, "the reason you paragraph often is so that his [the reader's] eyes won't get tired, ... so you get him without him knowing it by making his job easy for him." Vonnegut continues by noting that due to the impact of television and film, the audience has been educated to "quick cuts and very little exposition." In other words, "we have a much shorter attention span" today, which the writer of novels must take into consideration. Vonnegut has solved this problem by composing his novels of little stories, often centered around a joke: "My books are essentially mosaics made up of a whole bunch of tiny little chips and each chip is a joke." Besides adjusting his writing to the short attention span of the reader, Vonnegut in this way also provides his books with a humorous tone, in spite of the seriousness of the subject. This further entices the reader to swallow his sugar-coated pill. Repetition is also a recurring feature on many levels, still further reinforcing his didactic aim. Vonnegut is thus expressly concerned with reaching his reading audience and takes pains to adjust his style in order to reach his goal of alarming us and then poisoning us with humanity.

Vonnegut's mosaic style is also characterized by himself, on the very title page, where he speaks of Slaughterhouse-Five as "A NOVEL SOMEWHAT IN THE TELEGRAPHIC SCHIZOPHRENIC MANNER OF TALES OF THE PLANET TRALFA-MADORE." Later on, as Billy, the protagonist, is taken to this planet and he sees some books there, apparently composed of telegraphic messages, this style is further defined: "Each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message - describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn't any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has

1 Bellamy, p. 201.
2 Ibid., p. 197.
3 Ibid., p. 204.
4 Standish, p. 68.
chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time."¹ This telegraphic schizophrenic style is strongly reminiscent of Vonnegut's own style in Slaughterhouse-Five, as he suggests on the title page.

The ingredients have indeed been "carefully" chosen by the author with the purpose of producing an "image of life." Whether that image is "beautiful" is debatable, since Slaughterhouse-Five is mostly filled with war, death and destruction. There are some moments in the novel which could be called "beautiful," when human beings, in spite of miserable circumstances, show compassion or care for each other. As regards "depth," there is certainly depth in a novel, such as Slaughterhouse-Five, that provokes the reader into reflection on the state of the world and the human condition. Like the Tralfamadorian novel, Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five does not have a marked beginning, middle or end as concerns plot, setting or time scheme. Consequently, the element of "suspense" is lost. No specific "moral" can be deduced. It is left up to the reader to construct a "moral" or conclusion from the disparate messages. Although there is no "particular relationship between all the messages" of a Tralfamadorian novel, I feel that Vonnegut's "messages" in Slaughterhouse-Five have been extremely carefully chosen and that many connective links are possible among them. It is up to the reader to make these connections. Despite the fact that it is, beyond doubt, an anti-war book, no "causes" are given for war or the human penchant for cruelty. However, Vonnegut does show us the "effects" that war has on human beings. In sum, it can be stated that Vonnegut's own novelistic technique used in Slaughterhouse-Five is to a great extent close to the telegraphic schizophrenic style of Tralfamadorian novels.

¹ Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Slaughterhouse-Five (New York: Delacorte Press/ Seymour Lawrence, 1969), p. 76. All subsequent page references will be put within parentheses in the text.
Structurally, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a particularly good example of a telegraphic schizophrenic novel. Structure in this study is defined as the manner in which the novel is constructed or organized. The structure is composed of many elements, of which I will examine some of the most outstanding: point of view, the treatment of time, characterization, the use of quotes from other sources, and imagery. At the beginning of each chapter, I will indicate the method used for investigating the different subjects. By studying these separate elements I hope to reveal the inherent unity of the work.

However, structure can never be entirely separated from theme. The two are mutually dependent. Therefore the major themes of the novel, such as time, death, fantasy, regeneration, free will, the American family, innocence, the author's role, war, cruelty and survival will always be related to the structure and vice versa. A certain thematic dichotomy can be discerned when dividing themes into those pertaining to reality and those pertaining to fantasy. On the one hand, there are themes related to the reality of the Second World War and especially to Dresden, where Vonnegut himself survived the Allied bombings in February 1945. This horrid experience of being present in the greatest massacre in European history naturally permeates the entire novel. However, the novel's reality is not merely restricted to this one central event, but is extended into civilian life in the U.S. On the other hand, there are also themes related to the world of imagination, of hope, and the natural cycle of death and rebirth.

The reason for concentrating my study to *Slaughterhouse-Five* is first of all that I consider it to be Vonnegut's most interesting and innovative novel to date. Second, I find that *Slaughterhouse-Five* constitutes the epitome of Vonnegut's development of theme and structure. In many ways it is a recapitulation of themes, events, settings and characters that have appeared in his earlier novels.

Before the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five* in 1969, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., was an author virtually unknown to a wide reading public. *Slaughter-
Slaughterhouse-Five is his sixth novel and has earned him recognition among the public as well as the critics. It was turned into a film in 1972 and has been staged in Moscow.\(^1\) Slaughterhouse-Five has been translated into twenty languages. The total sale of all Vonnegut's books runs into many millions. Slaughterhouse-Five alone has sold over two and a half million copies in the U.S., according to his publisher.\(^2\)

The popularity of Vonnegut's novels must to a great extent be due to his style, which he admits has been adjusted to make his books accessible to a large audience, particularly to the young who one day will inherit the world. Vonnegut hopes to awaken his audience to make us all realize the state of the world. With this stated didactic aim in mind, he has chosen thematic and structural solutions that will aid his purpose, as will be shown in this thesis. What originally could simply have been another World-War-Two novel about Vonnegut's own experiences in Dresden, was instead turned into a statement on the human condition.

---

CHAPTER 1. "SO IT GOES" - POINT OF VIEW

In the early days of the English novel it was not unusual to find a subjective, intervening author present. Beginning with Fielding, authorial intrusions continued in Sterne, Thackeray and George Eliot. In the modern novel, however, there has been a movement away from overt subjectivity on the author's part. Intrusions have come to be considered a thing of the past or a stylistic flaw. As early as 1932 J.W. Beach notes in his study *The Twentieth Century Novel* that the author has begun to disappear from the novel.¹ F. W. Bateson emphasizes that the very genre requires the author to be "self-effacing," because "a novel must create the illusion of telling itself."² Even among recent novelists there is a trend to avoid "a discernibly subjective point of view," according to Myron Greenman.³ However, Wayne C. Booth, who has made a thorough study of point of view entitled *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, has reached the conclusion that the author's "judgment is always present" even if not always directly manifested.⁴ The arrangement of events, the expressions chosen, the very words, the values expressed all reflect the author behind the work. Booth continues, "we must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear."⁴ In Vonnegut's case there can be seen a revival of the old mode of writing, including authorial intrusions. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is as a result rather enriched than flawed by this technique of

personal authorial involvement. As a matter of fact, Vonnegut has stated in an interview that his use of a personal point of view in *Breakfast of Champions* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* was felt as "an inner urgency,"¹ which proves that it has been deliberately chosen. In this chapter it will be shown how Vonnegut has chosen a point-of-view technique that is in congruence with his subject matter and his stated purpose of writing.

Generally, the term "point of view" indicates who is narrating the story, more specifically, according to Percy Lubbock's definition, "the relation in which the narrator stands to the story."² Since Kurt Vonnegut's relation to the events of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is extremely personal, even autobiographical, the point of view used in that novel is adapted to its specific subject matter. These particular circumstances call for a narrator who, while personally involved, is at the same time safely removed from the events. Vonnegut's solution is to create double narrators. While writing about his own experiences during World War II, ("the war parts, anyway, are pretty much true," p. 1), Vonnegut also creates a fictional world around Billy Pilgrim. Consequently, in mixing fact and fiction, in insisting on the equal need to include brutal facts of reality and expressions of fantasy, Vonnegut shatters the notion of reality as a clear, coherent whole.

This is the reason why there are two principle narrators in *Slaughterhouse-Five*: one who is the actual author, Vonnegut himself, and another impersonal, seemingly omniscient narrator. The first one corresponds to the factual side of the story, the other one belongs to the fictional world. However, the two narrators are joined by the technique of intrusion, directly as well as indirectly.

¹ Bellamy, p. 205.
I THE AUTHOR-NARRATOR

In the first and last chapters, which serve as prologue and epilogue to the fictional story about Billy Pilgrim, Vonnegut uses the first-person "I" to narrate. There can be no doubt that the I in these two chapters is identical with Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., although he remains nameless. There are many autobiographical details in the book disclosing his identity. For instance, Vonnegut did receive a Guggenheim Fellowship which he used to revisit Dresden in 1967 (pp. 1 and 183). He did attend the University of Chicago and worked for the Chicago City News Bureau as well as the General Electric Company in Schenectady (pp. 7 and 9). He taught at the Iowa Writers Workshop (p. 16). The Kennedy summer home is also near Barnstable on Cape Cod where Vonnegut used to live (p. 182).^1

In the very first chapter Vonnegut explains his exact relation to the story: "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 about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen" (p. 2). This is a direct apostrophe to the reader, "you," specifying the source of the book, the destruction of Dresden, and the emotional strain that has gone into the making of the novel over a long period of time. He also thinks of "how useless the Dresden part" of his memory has been, while at the same time it has been "tempting" to write about this experience. A song about Yon Yonson from Wisconsin, that goes on ad infinitum, illustrates the way Vonnegut has been working, endlessly, on his book about Dresden (pp. 2-3). The fact that mere reporting was not enough to convey the deeper implications of this event is important, particularly as regards the technical aspects of Vonnegut's narration.

In Chapter One, Vonnegut also openly discusses the outline of the novel, done in crayon on the back of some wallpaper (p. 5). With many different-colored lines he was trying to concretize the war. If a line made it through the entire roll of wallpaper, it meant that the person in question was still alive and had survived the war, as Vonnegut himself miraculously did. The climax of the novel, the execution of Edgar Derby who had stolen a teapot, is announced already on page four, thus dispensing with plot and suspense in a traditional sense. Vonnegut also tells the reader of his efforts in researching the subject and finding out that the information on the Dresden raid was "top secret....'Secret? My God - from whom?'" he asks in amazement (p. 10). His attitude to war is further made clear when he promises Mary O'Hare, to whom the book is dedicated, that there will be no heroes, no parts "for Frank Sinatra or John Wayne" (p. 13). Rather than glorifying war he will emphasize the child-like innocence of soldiers by giving his novel the subtitle The Children's Crusade (p. 13).

Vonnegut also passes judgment on his book in Chapter One. He calls it a "failure" in the Biblical sense of looking back on destruction, but also finds it "human" to look back (p. 19). Thus, Vonnegut has given testimony to the compelling necessity of investigating the past in trying to understand his own survival, as well as the workings of the world. He has also made it clear that the central subject of the book, the Second World War, while being of great personal importance to him, has presented him with some veritable artistic difficulties.

In this introductory chapter Vonnegut touches on all the themes to be developed in the novel. War and its deglorification are seemingly major themes, but "even if wars didn't keep coming like glaciers, there would still be plain old death," as the third subtitle, A Duty-Dance with Death, suggests (p. 3). Time is another theme introduced in the very first chapter. The author's wife constantly insists on knowing what time it is, for instance (p. 7). At one point "somebody
was playing with the clocks" and the time simply would not pass (p. 18). Chance, or "if the accident will" seems to play a role in the events (p. 2). Closely tied in with the themes of time and death is that of regeneration. Even after a massacre life goes on, to which Vonnegut himself, as well as his novel, bears witness.

The tenth and final chapter is a recapitulation and summing up of the novel. It starts out as a narration in the first-person singular. Several examples of death are given: Robert Kennedy's and Martin Luther King's assassinations, Vietnam war dead and a natural death in the family (p. 182). Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest is alluded to as a contrast to Tralfamadorian belief in eternal life. O'Hare's and Vonnegut's return trip to Dresden, already mentioned in Chapter One on page one, nicely rounds off the novel.

Then a shift in point of view takes place. The omniscient third-person narrator steps in as Billy's parallel return to Dresden is described (p. 184). However, at this point the two narrators are joined in a plural "we" for one paragraph. The effect of this will be dealt with in detail later on in this chapter. The last pages of Slaughterhouse-Five which describe the excavation of corpse mines, are then impersonally narrated.

The final chapter sums up and concludes the book. Being narrated in the first person it closes the circle, relating back to the first chapter, also written in the first person. The first chapter is where the author sets the stage for the novel to come, tells of the reason for writing the book, his personal involvement and his difficulties in writing down this story, its major themes and events. Precisely because of his closeness to the events and his prolonged difficulties in facing the past, Vonnegut needed to create some distance to his subject matter. Hence Billy Pilgrim was created, a fictional character whose story is told by an impersonal narrator, between the introductory and the concluding chapters.
"... I want to be a character in all my works," Vonnegut states in a preface to his television play Between Time and Timbuktu. When making a comparison between fiction and film Vonnegut, actually, prefers the former because "in a movie, somehow, the author always vanishes. Everything of mine which has been filmed so far has been one character short, and the character is me. I don't mean that I am a glorious character. I simply mean that, for better or for worse, I have always rigged my stories so as to include myself, and I can't stop now. And I do this so slyly, as do most novelists, that the author can't be put on film." 

This explicit statement certainly explains Vonnegut's treatment of point of view. The omniscient impersonal narrator is merely a mask, a stand-in behind which the author retreats. This narrator will here be called the "implied author." The very term is borrowed from Wayne C. Booth who defines it as a "core of norms and choices." In short, themes, events, characters, symbols, ideas, phrases, tone and technique, everything selected by the author shows up as an implied image of the writing artist. Booth formulates it this way: "The 'implied author' chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices." I have chosen to use the term "implied author" because I agree with Booth's definition. I also share his belief that the author is always present in his work, even in a third-person, seemingly impersonal narrative. Whenever Vonnegut hides behind a third-person narrative, the "implied author" takes over. However, as we shall see, the author punctuates this narration periodically in a straightforward or indirect manner.


2 Booth, pp. 74-75. For a discussion of the term see Booth pp. 71-76. Kathleen Tillotson uses the term the author's "second self" which she has borrowed from Dowden. K. Tillotson, The Tale and The Teller (London, 1959).
Between chapters two and nine we are presented with a story narrated in the third-person "he": "Billy was born in 1922 in Ilium, New York, the only child of a barber there. He was a funny-looking child who became a funny-looking youth - tall and weak, and shaped like a bottle of Coca-Cola. He graduated from Ilium High School in the upper third of his class, and attended night sessions at the Ilium School of Optometry for one semester before being drafted for military service in the Second World War" (p. 20). These are the chapters that make up the fictional story about Billy Pilgrim, his war experience, marriage, work as an optometrist, trips to Tralfamadore and death at the hands of an assassin wielding a laser gun.

There are certain similarities between Billy and the author that cannot be ignored. Both were born in 1922 and both are very tall and gaunt (p. 20).¹ Billy "looked like a filthy flamingo" (p. 29) and was "preposterous - six feet and three inches tall" (p. 28), while Vonnegut himself is six feet two² and has described himself in an interview as a "preposterous kind of flamingo" when young.³ Besides the obvious physical and biographical similarities, they also share the entire war experience. Both were captured and survived in a meat locker. These parallels between protagonist and author are evidently deliberate so that the reader should associate Billy with Vonnegut whenever possible. Vonnegut actually shows that reality and fiction cannot easily be separated. The twain meet and mingle in his fiction, as the very first sentence implies: "All this happened, more or less" (p. 1).

As an impersonal narrator Vonnegut appears omniscient from the very beginning. He is fully aware of each step of Billy's time-travel. "Billy has gone to sleep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding

¹ See p. 8, note 1, for biographical information.


³ Standish, p. 64.
day. He has walked through a door in 1955 and come out another one in 1941.... He has seen his birth and death many times, he says, and pays random visits to all the events in between" (p. 20). "He says" is repeated three times on that same page to underscore the fact that the narrator is merely reporting what Billy has told him. However, the author has a full view of Billy's entire life which he summarizes in the first few pages of Chapter Two (pp. 20-22).

The reason for creating the implied author-narrator is first of all, as already stated, to gain some distance to a painful subject, but also to create a fictional forum. However, the fictionally created world is constantly imposed upon by the physical and biographical similarities between Billy and the author. Neither can the author-narrator resist directly intruding into the story which again reminds us of the reality behind the fictional front and which reinforces the idea that the implied author-narrator serves as a protective shield for the author.

II THE INTRUSIVE NARRATOR

In chapters two-nine, where the implied author-narrator dominates the narrative, the author-narrator makes four direct intrusions. An intrusion, in this context, can be defined as an unexpected disruption of the narrative, the sudden entry of another narrator. Each time the first-person "I" is used it provides a direct link with the first person singular in Chapters One and Ten.

The first intrusion occurs when a pitiful dying colonel believes he is addressing his own troops for the last time. Then Vonnegut adds: "I was there. So was my old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare" (p. 58). The next time the intrusive voice is heard is when Valencia wants to talk about the war on their honeymoon. Billy then thinks of a good
epitaph: "It would make a good epitaph for Billy Pilgrim - and for me, too" is the comment made by the author (p. 105). Later, when all soldiers have become "sick as volcanoes" from the feast in the British compound, someone is reported to be excreting his brains. "That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book" (p. 109). This dispels any doubt as to who the intruder is. Some of these same words are repeated once again, upon first seeing Dresden's beautiful skyline, someone exclaims: "'Oz'. That was I. That was me. The only other city I'd ever seen was Indianapolis, Indiana" (p. 129). Vonnegut was born in that city and has made it a custom to always include it in his novels.

Billy echoes these same words, "I was there," when he is trying to convince the history professor, his hospital roommate, that he had been in Dresden (pp. 165 and 167). It is significant that the World War Two specialist does not want to listen to him. Once again this provides us with yet another link between the author and Billy. Each time that the author intrudes in Slaughterhouse-Five, as a matter of fact, Billy and the author appear together. In three of the scenes described they are physically linked. In the boxcar in Dresden Vonnegut is "somebody behind" Billy (p. 129). In the excretion scene the author is "an American near Billy" (p. 109). Both Billy and the author are present while the dying colonel makes his speech. So is Bernard V. O'Hare, Vonnegut's friend from the war (p. 58). In the fourth intrusive scene Vonnegut is not physically present in bed with Valencia and Billy, but on the subject of war and death he is emotionally there (p. 105). Death is not only suggested in the epitaph scene but also in the other three scenes: the dying colonel, beautiful, heaven-like Dresden about to be turned into a hell of rubbish and the loss of everything, including brains, must have made the author feel sick unto death.

The obvious reason for interjecting himself into his fictional account of Billy Pilgrim is that he did experience the war himself. His in-
trusions into morbid or unpleasant scenes are simply to remind us readers, although we may be lulled by the impersonal narration to believe that we are reading a totally fictional account, that some aspects of the story are true. In this way Vonnegut's intrusions directly give expression to his didactic aim.

Each intrusion suspends the narrative, albeit briefly, and relates it back to the information gained in the first chapter. These intrusions, as well as the autobiographical material found at the beginning and the end of the book, serve the purpose of destroying "the traditional illusion of the novel as something separate and distinct from life," as Sharon Spencer has observed that many modern novelists seek to do. This fusion of real and imaginary elements, then, has the effect of producing a simultaneously projected real and imaginary world. In a TV interview Vonnegut himself feels that his intrusions are "comical" or "funny," because they make books seem "more real than life." This, he adds, is usually a trick of amateur writers who want to convince prospective publishers that something has truly happened.

The actual fusion of the author-narrator with the implied author narrator takes place in the final chapter. The first four brief paragraphs are narrated by Vonnegut, the author, in the first person (p. 182). Then the impersonal narrator takes over reporting on what Billy Pilgrim says, using "he says," "says Billy Pilgrim," on the subject of Tralfamadorian thought. The sixth paragraph is a report on a Trout book. Then Vonnegut takes over the narration again until page 184, where the two narrators fuse in one paragraph: "Billy Pilgrim was meanwhile traveling back to Dresden, too, but not in the present. He was going back there in 1945, two days after the city was destroyed. Now Billy and the rest were being marched into the ruins by their


2 Lars Helander, Uncut tapes from TV interview for "Spegeln" TV 1, Sweden, telecast on October 17, 1977.
This section appears to be impersonally related, but could also be said by Vonnegut, because this is the way in which the paragraph continues: "I was there. O'Hare was there." (These same two sentences were earlier used as intrusions) "We had spent the past two nights in the blind innkeeper's stable. Authorities had found us there. They told us what to do. We were to borrow picks and shovels and crowbars and wheelbarrows from our neighbors. We were to march with these implements to such and such a place in the ruins, ready to go to work." For the first time the plural "we" is used in the narrative sense of including Vonnegut, Billy, O'Hare and the rest of the American soldiers who were prisoners. No longer is there any way of separating the different characters. The remaining two pages are impersonally narrated, but after the fusion of the two narrators, it no longer seems relevant to ask which one is doing the telling. Now we know that the two are, in fact, the same.

IV INDIRECT INTRUSIONS

Whereas direct intrusions are clearly marked by a change of the personal pronoun in an otherwise impersonal, third-person narrative, the indirect intrusions are more difficult to distinguish. They can be characterized as comments, statements or expressions of attitude provided by an anonymous source. Who utters the imperative, didactic "Listen," for instance (pp. 19, 20, 69, and 118)? It would most likely be Vonnegut, the author as narrator, that addresses his readers this way, rather than the impersonal narrator who merely implies the author. However, there is no way of proving who, in fact, is behind an indirect intrusion. These indirect intrusions also serve as examples of repetition, a technique which is used by Vonnegut on all

1 This repetitive "Listen" is used to a greater extent in Breakfast of Champions (1973). It also appears in Cat's Cradle (1963).
levels throughout the novel.

There is one such indirect intrusion, an expression that appears 104 times in the novel that will here be dealt with as an example. Whenever someone or something dies in the book, it is followed by the statement "so it goes." Except when Billy explains its origin (p. 23), the phrase appears outside direct quotes, such as in Weary's story about the worst imaginable execution (p. 32). This clearly separates it from the narrative and makes it serve as an extra comment. In some instances it is profiled into a paragraph of its own which lends it still further significance, e.g., pp. 33 and 83.¹

When Wild Bob's corpse is carried out of the colonels' train car, "so it goes" is the comment (p. 60). When Christ's death is verified, it is followed by "so it goes," as is sexy Montana's demise (pp. 176 and 177). Even when lice, fleas and bacteria are gased to death, they are equally treated to "so it goes" (p. 73). Champagne (p. 63) as well as water can die (p. 68). "So it goes." By its mere repetition and by serving as a constant reminder of the omnipresence of death, it creates a certain emotional effect and conveys an attitude that will be investigated here.

Many critics have naturally been fascinated by "so it goes." To Willis McNelly they are "the magic words that exorcise, enchant, stoicize" and form a "fatalistic chant, a dogmatic utterance, to permit Vonnegut himself to endure."² Several other critics agree with McNelly, even if they do not invoke such strong terms, that these three little words signify endurance, even survival. Raymond Olderman, for example, sees them as an expression of what he calls "cosmic cool," much needed "if we are to keep our heads and continue to live while we are looking into the abyss of possible cataclysm ...."³

¹ "And so on" is used in a similar fashion, e.g., pp. 1, 5, 17, 151, 161, and will not be taken up for discussion here.
He also makes an interesting comparative link between "so it goes" and the birds singing "poo-tee-weet." In the film version of the novel, this particular repetition is not included with the result, according to Joyce Nelson, that: "The emotional detachment created in the novel by the reoccurrence of the phrase, 'So it goes,' is lacking in the film."

These critics seem to agree on the effect created by "so it goes," namely one of emotional detachment necessary for survival or endurance in a chaotic world. The origin and the purpose of the saying is actually explained in the novel. Billy learns about this idea on Tralfamadore. It combines Tralfamadorean concepts of both death and time as Billy describes it in a letter to the editor:

> When a Tralfamadorean sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in bad condition in that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments. Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is 'So it goes' (p. 23).

In other words, Billy learns to accept death as just one tiny moment of a person's life. Although it is Billy who introduces and explains this fatalistic concept, Vonnegut, as author-narrator, employs it as early as page one of the novel. In view of the fact that neither Billy nor any other character uses the expression within quotes, it stands out as an indirect comment, an intrusion, throughout the book.

Wayne McGinnis also realizes the structural impact of "so it goes": "The most important function of "so it goes," however, is its imparting

---

1 See the chapter on imagery, pp. 119-121.
a cyclical quality to the novel, both in form and content. Paradoxically, the expression of fatalism serves as a source of renewal, a situation typical of Vonnegut's works, for it enables the novel to go on despite - even because of - the proliferation of deaths.\footnote{Wayne D. McGinnis, "The Arbitrary Cycle of Slaughterhouse-Five: A Relation of Form to Theme," \textit{Critique}, 17 (1975), 59.} McGinnis continues by stating how paradoxical it may seem that "death keeps life in motion." I believe McGinnis is making an important point when combining the structural and textual significance of this phrase. Repetition easily lends itself to the creation of a cyclical effect. However, in this case form also ties in well with content. The little phrase "so it goes," insignificant at first, gradually grows into an expression of some of the major themes of the novel, the inherent human will to survive and the fact that life goes on in spite of all attempts to the reverse. Vonnegut's use of "so it goes" is an example of how he can choose a simple cliché and, by repetition, infuse it with thematic as well as structural meaning.

At an early stage it was apparently clear to Vonnegut that merely impersonal reporting of his war experiences would not do (p. 2). The inclusion of himself in his story became a natural solution to this point-of-view problem. The impersonal, merely implied author, could tell a fictional story evolving round Billy Pilgrim, while the author himself could narrate the true aspects of his own Dresden experience. In this way Vonnegut could relate fact as well as fiction, reality as well as fantasy by using double narrators. This is an entirely appropriate solution, a point-of-view technique suitable for this particular book and subject matter.

However, deliberate physical and biographical similarities between Billy and Vonnegut naturally make the reader confuse or eventually fuse the two. This is also accomplished in the novel's last chapter, as has been shown. The little phrase "so it goes," which combines
structural and thematic significance, further ties Billy and Vonnegut together. Billy learns about it on Tralfamadore. Vonnegut uses it in his novel. The author's intrusions also help to fuse the two. They are reminders to the reader of the veracity behind it all. Much of the richness and poignancy of the novel lies in the personal part played by the author. The reader, in turn, is also prodded into involvement because of the personal tone. The author's intrusions demonstrate that in this case it is almost impossible to separate the worlds of fact and fiction. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* Vonnegut combines the two in a manner proper for his subject.
Writers throughout the ages have been fascinated by time, how human beings perceive it, how our perspective of history affects us, and also how to depict time in a literary form. In the twentieth century, authors have begun more consciously to use the technique of stream-of-consciousness or have otherwise broken up the language in order to better "express their sense of life as a sequence of non-causal impressions." As A. A. Mendilow further notes in his study on Time and the Novel this obsession with time in modern literature is "conditioned by the increasing pace of living, by the wide-spread sense of the transience of all forms of modern life, and more particularly perhaps, by the rapidity of social and economic change." Modern psychology, science and philosophy have contributed to the general loss of faith in a simple, clear and ordered universe. This phenomenon can be witnessed in many twentieth-century novels. The novel seems to be a literary form that particularly lends itself to great elasticity in adapting to new ideas, such as different ways of depicting time. In fact, Mendilow feels that it is the "time-problem of modern literature that has changed the novel into what is virtually a new form."

Still another critic, J. F. Lynen, feels that particularly American authors are more aware of the significance of time in literature, as well as the innovative techniques it has made possible. In my opinion, Vonnegut is a case in point.

2 Ibid., p. 9.
In *The Sirens of Titan* from 1959 a "chrono-synclastic infundibulum" figures preeminently as a place "where all the different kinds of truths fit together ..." ¹ Those who collide with it become split up in time as well as space. This can be seen as a precursor to Billy Pilgrim's coming "unstuck" in time ten years later.

*Slaughterhouse-Five* operates on several time levels. The time shifts from different levels naturally result in great fragmentation and split up the events that in a more traditional novel would be the linear plot. Inspired by modern science, Vonnegut illustrates in this novel the fact that time no longer can be viewed as a linear continuum. Neither is time limited to the individual's personal perception of time, but Vonnegut seems to recognize the existence of at least three kinds of time. First of all there is cyclic time or time based on the forces of nature in the form of recurring seasons and rebirth. This kind of time is primarily given expression in the themes of regeneration and renewal.²

Second, there is historical time which can be viewed as a linear continuum in the sense that events follow chronologically one after the other for all of mankind. In *Slaughterhouse-Five* this kind of time is chiefly reflected in the historical quotes and references which actually show that there is a cyclic quality to history as well, which is also seen in its inclination to repetitiveness.³

Finally, there is psychological time, or the individual's personal concept of time.⁴ Although Vonnegut is concerned with all three kinds of time and in particular how to depict them in a novel, it is this last category that, to a great extent, results in fragmentation

---

² See the section on symbols in the chapter on imagery, pp. 117-122.
³ See the chapter on sources, pp. 77-84.
⁴ For comparison see John Henry Raleigh's article "The English Novel and the Three Kinds of Time," *The Sewanee Review*, 62, No. 3 (1954), pp. 428-440. He bases his analysis on the Russian philosoper Nicholas Berdyaev's division of time into cosmic, historical and existential time each represented by a circle, a horizontal and a vertical line respectively.
of the book's structure. By letting his protagonist time-travel as a means of expression for his imagination, which, in fact, turns out to be his sole tool of survival, Vonnegut also permits the structure of his novel to become as jagged as the quirks of the human mind. It is psychological time that allows the individual to free himself from cyclic or historical time. The resulting fragments are the separate "clumps" of which Tralfamadorian novels are made (p. 76) and that create the "telegraphic schizophrenic" style of Slaughterhouse-Five already discussed in the introduction.

The structural impact of Vonnegut's treatment of time is that of general fragmentation of the narrative. Emphasis is rather placed on ideas expressed and space, that is, where events take place. This so-called "spatialization of time"¹ will be discussed in the first section of this chapter in which also a division is made into the different time levels that can be discerned in the novel. This is done to bring clarity to the reader who is often confused by the fragmented structure. By close reading of a few pages it will be demonstrated how Vonnegut goes about this process of "spatializing."

Besides the structural effect of time upon the novel, there is a thematic one as well, which will be treated in section two. W.J. Harvey has noted that "an unusual emphasis on the thematic importance of time is one of the distinguishing features of modern literature."² Vonnegut's own interest in the subject and his concern with the depiction of time have already been noted. In fact, Vonnegut provides us with an alternative time concept, namely the Tralfamadorian one. The basic ideas for this have been influenced by Guy Murchie's book Music of the Spheres.³ Several examples of this influence will be given to illuminate this very different notion of time. Tralfamadorian time also views death in a simple way that suits

¹ Spencer, p. 156.
³ Guy Murchie, Music of the Spheres (Boston, 1961).
Billy. Death, being another central theme, is in this way closely aligned with time. Billy's struggle to transcend death is greatly aided by this new way of accepting mortality.

In a television interview Vonnegut was asked about the human concept of time. He then elaborated on the subject as follows. "Time is not what we think it is," because we human beings are "limited in what we can understand." Just like a dog that thinks his master is God, we are wrong in our concept of what time really is. Our minds are simply not enough to grasp time fully. Instead, Vonnegut believes that "reality is rationed to us, as our brains are such a size that we can only deal with a small part at a time and so reality is metered through our brains of irregular manageable rates and that's what we call time." These ideas of Vonnegut's show that there is no definite way of either perceiving time or much less of depicting it. Hence, his technique of fragmentation and his interest in alternative views of time.

I THE STRUCTURAL IMPACT OF THE TREATMENT OF TIME

A Spatialization of time

The structural effect of having several different time levels simultaneously projected is one of great fragmentation. It appears difficult to read such a text, because the average reader expects to follow a chronological order of events. By splintering the events Vonnegut succeeds in destroying linear depiction of time. Instead, he forms his tale from separate small stories, akin to "shrapnel bits" as one critic appropriately has called such fragments. It is then up to the reader to fuse the stories or fragments into a coherent whole.

1 TV interview conducted by Lars Helander for Swedish TV1, "Spegeln." From the uncut tapes of the interview, October 17, 1977.

This general breakdown of events into fragments, which demands that the reader form some totality of vision, has aptly been called the "spatialization of time" by Sharon Spencer. She defines it as "the process of splintering the events that, in a traditional novel, would appear in a narrative sequence and of rearranging them so that past, present, and future actions are presented in reversed, or combined, patterns ...."¹ As early as 1945 Joseph Frank found that "modern literature ... is moving in the direction of spatial form," but until recently little work of significance has been done in this area of research.² Since Frank admits that time is a central concept to such writers as Eliot, Pound, Joyce and Proust, this leads him to believe that the reader is "intended to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence."² Spencer latches on to this idea and, in fact, carries it a bit further. She suggests that time has lost its importance as a literary means of chronological narration, but lives on in its "aspect as a function of space as perceived by some individual from a changing point of view."³

Man's wish to be liberated from the limits of time has usually been exemplified in literature by the use of dreams, hallucinations, or with the help of drugs. Billy Pilgrim experiences all three and, in addition, feels "unstuck in time." His space trips, for instance, which free him of all temporal bonds, are similar to a dream experience. Technically, however, this is also possible today in our very own livingrooms, where television easily switches the viewer, who is stationary in space, from today's events, to yesterday's war, or tomorrow's weather. This is also how the human mind operates, out of bounce with time and space. Similarly, the method of "spatializing" time permits the author to consciously juxtapose past, future or present events that point to a

¹ Spencer, p. 156.
³ Spencer, p. xx.
certain cyclical repetition in life, such as the recurrence of massacres, not only in Dresden, but also in Sodom and Gomorrah, Hiroshima, Viet Nam etc. Once the events have been "spatialized," the one remaining factor that establishes their connection with reality is the place where they happen.

If we study the time shifts in a single chapter we immediately get the impression of a jagged, irregular structure with many changes of time schemes. In fact, there are over twenty such changes in Chapter Five alone (42 pages long). It seems as if Vonnegut has been careful in attempting to register events in time in this chapter. For instance, he mentions the year 1934 in connection with the Grand Canyon and Carlsbad Cavern incidents (pp. 76-77). The space trip that set Billy off on these time travels took place in 1967, when he was forty-four years old (pp. 61-62). However, Derby's death is not specified in time, although it presumably happened right after the war. Although one of the zoo scenes is anchored in time (p. 96), the other one is not (pp. 114-115), nor, of course, is the end of the world (p. 101). When looking for time changes it is quite difficult to find the correct date or year of the event, as well as the interior chronological order, in spite of Vonnegut's attempt to provide clues. Rather, the place where the event occurred, and the content of the event itself emerge as significant factors.

A close reading of a few pages will further illustrate how Vonnegut spatializes time (pp. 92-97). The first five paragraphs on page 92 describe the surrender of American forces in the German forest. In the next page and a half Billy time-travels back to the veterans' hospital upstate New York. Valencia, his fiancée, is the center of attention. Eliot Rosewater is there too, talking about Kilgore Trout. Starting on page 94, a digression on Trout's book ensues. Spatially we are still in the hospital, but the resumé of the book certainly causes discontinuity of the major thread of events. In the middle of page 95, we return to Valencia who is now munching on a Milky Way. She has finished the Three Musketeers Candy Bar we left her with a few pages back. A discus-
sion of Trout's literary merits follows. On page 96, a small paragraph consisting of three lines is injected as a point of information on Trout's physical whereabouts. Then Valencia tries to interest Billy in the silver pattern to be chosen for their upcoming wedding. This causes Billy to travel to Tralfamadore to his naked and problem-free existence in a miniature, stereotyped American home.

Spatially, these few pages move from Germany to upstate New York and thence to Tralfamadore. Chronologically, we have moved from wartime to the postwar period and on into fantasy. Each person is enwrapped in his own thoughts: Eliot is reading about a new gospel, Valencia is preoccupied with her wedding, while Billy escapes it all into his imaginary world on another planet. By fragmenting the narrative Vonnegut shows not only the loneliness of these three characters, but also the lack of communication between them. Valencia appears trapped in her middle-class values, while Eliot is in search of new alternatives. Billy, finally, cannot cope at all with reality. Admittedly, this interpretation is subjective. However, it does seem as if Vonnegut leaves it up to his readers to connect his fragmented prose into some coherence.

Due to the spatialization of time, there are naturally great difficulties in discerning the central chain of events on the different time levels that can be found in the novel. The reader often feels a need to restore some systematization to the order of events before beginning to discover, on his own, a pattern in the prevailing fragmentation.

B Time levels

Vonnegut reveals his interest in time in the very first chapter: "I asked myself about the present: how wide it was, how deep it was, how much was mine to keep" (p. 16). He had then been to the World's Fair in New York to see the past according to the Ford Company and the future according to Walt Disney. There are numerous other examples of this
concern of his to be found in the novel, frequently reinforced by literary quotes and allusions. The very first time level, the one that forms the foundation of the book, is thus constituted by the author's level, at the time of composition. The second level covers Billy's experiences, ranging from war to his private life, and finally into his fantasy life.

Because of the technique here called "the spatialization of time," these different levels are difficult to discern, and therefore it serves as an aid to the reader to separate and summarize these time levels. Having done so and having found that the novel is mainly constructed around two principle time levels with some subdivisions of the second one, it becomes easier to trace a pattern in the prevailing fragmentation. Seemingly unrelated events, juxtaposed by the author, begin to connect. Eventually the reader forgets about trying to construct a plot of his own and, instead, is able to enter the time scheme of the novel.

1 Author's level

Vonnegut's own appearance in the novel is mainly restricted to Chapters One and Ten, as we have seen in the chapter on point of view. Those are also the chapters where he expresses concern about his writing of the novel. He emphasizes how much money, anxiety and time the "lousy little book" has cost him (p. 2). In actual time it cost him twenty-three years and constant talk of how he was working on his "famous book about Dresden" (p. 16). His proper concern with time is reflected in the quotes from other sources used in the introductory chapter. These treat the flight of time, the diffuse borderline between consciousness and sleep, Céline's obsession with time and death and a song that goes on endlessly.¹ These quotes serve to illustrate the author's psychological sense of time.

When the plane carrying Vonnegut back to Dresden could not take off, he

¹ For a more detailed discussion, see the chapter on sources, pp. 86-88, 89-90.
feels "somebody was playing with the clocks" (p. 18). He feels non-existent, like a "non-person" in a "non-night" (p. 18). The author's wife is noted to ask him at all hours of the night what time it is (p. 7). These quotes show that Vonnegut, at the time of composition, in the last part of the 60's, was groping around for a technique of rendering time. His subject was then over twenty years old. Yet, he must have felt a need to widen the perspective of the subject by adding his twenty-three years of experience and reflection to Billy's story. Hence, the inclusion of the author's level at the time of composition, and as a consequence, his own point of view.

However, Vonnegut's concern with time is not only restricted to the technical means of depiction. Time is also developed into a theme that is used throughout the book. By delving into history, for instance, Vonnegut provides parallels that show how history repeats itself. Time does not seem to improve man, at least as far as his destructive instinct is concerned. The fact that massacres are as ancient as man is further underlined by a reference to Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible (p. 19) and by references to violent acts at the time of composition (p. 182). The present is mixed with the past to link historical time. Vonnegut, in sum, uses his own process of creating Slaughterhouse-Five as a means of projecting an added dimension of all three kinds of time into the story of Billy Pilgrim.

Billy is a chaplain's assistant and as such he is a "figure of fun in the American Army" (p. 26). Time and again he is described as harmless to the enemy, friendless, unarmed and utterly ridiculous in appearance.

1 Later on, Montana Wildhack also feels that "they're playing with the clocks again" in the zoo on Tralfamadore (p. 179).
2 Cf. with Rumfoord who considers Billy "a repulsive non-person," because his mere existence is a threat to the Professor's scholarship (p. 165).
3 See the chapter on sources, pp. 77-84.
His little organ as well as his portable altar are both extremely ludicrous. He wears neither boots nor helmet. Gradually his civilian shoes lose one heel and he ends up bobbing up and down as he wanders behind the German lines. As a "dazed wanderer" he walks in Indian file with two scouts and an antitank gunner (p. 28). Several times the latter saves him from being shot, but Billy has no wish to go on or to survive. He is a pitiful character who feels "cold, hungry, embarrassed, incompetent" (p. 29). He has a beard, but is going bald at the age of twenty-one. Finally, this aimless wanderer only wants to quit when "he could scarcely distinguish between sleep and wakefulness" (p. 29).

When Weary is just on the point of beating Billy up, they are both arrested by Germans. They are included in a "fools' parade" of American prisoners that move about as a group (p. 50). They spend ten days in a boxcar that brings them to the British camp where they are deloused, provided with dogtags and coats. Billy naturally gets the most ridiculous one, a short fur-collared impresario's coat. This little coat catches fire as he stands too close to the fire at the camp. As an Englishman snaps out the fire, he remarks: "My God - what have they done to you, lad? This isn't a man. It's a broken kite" (p. 84). That evening Billy also gets into a hysterical fit over a funny rhyme and is treated at the prison hospital.

As the Americans leave the British prison camp, Billy leads the parade. Once again, his silly outfit is emphasized. He is then wearing Cinderella's silver shoes, a muff and a piece of azure curtain used as a toga. Having arrived in Dresden, Billy once more leads the parade, now headed for the slaughterhouse where the group will later survive the Allies' ferocious air-attack on the city. For a month they all work in a factory that makes enriched syrup for mothers-to-be. After the fire-storm the Americans march out of Dresden, then likened to a moon landscape. In a suburb they find an inn where they spend the night. Two days after the war ends, Billy and some other Americans find a green wagon and some abandoned horses which they use to go around looting with. Billy does
not loot, however, instead he takes a snooze in the wagon basking in the sun. At the end of the war, Billy is shipped back to America on a freighter.

His war experiences are naturally central to the book. They entail his wanderings in the Ardennes, his capture in Luxembourg, and his subsequent transportation back to Germany. One stop is made at the camp for imprisoned British officers. Finally, they include imprisonment and his survival in Schlachthof Fünf. Most importantly, the war events are crucial because they trigger off Billy's time-travel.

In sum, Billy's role in the war proves useless. He never fights, and does not even get to meet the chaplain he is to work for. Most of his time is spent wandering about in the German forests or as a prisoner-of-war. In fact, he is one of those truly "listless playthings of enormous forces," as Vonnegut himself suggests that his characters are (p. 140). He is placed in situations which he feels he cannot change. Neither does he ever prove useful as a soldier. His seemingly pious task as a chaplain's assistant turns out equally fruitless. Instead, he is made to look utterly ridiculous. His outfit, his equipment and his passivity all add up to produce an image of Billy as an involuntary clown. It is significant that his war experiences provoke his time-travel, make him think of his past, his parents and ultimately death. This mechanism of traveling in time stays with Billy throughout the rest of his life as a means of coping, not only with war atrocities, but also with other incomprehensible events and situations.

Private life

Billy's private life is interjected piecemeal throughout the narrative. In this manner we learn about his family, marriage, stay in a mental hospital, airplane accident, his wife's tragic death, his son's success in Viet Nam, his own attempts at spreading Tralfamadorian ideas, and his ultimate murder.
Billy was born in 1922 in Ilium, New York, where he becomes a businessman, an optometrist, making a good living. A large part of his success is due to the fact that he marries the daughter of the owner of the optometry school he attended. His war experiences take place before he meets Valencia. After his engagement to her, "he suffered a mild nervous collapse" (p. 21), is given electric shock treatment and recovers to marry ugly Valencia. "She was one of the symptoms of his disease. He knew he was going crazy when he heard himself proposing marriage to her ..." (p. 93). The marriage turns out "at least bearable all the way" (p. 104).

They have two children, a boy and a girl. The daughter marries an optometrist who in turn is set up in business by Billy. The son, who is troublesome in high school, straightens out as a soldier in the Viet Nam War. Valencia dies quite dramatically in an automobile accident on her way to see Billy who has been seriously wounded in a plane crash. Nowhere is there any warmth displayed between the members of the Pilgrim family. This is true of most families in Vonnegut's fiction. Then there seems to be a big gap in Billy's life from the time when he becomes a widower and is generally considered crazy by his surroundings, up to the time when we hear of his attempts to spread his Tralfamadorian ideas in newspapers, on late night TV shows and finally at a big convention in Chicago in 1976, where he is assassinated.

Billy's life thus seems quite ordinary. He is successful in a business sense, but he fails in personal relations. His marriage is mostly a social and economic arrangement and the contact with his children is poor. Vonnegut here seems to take the opportunity to take a gibe at the American family as an institution. In other words, there are other factors than merely the war that contribute to Billy's sense of meaninglessness.

Fantasy life

Events and materials from Billy's earthly life often supply him with
stuff for his fantasy life, which, in effect, saves him from despair and also makes him an extraordinary character. His time-travels and the fact that he is "unstuck" in time have already been mentioned. "Billy is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren't necessarily fun. He is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next" (p. 20).

Reality around Billy seems to provoke him into time-travel. War provokes the very first time he comes unstuck in 1944 in the German woods. Billy is shot at several times, but makes no effort to save himself. Instead, Roland Weary saves him. Later on Billy is found "leaning against a tree with his eyes closed .... nostrils were flaring" (p. 37). The first event he travels to is his own death, merely a "violet light - and a hum" (p. 37). From there he travels to pre-birth and to the YMCA pool where his father threw him in. That experience is directly linked to death: "It was like an execution" (p. 38). Billy actually resents being rescued. Then he travels to a visit with his mother who is on the brink of death in 1965. A dead man is wheeled by him in the corridor. He reads The Execution of Private Slovik by William Bradford Huie, a true story about the "only American soldier to be shot for cowardice since the Civil War" (p. 39). In 1958 someone at a meeting talks about being water boy for the Little League team. Vonnegut's underlining of water here may mean an association of words to his experience with death in the YMCA pool. He finally travels to 1961, to a party at which he is extremely drunk and unfaithful to his wife. He is so drunk that he passes out (p. 41). The imminent presence of danger and the fear of death appear to provoke Billy's time-travel. The different episodes all seem to be associated with death, passing out, execution or drowning. Reality around Billy is apparently too awful to cope with. "Billy wanted to quit" (p. 29). Repeatedly he told the other soldiers to go on without him. Consequently, his time-travel can be seen as escapism, as a response to the world around him. Death in his situation must have appeared as the easiest way out of meaninglessness and danger.
But war and the threat of imminent death are not the only causes of his time-travels. His very home life also seems to warrant escape. When Barbara, his daughter, "took his dignity away in the name of love" by treating him as a child, he escaped by traveling to Tralfamadore and to Montana Wildhack. Life on Tralfamadore is seen as idyllic, void of conflicts and trouble, filled with heavenly sex and even a rosy baby. The Tralfamadorian zoo furnished with cheap Sears and Roebuck furniture, complete with end-tables, non-functioning TV, refrigerator and all, is turned into a miniature American home. It is clear that Billy escapes to Tralfamadore and uses the unreal planet for his own mental survival in a depressing situation. Most likely he got the idea of another planet from reading Trout's book The Big Board. It tells a story about a man and a woman from earth who are kidnapped and put into a zoo on a planet called Zircon-212 (pp. 173-174).

In addition to simple escapism, Tralfamadore is also used for wish-fulfillment. There Billy gets to make love to the sexy movie-star who is Valencia's absolute opposite. He enjoys his body for the first time. During yet another time warp his voice box, hitherto "reedy," "a little whistle cut from a willow switch," becomes a "gorgeous instrument" (p. 43). This wish is coming true in Billy's fantasies while Roland Weary, in reality, is about to beat "the living shit out of him" (p. 43). In fact, Billy only made "convulsive sounds" there in the frozen creek, sounds that were "a lot like laughter" (p. 44).

At one point, Billy is "loony with time-travel and morphine" at the prison hospital in 1944 (p. 107). When going to take a leak, he gets entangled in a barbed-wire fence, does a scarecrow dance, is released by a Russian, still does not know where he is or where he is headed. During that morphine night he travels to his honeymoon, his father's funeral, to his daughter Barbara's reproaches, to Tralfamadore, and to

---

1 This is a rare instance in Vonnegut's fiction when people happily reproduce - compare the gynecologist couple who refuse to reproduce in wartime (p. 170) - but then it must be remembered that Tralfamadore is only a dream!
his optometry practice. However, there does not seem to be any great difference between his other time-travels and those under the influence of morphine.

Billy also experiences hallucinations as escape mechanisms. When his shoes become full of snow behind the German lines and he is a "dying young man," he has a "delightful hallucination" (p. 42). He is skating on a ballroom floor in wonderfully dry and warm socks doing unbelievable pirouettes. As a matter of fact, Billy's hallucination goes into time-travel as Vonnegut later points out (p. 43).

Besides Billy's need for survival, escape and wish-fulfillment, he also experiences a need to comprehend the world around him. In the Veterans' hospital both Eliot Rosewater and Billy are trying to "re-invent themselves and their universe" after having experienced the war. They find that science fiction is a big help, this form of literature which encourages fantasy and the use of the imagination (p. 87). Kilgore Trout, Vonnegut's own science fiction author, leads them into outer space in order to gain some perspective on earthly existence. Billy, who "did not really like life at all" (p. 88), adopts many beliefs from Tralfamadore that help him cope with his problems. For instance, he accepts their concept of time which stipulates simultaneity and the fact that death is only an appearance. The person is "still very much alive in the past," and since all moments exist simultaneously, they will always exist (p. 23).

However crazy Billy may appear to his surroundings, he has, with the help of his imagination, found something to believe in that makes it easier for him to accept an inhuman world and the atrocities he has experienced. "Actually, Billy's outward listlessness was a screen. The listlessness concealed a mind which was fizzing and flashing thrillingly. It was preparing letters and lectures about the flying saucers, the negligibility of death, and the true nature of time" (p. 164). Vonnegut has often stressed the need for imagination in order to survive in a
meaningless universe. In *Cat's Cradle* architects, musicians, writers and painters give expression to artistic imagination. Twice he has created religions, obviously full of fantasy, but used to give people hope: The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent in *The Sirens of Titan* and Bokononism in *Cat's Cradle*. In *Mother Night* the alleged double-spy writes plays and a pornographic diary. People in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and even more so in *Breakfast of Champions*, which originally was part of *Slaughterhouse-Five*,\(^1\) are described as machines, except for their mental capacities. The painter in *Breakfast of Champions* swears that his picture "shows everything about life which truly matters, with nothing left out. It is a picture of the awareness of every animal. It is the immaterial core of every animal - the 'I am' to which all messages are sent .... Our awareness is all that is alive and maybe sacred in any of us. Everything else about us is dead machinery."\(^2\) Human awareness is termed an "unwavering band of light" which is also what the artist paints.\(^3\) The National Educational Television special entitled *Between Time and Timbuktu*, which is a conglomeration of all Vonnegut's works and major ideas before 1972, ends with a scene in which death, personified by Hitler, is conquered by the imagination.\(^4\) This fight certainly seems inspired by Billy's situation in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and does epitomize the major theme of the novel.\(^5\)

Billy's life is doubtlessly filled with ample reason for insanity, beginning with his father's cruel attempts at trying to teach him how to swim and ending with his plane accident and his wife's death. However, it is the Second World War that serves as release mechanism for his time-travels. With the help of dreams, hallucinations and being gener-

---

1 Standish, p. 214.


3 Ibid., p. 225.


5 Wayne McGinnis also believes that "the duel represents in stark outline the great theme of Vonnegut's work," which I would agree with. McGinnis, p. 66.
ally "unstuck" in time, Billy finds a way of reinventing his universe. Apparently, psychiatrists were not very helpful in this regard, as Eliot and Billy found when confined to hospital care. Eliot then said to a psychiatrist: "I think you guys are going to have to come up with a lot of wonderful new lies, or people just aren't going to want to go on living" (pp. 87-88). Both patients found some comfort in science fiction, although Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov contained everything there was to know about life, but according to Rosewater "that isn't enough any more" (p. 87). It seems evident that what is needed to exist in an absurd world is a personal strength that mainly resides in the imagination.

II THE THEMATIC IMPACT OF THE TREATMENT OF TIME

A Influence from Murchie's book Music of the Spheres

In the sections of the novel dealing with Billy's flights of fantasy, we encounter a new time concept, the Tralfamadorian way of viewing time, as well as death. It is particularly interesting to note that Vonnegut has been influenced by modern science in his presentation of alternative ways of perceiving time and death. As a former student of science, Vonnegut can hardly have been unfamiliar with modern theories including Einstein's theory of relativity. Also, his only brother is a well known physicist. Vonnegut has even admitted that he has used another source for his ideas on time, that he "had lifted a comment Murchie made about time for a book of my own." This statement was published in an article in the New York Times Magazine section shortly after the appearance of Slaughterhouse-Five in 1969. The reference is to Guy Murchie's book

1 For biographical information, see Perry D. Westbrook, Contemporary Novelists, ed. James Vinson (New York, 1972), pp. 1284-1286.

Music of the Spheres, a popularization of modern scientific concepts.\textsuperscript{1} It seems evident that the book Vonnegut refers to must be Slaughterhouse-Five. However, I would also claim that Vonnegut did not only use one comment from that book, but rather several, all from the chapter entitled "Of Space, Of Time."\textsuperscript{1}

The Tralfamadorian concept of time, for instance, includes the thesis that "all moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains ..." (p. 23). It is curious to note that Murchie mentions in his book Music of the Spheres that the Puri Indians only had one word for time and indicated different tenses by pointing forward, backward or upward. "Their 'time' sense was also almost literally circumscribed by space in the fact that they looked upon the distant skyline of mountains that surrounded them as the outer rim of time."\textsuperscript{2} It seems likely that Vonnegut has used the same idea of a mountain range as representing all time. On several occasions he explains the earthly illusion of regarding time as a sequence of moments, "like beads on a string" (p. 23, cf. pp. 74 and 99). Murchie also emphasizes that today we accept "the principle that time is by no means the universal flow of sequence it always seemed."\textsuperscript{3} Instead, time depends on relative motion which in turn is judged from different points of view.

Murchie also brings up the concept of "the fourth dimension, as a fresh conception of time."\textsuperscript{4} It must be remembered that Vonnegut's little green creatures on Tralfamadore could see in four dimensions, and that they pitied terrestrials for only seeing three (p. 23). Kilgore Trout has, among other books, also written a story on Maniacs in the Fourth Dimension, all about people who had mental diseases that could not be

\textsuperscript{1} Murchie, pp. 500-589.
\textsuperscript{2} Murchie, p. 503.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p. 501.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 549.
treated on earth because earthling doctors could not see in the fourth dimension. William Blake, for example, was in the fourth dimension (p. 90). Also, sex could be seen in the fourth dimension, for there were five extra sexes on earth that only Tralfamadorians could perceive (p. 99).

While Tralfamadorians could see an entire mountain range, the poor Earthling could only see through one eyehole. "His head was encased in a steel sphere which he could never take off ... welded to that eyehole were six feet of pipe .... He was also strapped to a steel lattice which was bolted to a flatcar on rails, and there was no way he could turn his head or touch the pipe .... All Billy could see was the little dot at the end of the pipe" (pp. 99-100). This little story clearly illustrates how Billy, in common with the rest of humanity, is trapped in his time concept.

Vonnegut's most brilliant passage playing with time also seems inspired by Murchie. While waiting for the flying saucer, Billy Pilgrim watches a war movie on television - backwards. He has come "slightly unstuck in time again" (p. 63).

American planes, full of holes and wounded men and corpses took off backwards from an airfield in England. Over France, a few German fighter planes flew at them backwards, sucked bullets and shell fragments from some of the planes and crewmen. They did the same for wrecked American bombers on the ground, and those planes flew up backwards to join the formation.

The formation flew backwards over a German city that was in flames. The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires, gathered them into cylindrical steel containers, and lifted the containers into the bellies of the planes. The containers were stored neatly in racks. The Germans below had miraculous devices of their own, which were long steel tubes. They used them to suck more fragments from the crewmen and planes. But there were still a few wounded Americans, though, and some of the bombers were in bad repair. Over France, though, German fighters came up again, made everything and
everybody as good as new.

When the bombers got back to their base, the steel cylinders were taken from the racks and shipped back to the United States of America, where factories were operating night and day, dismantling the cylinders, separating the dangerous contents into minerals. Touchingly, it was mainly women who did this work. The minerals were then shipped to specialists in remote areas. It was their business to put them into the ground, to hide them cleverly, so they would never hurt anybody ever again (pp. 63-64).

This qualifies as a wish-fulfillment scene as well, since Billy continues by applying the backward motion idea on recent history. He returns all the way to Adam and Eve after turning everyone into a baby, including Hitler, thus protecting the world from evil. Murchie also speculates on the reversal of time in his book: "What actually could constitute a backward flow of time through our consciousness anyway? It is worth stopping to think about this. If we began to ungrow and life's processes were reversed, mouths evacuated and rectums fed, and friction and gravity took on the opposite of their present tendencies, would that amount to a reversal of time? We might reasonably assume so, especially if every aspect of life were reversed consistently."\(^1\) It does not seem unlikely that Vonnegut has been influenced by Murchie's story of reversal, but he has of course adapted it to his own subject and goals.

2 **Death**

The most significant idea that Vonnegut has derived from Murchie is, however, the distinction between mortality and immortality. As already mentioned, Vonnegut admits that he has lifted a comment Murchie made about time for a book of his own. This is Murchie's comment as follows: "I sometimes wonder whether humanity has missed the real point in raising the issue of mortality and immortality - whether perhaps the

\(^1\) Murchie, p. 555.
seemingly limited time span of an earthly life is actually unlimited and eternal - in other words, whether mortality itself may be a finite illusion, being actually immortality and, even though constructed of just a few 'years,' that those few years are all the time there really is, so that, in fact, they can never cease."¹ According to Murchie's speculation, life may be seen as "unlimited and eternal," since it is difficult to imagine a beginning and an end to time. Thus, the border between mortality and immortality is erased as well or at least diffused. There are several examples of this diffusion in Vonnegut's novel.

When Billy is about to die he tells his Chicago audience, as he customarily closed his speeches: "Farewell, hello, farewell, hello" (p. 123). Death is only momentary for him, he "experiences death for a while" (p. 124). In fact, he has experienced this moment many times throughout the book, because he is a time-traveler (pp. 122-123). He has even described it on a tape which is locked up in a bank. "I Billy Pilgrim, the tape begins, will die, have died, and always will die on February thirteenth, 1976" (p. 123).² The different tenses once again reinforce the idea of life only being seemingly limited.

War itself illustrates the vicarious link between life and death. When the American prisoners-of-war had been signed into a red ledger by the Germans they were pronounced "legally alive now. Before they got their names and numbers in that book, they were missing in action and probably dead" (p. 78). Once on a maneuver a similar situation had occurred. During a church service a theoretical battle was going on and the entire congregation had been killed, in theory. "The theoretical corpses laughed and ate a hearty moontime meal" (p. 27). Billy remarks that it was quite a Tralfamadorean experience to be able to eat and be dead at the same time.

¹ Murchie, p. 589. Vonnegut cites this passage in Wampeters, Foma & Granfallos, p. 88, but he deletes the section within dash marks.

² Cf. Rumfoord in The Sirens of Titan (1959) who makes a similar statement: "When I ran my space ship into the chrono-synclastic infundibulum, it came to me in a flash that everything that ever has been always will be, and everything that ever will be always has been" pp. 25-26.
In the British compound Billy is taken to the hospital ward after his hysterical fit of laughter. He is given morphine there. Derby who comes to check on him is told that Billy is "Dead to the world," but not actually dead. Then Derby makes a reflection similar to Billy's in the above quoted situation: "How nice - to feel nothing, and still get full credit for being alive " (p. 91).

Tralfamadorian philosophy also views death as an appearance. "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" (p. 23). This view of death seems to coincide with Murchie's postulation that "mortality itself may be a finite illusion, being actually immortality" and is amply illustrated by Vonnegut in the above quotes.

Vonnegut's concept of death is thus closely linked with his concept of time. The two are mutually dependent. Death becomes an important theme as physical death pervades the book - and life itself. The recurring refrain "so it goes" testifies to the attitude developed by someone embracing this concept. In a short article entitled "Reflections on My Own Death"(1972), Vonnegut maintains the same ideas on time and death that he espouses in Slaughterhouse-Five:"I honestly believe ... that we are wrong to think that moments go away, never to be seen again. This moment and every moment lasts forever." According to Frederick J. Hoffman, man's sense of time and his view of mortality are indispensably linked: "One of the most important of all elements in the literary view of mortality is the time-space relationship that at any moment helps to define human nature." Hoffman feels that to come to terms with the negligibility of death is modern man's foremost dilemma: "The recognition of death will save man, as against his horrifyingly naive and urgent

---

1 See the chapter on point of view for a discussion of "so it goes," pp. 17-19.
effort to deny it."¹ This is how Billy saves himself, although by means of Tralfamadorian ideas.

Vonnegut is obviously searching for new ways of looking at time that will help to define human nature. Having shown how human beings are imprisoned in their linear conception of time, he offers a new alternative. With the help of imagination, it is possible to view time, and as a consequence also death, in a new and different light. In order to convey this new concept of time, Vonnegut adjusts his prose accordingly, "spatializes" time so that the main time levels are fragmented but re-fused into a new synthesis which properly reflects the structural as well as the thematic aspects of the subject. Vonnegut himself puts it this way in an article published a year later than Slaughterhouse-Five: "Nothing in this world is ever final - no one ever ends - we keep bouncing back and forth in time, we go on and on ad infinitum."²

¹ Ibid., p. 10.

"There are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations, because most of the people in it are so sick and so much the listless playthings of enormous forces. One of the main effects of war, after all, is that people are discouraged from being characters" (pp. 140-141). This quote from the novel itself explains Vonnegut's view of character and how he makes use of character to illustrate the "forces" that rule the individual's life. All Vonnegutian characters feel powerless and tied down. Whether free will exists becomes, in this context, a query limited to the very small sphere of the individual which is in turn so sharply restricted by these overwhelming forces out of his reach. In another place in the novel he speaks of people as "bugs in amber" which provides yet another concrete and excellent illustration of how his characters feel trapped in a situation without much choice (p. 74).

In contemporary literature most authors show comparatively little interest in characterization. This seems to be a natural result of the increasing knowledge gained from psychology, science and sociology. The possibility of ever portraying a character in all its complexity on the printed page appears increasingly hopeless. "A concern with character in the old sense - ideas of verisimilitude, believability, pleasure in the character for its own sake - these have not been respectable responses to fiction for a long time," one critic notes. Instead, today's novelists use character for other purposes, perhaps "as perspectives, as points of reference from which the subject of the book is perceived." If his purpose is to paint an absurd world, he may choose a mad man as his central character. As a consequence, character, "instead of being the focal point, the purpose

2 Spencer, p. 2.
for which the fiction was created, becomes, instead, a medium for the expression of some particularized view of the reality constructed in the book in which he appears," according to Sharon Spencer.¹

Keeping Vonnegut's didactic purpose in mind this concept of character suits his purpose well. In fact, Vonnegut does not develop in-depth characters, but prefers sketchy, flat, almost stereotyped characters. Each one serves a purpose in the novel. In *Breakfast of Champions* Vonnegut explains this author/character relationship to Kilgore Trout, one of his recurring characters: "I am a novelist, and I created you for use in my books."² There is little or no development in any of his characters. One critic believes that Vonnegut uses "two-dimensional characters" and "caricature to burlesque certain ideas and philosophies."³ This is true, but only one of the reasons for using such a method of characterization. He not only burlesques certain ideas, but he also uses his characters simply to illustrate human vices or beliefs and, most importantly, to expose themes through character. Frequently, Vonnegut contrasts, compares or draws parallels between characters to emphasize each one's particular significance.

Due to this need for compressed characterization, Vonnegut has developed a special skill whereby he seizes on a few outstanding features of personality that sum up the character in a sentence or two. Such a sketchy depiction naturally lends itself to humorous effects too. In congruence with the fragmented structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, discussed in the previous chapter, the depiction of character is consequently also fractionalized. There may be only a few sentences devoted to an entire character. The fragmentation of characterization lies in the fact that these few sentences

---

¹ Spencer, p. 5.
are dispersed throughout the book. In this case, repetition serves as an aid in quickly recognizing the character in question. Often Vonnegut supplies his characters with a specific mark of recognition, a piece of clothing that one character always wears, for example, or an epithet that always accompanies a name, such as "doomed Derby." In this way the reader will easily recognize the many types parading by. I agree with W. J. Harvey that character is a structural feature in literature, but that it has unfortunately often been neglected as such. In Vonnegut's case we can see how the general structure is fragmented and that his way of depicting character becomes an integral part in this overall structure. In addition, his fragmented and often shallow characters support the major ideas expressed in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Like Vonnegut's characters, the individual in modern society is also quite isolated and split up. Deep personal contacts are frequently lacking. People parade by, but we may never get to know them beyond the clothing by which we recognize them.

Vonnegut concentrates on male characters. The females are usually of peripheral significance and are less clearly depicted than their male counterparts. Vonnegut is aware of this situation and explains it in the following way: "It has never worried me but is puzzling that I've never been able to do a woman well in a book. Part of it is that I'm a performer when I write. I am taking off on different characters, and I frequently have a good British accent, and the characters I do well in my books are parts I can play easily. If it were dramatized, I would be able to do my best characters on stage, and I don't make a good female impersonator." There is also another reason why women are not protagonists in Vonnegut's fiction: "They imply a better, healthier life than we have now." Since Vonnegut depicts a world created and dominated by males, there is little space left for women.

2 Bellamy, p. 198. In a recent novel, *Slapstick or Lonesome No More*, Vonnegut has tried to remedy this situation by permitting a woman to play a central role.
In most of Vonnegut's novels there is a male protagonist, an anti-hero, of questionable sanity, filled with uncertainties and ambiguities. He is usually of middle-class background, quite well-to-do, placed in a situation which he cannot control or alter. This central character often finds the world crazy and his own life meaningless. As a consequence, he tries in a rather simple and often clumsy way to find some meaning in his absurd life, a quest unmarred by the deep intellectual search which so often is the case in contemporary literature. In addition to this central schlemiel, there is usually a score of less developed characters inhabiting Vonnegut's novels. These serve to illustrate certain values or ideas that underscore or contrast with those of the protagonist. In many ways these quickly drawn characters take on symbolic value.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five* Billy Pilgrim is the central character who appears throughout the novel. Piecemeal we learn about his life. He finds existence meaningless but does succeed in giving it some substance. He is surrounded by family, soldiers, and other minor characters of whom we only get glimpses. Whatever the relationships, professional, military or familiar, they are all characterized by distance and lack of warmth, except on a fantasy level where dreams come true.

Once Vonnegut settles down to write a novel, the very first item on his agenda is to supply the characters with names. "You need a name right away," he feels. "Otherwise, the character doesn't develop and grow or have much of a personality." He has been known to pick names out of telephone directories or simply from mailboxes. The word "karass" used in *Cat's Cradle*, for instance, is the name of a Greek family in West Barnstable where Vonnegut used to live. Quite often the protagonist's name is invested with historical or literary symbol or allusion, e.g., Proteus in *Player Piano*, Jonah in *Cat's Cradle* or Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Many names are tag names referring to living persons, such as Rosewater (most likely a take-off on

1 McCabe, p. 94.
Goldwater, the Republican Senator running for President in 1964) or Papa Monzano (reminiscent of former President Papa Doc Duvalier of Tahiti); or they merely allude to some human characteristic, e.g., Weary, Constant (in The Sirens of Titan), and the Reverend Vox Humana (a character in Cat's Cradle). Vox Humana is also used to describe Billy's organ in Slaughterhouse-Five. Amanita (from God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater) is a poisonous fungus or read as a pun, "a man-eater." The importance Vonnegut places on names once again demonstrates his method of quick, direct and at times symbolic characterization. The fact that Vonnegut creates character for a specific use and purpose in his novels, is borne out by his release of all characters in Breakfast of Champions: "Count Tolstoy freed his serfs. Thomas Jefferson freed his slaves. I am going to set at liberty all the literary characters who have served me so loyally during my writing career."  

In this chapter I will first make an inventory of some of the secondary characters in Slaughterhouse-Five in order to show the author's purpose in creating these sketchy figures, the role they play in the work as a whole, and particularly the way they relate to the protagonist. They will be divided into characters appearing with the author on his level and characters surrounding Billy in his army experience, in his private life, or in his fantasy life. Finally I will attempt to analyze Billy who, after all, embodies the major ideas Vonnegut wishes to express and expose.

I CHARACTERS ON THE AUTHOR'S LEVEL

There are only a few characters appearing with the author as he describes his preparations for the novel. Even though they may exist in reality (his war buddy, for instance), as soon as they are put into a work of fiction


2 Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Breakfast of Champions or Goodbye Blue Monday! (New York, 1973), p. 293. There is, however, a character who has reappeared in Slapstick (1976). That is Norman Mushari, the lawyer from God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965).
they do become characters and as such they are used by Vonnegut for some purpose. In fact, Vonnegut makes himself into a fictional character by the mere choice of personal features he exposes. The role of the author and, consequently, many of his characteristics as a character, are dealt with in the chapter on point of view and will not be repeated here. However, *Slaughterhouse-Five* does contain a fictionalized author, Kilgore Trout, who will be dealt with here, since he serves as Vonnegut's own projection of the struggling author and his role.

**Mary O'Hare**

Mary is one of the characters appearing with Vonnegut in Chapter One. She is one of the persons to whom Vonnegut dedicates the book. She is a trained nurse, married to his war buddy. When visiting the O'Hares to gather material for *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Mary's behavior makes Vonnegut feel she does not like him. For the war buddies' talk she prepares "an operating room" and throughout their reminiscences she keeps banging ice trays and moving furniture around (pp. 11-12). Finally Vonnegut understands why she is so angry. She suspects that he will write a glamorous tale of war, because she believes that "wars were partly encouraged by books and movies" (p. 13). Mary then, on the one hand, serves the purpose of making the author realize the necessity to deglorify war, but, on the other hand, she also introduces the baby and innocence theme. She does not want her own children to become involved in war, (nor does Vonnegut, p. 17), and she points out that both O'Hare and Vonnegut had been "just babies" themselves in the war (p. 12).

**Bernard V. O'Hare**

Mary's husband and Vonnegut's old war buddy is a District Attorney in Pennsylvania, and Vonnegut pays him a visit with the intention of getting some help from him in remembering what exactly happened in the war. However, all that O'Hare can recall is the story of a man who had gotten hold of a lot of wine that he drove around in a wheelbarrow; admittedly, not much to

1 There is a Bernard B. O'Hare in *Mother Night* (1961), an American chauvinist, who seems to have little in common with this O'Hare.
build a novel on. He also accompanies Vonnegut on his revisit to Dresden (pp. 1 and 183). In general, he shows disinterest in the war: "He was unenthusiastic. He said he couldn't remember much" (p. 4). O'Hare is also the only soldier not to take souvenirs from the war (p. 5). Consequently, both Mary and Bernard O'Hare are instrumental in making Vonnegut realize that one of his purposes ought to be the deglorification of war.

Gerhard Müller

When O'Hare and Vonnegut go back to visit Dresden they befriend a taxi driver by the name of Gerhard Müller. He takes them back to the very slaughterhouse where they once had been prisoners. Gerhard Müller had also been a prisoner during the same war, a prisoner of the Americans. His mother was killed in the Dresden bombing. When asked about how it was to live under a Communist regime, he said that he had adjusted to it and was satisfied with his apartment and the education his daughter was receiving.

The fact that Vonnegut dedicates his novel to this Dresden cab driver shows that he plays an essential, although miniscule role. From Dresden he sends O'Hare a Christmas card that contains some of the novel's central themes: "I wish you and your family also as to your friend Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and I hope that we'll meet again in a world of peace and freedom in the taxi cab if the accident will" (p. 2). In his imperfect but humorous message the words peace and freedom stand out as signs of optimism expressed by a man who has not had an easy life. Vonnegut also likes the final phrase, repeats it and places emphasis on it by giving it a paragraph of its own. This relates to the theme of whether free will exists.

In the case of Gerhard Müller we can see how an otherwise insignificant person, a cab driver helping two foreign visitors, is turned into a character and is used by the author to introduce certain themes early in the book. The O'Hares also serve the same purpose. Both deemphasize the war and make Vonnegut decide on what kind of war story he is going to tell.
Kilgore Trout

The presence of another author in Slaughterhouse-Five indicates Vonnegut's concern with the author's role in society. Just as the implied author is used as a mask for Vonnegut, so is Trout a projection of the author. In many ways the science-fiction author Kilgore Trout serves as an alter ego for the unsuccessful author in general and for Vonnegut himself in particular. Although he has written many novels (probably 75), he has no money and works as a news dealer for his hometown newspaper, The Ilium Gazette, as we encounter him for the first time (p. 142). He is not used to thinking of himself as a writer and is completely taken aback as Billy enquires about Kilgore Trout, the writer (p. 145). His books often serve as "window dressing" in pornographic stores (p. 176). All this fits in with Vonnegut's own writing career. His books only came out in paperback editions, in lurid covers to begin with (see The Sirens of Titan, for example) and he was quickly labeled a science-fiction writer. To eke out a living he also took other odd jobs, in public relations or once as a SAAB dealer. It was not until the publication of Slaughterhouse-Five that Vonnegut became recognized as a serious writer. Perhaps he had felt "friendless and despised" as Kilgore Trout did during those unrecognized years (p. 96), because he had also, in fact, "been opening the window and making love to the world" (p. 145). Vonnegut himself characterizes Trout as "my opinion of myself" in a TV interview.

In spite of this obvious identification with the struggling author, Trout, who also figures in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater as a prophetic voice and plays a major role in Breakfast of Champions, is mainly used in another

1 Leslie Fiedler has pointed out that the names Kurt Vonnegut and Kilgore Trout contain the same number of letters. I would extend this link of identity by also registering that the first and the last two letters are the same in both names. Leslie Fiedler, "The Divine Stupidity of Kurt Vonnegut" in Esquire, 74, September, 1970, p. 204.

2 Sigfrid Leijonhuvud, "USA och det objektivt goda," Svenska Dagbladet, June 12, 1972, p. 5.

3 Lars Helander, Uncut tapes from TV interview for "Spegeln" TV 1, Sweden, telecast on October 17, 1977.
function by Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. He uses Trout's books as parables there. In all there are seven Trout novels more or less summarized in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. They either provide Billy with material that will give him a new perspective on the human condition, or they permit Vonnegut to draw revealing parallels with our culture and set of values that further reinforce some of the central themes.

The fact that Trout is called a "cracked messiah" of course puts his writings into an ambiguous light (p. 143). "'Jesus - if Kilgore Trout could only write!' Rosewater exclaimed. He had a point: Kilgore Trout's unpopularity was deserved. His prose was frightful. Only his ideas were good" (p. 95). It is evident from this statement that we should pay proper attention to the contents of Kilgore Trout's books. They will be dealt with in the chapter on Vonnegut's use of other source material. Trout as a character mainly serves as a parallel to the actual author. The obvious similarities between them further reinforce the theme of the author's role in fiction, in general, and in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in particular.

II CHARACTERS ON THE PROTAGONIST'S LEVEL

A Military level

Since *Slaughterhouse-Five* deals with the subject of war, most of the characters Billy encounters are soldiers ranging from high officers down to privates. Quite a kaleidoscope of German, British and American enlisted men parade by. They are all pitiful, in appearance as well as behavior. Most of them are innocent persons thrown into a war they have not created. They are what Vonnegut calls "listless playthings" (p. 140). These characters are used by Vonnegut to show us the concrete effects of war upon the individual.

Edgar Derby

Derby who figures in snatches throughout the book becomes a symbol of war's
horror and injustice. Even on the first page Vonnegut refers to his death, without mentioning his name, however. He is a High School teacher from Indianapolis, Indiana, who ironically enough has taught a course entitled "Contemporary Problems in Western Civilization" (p. 72). He is old enough to have a son in the war and has pulled strings to get into the war himself. He is consistently the nice guy who always does the right thing. It is he who watches over Billy in the British compound's hospital ward while reading The Red Badge of Courage, a classic on selflessness, valor and sacrifice. He is elected leader of the Americans. He writes home to his wife assuring her that he is safe in Dresden. He is the only one to become a real "character" while standing up to Campbell defending American freedom, justice and brotherhood. That was "probably the finest moment in his life" (p. 140). He also takes care of Weary who dies in his lap. When Billy gives him enriched syrup on a spoon he bursts into tears. Derby seems to represent the actively good, a characteristic all too rare in Slaughterhouse-Five.

Originally, Vonnegut had intended to use Derby's execution as the climax of the novel, because "the irony is so great. A whole city gets burned down, and thousands and thousands of people are killed. And then this one American foot soldier is arrested in the ruins for taking a teapot. And he's given a regular trial, and then he's shot by a firing squad" (p. 4), but since his death is told of on numerous occasions, it loses its effect as climax. This also contributes to the deglorification and undramatization of the war. To remind us of Derby's fate Vonnegut uses an epithet as a refrain accompanying Derby's name throughout the novel: "poor old Derby" or simply "old Derby" and sometimes "doomed Derby" (pp. 79, 90, 92, 105, 107, 120, 121, 124, 125, 127, 128, 130, 135, 137, 138, 140, 141, 162 and 186). It is ironic that the only character with ideals and who tries to do good is doomed and eventually executed.

Paul Lazzaro

In many respects Lazarro is Derby's opposite. A professional car thief from Cicero, Illinois, this soldier is portrayed as tiny in stature, with rotten
bones and teeth. Even his skin is "disgusting. Lazzaro was polka-dotted all over with dime-sized scars" (p. 72). These scars, in fact, become Lazzaro's particular mark of distinction as polka-dots or boils are repeated (pp. 72, 79 and 110). Where Derby is calm, reassuring and collected, Lazzaro is said to be "fizzing with rabies" (p. 130, cf. p. 125), and is introduced as the "rabid little American" (p. 5).

There is also a refrain that is associated with Lazzaro: "It's the sweetest thing there is" (p. 120). He means revenge, his main purpose in the story being to incarnate revenge. Once he tells of taking revenge on a dog, an extremely gruesome story that makes personal retaliation as ugly as any large-scale international equivalence, such as war (pp. 120-121). He often has fantasies of killing people (pp. 121-122, 124-125). Years later, it is Lazzaro who arranges Billy's death to avenge Roland Weary (p. 123).

Roland Weary

This weary character is comic yet pitiful. There is a detailed description of him all bundled up in his many layers of clothing. Short and fat, he looks somewhat like a character from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Tweedledum or Tweedledee (p. 34). His face, full of baby innocence (p. 36), looks like a "toad in a fishbowl" (p. 41). Vonnegut uses yet another refrain to pinpoint a character. Weary's "scarf from home" becomes his particular trademark (pp. 36, 41 and 44).

Inside this famous scarf he is a "roaring furnace" with a limited vision, both literally and figuratively speaking (p. 35). Weary, in fact, provides a parallel to Billy's escapism. Admittedly, Weary saves Billy's life on numerous occasions by yelling "Get out of the road, you dumb motherfucker" (p. 29), "Saved your life again, dumb bastard" (p. 29) and so on, but nevertheless he himself uses his imagination to escape from reality as they are wandering aimlessly in the Ardennes. He invents a group named The Three Musketeers which represents everything that was not true, and which allows him to pretend "that he was safe at home" (p. 36).
In reality, Weary had no friends. He had spent his unhappy childhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he was "unpopular because he was stupid and fat and mean, and smelled like bacon no matter how much he washed" (p. 30). His big trouble was being ditched by everybody else and that made him in turn want to ditch someone else. "It was a pattern. It was a crazy, sexy, murderous relationship Weary entered into with people he eventually beat up" (p. 30). In Slaughterhouse-Five he repeats this established pattern and is about to "beat the living shit out of" Billy when the Germans arrest them both (p. 43). After that he blames Billy for his own failure. When he dies of gangrene in his feet, he swears to have Billy killed so that he will be avenged (pp. 68-69).

Weary's military career is as brief and as pitiful as Billy's. He is an antitank gunner, a replacement, who fires a single shot, a miss, which results in everyone but Weary being killed in his own gun crew. Even as a child he had been endowed with ideas on torture. His father collected guns and torture instruments. Weary gladly tells of the Iron Maiden, the Spanish thumbscrew, blood gutters, Derringer pistols, how to put a dentist's drill in a human ear and other "neat tortures" as he calls them (p. 31). His trench knife has a triangular cut which "makes a wound that won't close up" (p. 32). Through Weary Vonnegut proves that inhumanity and cruelty do not only exist in war. Weary turns out to be a pitiful, lonely character, who retreats into the glorification of cruelty and the use of violence in order to assert himself in private as well as in war. Like Billy, he escapes into a dream world at one point.

Wild Bob

Another pitiful American character is Wild Bob, a colonel who has contracted double pneumonia. In the midst of coughs, "with the colonel dying and dying," he cries out: "'It's me, boys! It's Wild Bob!'" He had always wanted his troops to call him by that nickname (p. 57). Unfortunately he had lost "an entire regiment, about forty-five hundred men - a lot of them children, actually" (p. 57). In a pathetic scene he addresses his nonexistent troops promising them a reunion in his home town in Wyoming, a
huge party with barbecued whole steers. He concludes his speech with a phrase that is later repeated in other contexts: "'If you're ever in Cody, Wyoming, just ask for Wild Bob!'" (pp. 58, 162 and 183). This could be an ironic allusion to "Wild Bill Cody" alias "Buffalo Bill," a true hero of the Wild West.

The Hobo

The brief appearance of the forty-year-old, nameless hobo reminds us that some people's every-day life may be even worse than wartime conditions. He has been in worse places and been hungrier, he keeps saying (p. 59). His refrain becomes: "This ain't bad" (pp. 59, 60, 68). On the ninth day he dies onboard the boxcar, which carries them into captivity, proclaiming: "You think this is bad? This ain't bad!" (p. 68). Even in death he tried to "nestle like a spoon," not with Billy as on Christmas, but simply "with thin air and cinders" (p. 128). Billy, once again, is reminded of the omnipresence of death.

The Maori Soldier

When Billy is paired with a Maori soldier to dig out the Dresden corpse mines, they are both very close to death. The Maori's ghastly death, he died from inhaling the putrefaction in the mines, makes us realize how close Billy is to succumbing as well (p. 185). Also, the fact that the Maori soldier comes from distant Polynesia, illustrates once again how the innocent are forced into a war they have nothing to do with. Except for Derby, who embodies positive qualities, the Allied soldiers are portrayed as pitiful and pathetic. Lazzaro revels in revenge. Stocky Weary is a lonely, unhappy character trained in "neat tortures" from home. The hobo represents the down-trodden in society, while the Maori is the truly innocent soldier from a developing nation sacrificed in a Western war. Wild Bob, finally, lives and dies under false illusions of being something else. This collection of lamentable characters, in which executed Derby can also be included, is juxtaposed to an enemy soldier who turns out to be as innocent and pitiful as the Allied soldiers.
Werner Glück

He is the only German soldier of whom we get a quick close-up. He is a sixteen-year-old Dresden boy, "tall and weak like Billy, might have been a younger brother of his" (p. 136). They were actually cousins, but unaware of the fact (p. 136). His name Glück, the German word for luck, may be ironically intended. He is ridiculously armed with a musket and a bayonet, the musket a museum piece. The purpose of this portrait is probably to make the enemy seem as human and helpless as the Americans. The fact that Glück is only sixteen, "the childish soldier," also adds to the theme of innocent children being sent into war on both sides (p. 137). Then there is also a direct comparison with Billy and, in fact, a family link between the two across national borders. This German soldier as well as all the Allied soldiers are in turn sharply contrasted to a group of British officers.

Englishmen

These fifty imprisoned officers provide a stark contrast indeed to the shabby, demoralized Americans and young Glück. The very first time we meet them, they all come marching out of a door singing "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here" (p. 80). They had been among the first English-speaking prisoners of war to be taken and had not seen any women, children, not even birds, in four years. They are "clean," "enthusiastic," "decent" and "strong" (p. 81). They keep their muscles in shape by weight lifting and their minds are stimulated by all sorts of games. "Dressed half for battle, half for tennis or croquet," the Englishmen were adored by the Germans (p. 82), because "they made war look stylish and reasonable, and fun" (p. 81).

When they were told they were going to have guests they set to work like "darling elves" and prepared a fantastic banquet with ensuing performance of a musical version of Cinderella (pp. 82-83). The starved, dirty and exhausted Americans naturally got sick from such a feast and made the Englishmen "catatonic with disgust" at their "excrement festival" (p. 109).
In the end, the British compound is divided into two camps by a line drawn on the ground.

"I frequently have a good British accent" while enacting characters in the process of writing,"Vonnegut claims.\(^1\) His technique in portraying these Englishmen is to use a particularly British vocabulary: "lads" (p. 126), "Good show," "Yank" (p. 82), "lusty, ruddy" (p. 80) and by talking of dartboards, tennis and croquet.

One of the Englishmen delivers a lecture on their particular way of surviving the war. His panacea is "To brush his teeth twice a day, to shave once a day, to wash his face and hands before every meal and after going to the latrine, to polish his shoes once a day, to exercise for at least half an hour each morning and then move his bowels, and to look into a mirror frequently, frankly evaluating his appearance, particularly with respect to posture" (p. 126). In other words the emphasis is on corporeal well-being. It is true that this was a jolly effective way of surviving, but it does seem as if the Englishmen had swept all moral apprehensions about war under the rug in their neat, overstacked compound. Perhaps that is the only way of surviving a war with your sanity intact. These fifty Englishmen certainly provide a contrast to Billy's method of survival which is more on a mental than a material plane.

Howard W. Campbell, Jr.

There is also a special American portrayed in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a Nazi indoctrinator who is used for multiple purposes by Vonnegut. Similarly to Rosewater, Campbell has also played the role of protagonist in a previous Vonnegut novel, *Mother Night* (1961). There he was a double-spy, an American living in Nazi Germany actively making propaganda broadcasts for the Nazis in English. However, in his speeches there were also coded messages to the Allies.

\(^1\) Bellamy, p. 198.
In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, however, Campbell is only portrayed as a Nazi propagandist. He has a high IQ, is a native of Schenectady, New York, who has learned German fluently and writes popular plays and poems in that language. He had married an actress, Resi North, who was killed in the war. His uniform, described in detail, appears to be a curious mixture of cowboy boots, Texas hat, American colors and Nazi swastikas.

On one occasion, Campbell comes to the slaughterhouse to recruit Americans for "The Free American Corps" which is to fight for the Nazis on the Russian front. He tries to make his propaganda more alluring with offers of juicy steaks, mashed potatoes and mince pie to the starved American soldiers. That is when Edgar Derby rises to his finest moment by confronting Campbell's Nazi propaganda (pp. 140-141).

But Campbell is not only used as a symbol for extreme propaganda. Vonnegut uses him to criticize the American system as well. Campbell has written a monograph on the behavior of American enlisted men as prisoners in Germany. This pamphlet is quoted at length in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (pp. 111-113). The point of it seems to be general criticism of American patriotism, the capitalistic system, its poverty and emphasis on money; in short, a résumé of the major ideas already expressed in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965).

Campbell, then, is used to comment on the American system as well as the Nazi regime. If *Mother Night* is taken into consideration, Campbell of course turns out to be ambiguous indeed. Then Vonnegut's double use of him, as well as his two-toned uniform and mind, take on a new and fresh meaning that emphasizes Campbell's ambiguity.

Except for Campbell and the Englishmen who are all self-confident and in control of their own situations due to special circumstances, the other soldiers are shown to be "listless playthings" of forces out of their control. They exist in a kind of limbo, a state of unreality, of anonymity. They are as

---

1 In *Mother Night* she is called Resi Noth.
truly stuck as bugs in blocks of amber. Unfortunately the same is equally true of the characters on a private level. Although they would seemingly have a greater chance of making their own choices, they appear surprisingly unfree and are also directed by circumstances and traditions.

Private level

Family

The characters surrounding Billy on a private level are mainly his parents, wife, father-in-law and two children. The family situation presents Vonnegut with an opportunity to expose the emptiness and hypocrisy of American family life.

Mrs. Pilgrim

Billy's mother, who is hardly noticeable in the book, only mentioned in a few places, still serves manifold purposes. She is depicted as a "perfectly nice, standard-issue, brown-haired, white woman with a high-school education," as she visits him in hospital (p. 88). But he hides under the blanket every time she comes, because she makes him feel "embarrassed and ungrateful and weak because she had gone to so much trouble to give him life, and to keep that life going, and Billy didn't really like life at all" (p. 88). His mother is thus instrumental in making him feel guilty. At one point he visits her, the reversed situation, in an old people's home. She is then a "decrepit," "antique," dying mother who barely gets out one sentence: "How did I get so old?" (p. 38). She reminds Billy of old age and human mortality.¹

Billy's mother is also used to reinforce the theme of the empty spiritual life of the middle-class. When Billy marries Valencia, for instance, his

¹ Cf. the old man who farts tremendously, p. 163: "'I knew it was going to be bad getting old .... I didn't know it was going to be this bad.'"
mother endorses his choice, only emphasizing his material gains from the match: "The Pilgrims are coming up in the world" (p. 103). She was herself a substitute organist who could not make up her mind about which religion to choose. "Like so many Americans, she was trying to construct a life that made sense from things she found in gift shops" (p. 33). This is a sharp statement on Americans in general revealing a spiritual void filled with bric-à-brac. One time she found a "gruesome" crucifix in a Santa Fe gift shop which she placed on Billy's wall. "A military surgeon would have admired the clinical fidelity of the artist's rendition of all Christ's wounds - the spear wound, the thorn wounds, the holes that were made by the iron spikes" (p. 33). Billy was thus introduced to human cruelty by his mother and was daily reminded of it in the shape of this cross. It is likely that it also planted the seed for his later pseudo-Christ identification.

Mr. Pilgrim

If Billy's mother is hardly noticeable in Slaughterhouse-Five, then Billy's father is barely there. He is by profession a barber in Ilium. While out hunting he is mistakenly killed by a friend. However, he is most interesting when seen in his relationship with Billy. He is instrumental in the pool incident when he thinks his son Billy can learn to swim by simply being thrown into the water. The significance of this event lies in the fact that authoritarian manners do not provoke Billy into fighting for his life. He rather prefers staying on the bottom of the pool, choosing death over life.

In another similar situation, in the total darkness of the Carlsbad Caverns, the father aggressively defies the dark by taking out his luminous radium watch (p. 77). While Billy is apt to lose touch with time and life, his father stays in touch with time and can master and even dominate any situation with it. The father seems dominant and self-righteous in comparison with the quiet, sensitive, mild-mannered son. Billy yields to his father's dominance, as he later on will yield to other authorities.
Lionel Merble

Billy also yields to Lionel Merble who is described as "the machine that was Billy's father-in-law" (p. 133). Despite the fact that he is only mentioned some three times in the novel, we get quite a clear picture of him. He is a member of the John Birch Society and has given Billy a bumper sticker proclaiming "Impeach Earl Warren" (p. 49). Earl Warren was considered a liberal Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and thus we can conclude that Lionel Merble is an extreme conservative, even a reactionary since he belongs to the John Birch Society. In addition, he is also a racist who enjoys and requests a song demeaning to Poles (p. 134). Vonnegut's purpose here seems to be the portrayal of an ultraconservative and racist to show that a well-to-do businessman can embrace ideas very similar to those held by the Nazis, for instance. In relation to Billy, Lionel is the one who sets him up in business by marrying off his ugly daughter, thus making Billy a part of the established business world, but at a very high price.

Valencia Merble Pilgrim

Billy's fiancée and later wife is described as big, fat and ugly. She snores "like a bandsaw" (p. 62), eats candy throughout the book and wears tri-focal lenses. To outweigh these negative characteristics she is rich, very rich, and the daughter of the founder of Billy's school of optometry. Thus their marriage means that Valencia is used by Billy to climb socially and financially, but Valencia is happy, moved to tears, because someone has married her (p. 103). Valencia is a materialist, showing great concern about her silver pattern (p. 96) or being deeply awed at the diamond, war booty, Billy gives her on their anniversary (p. 150). She becomes hysterical when learning of Billy's accident, because she "adored" him and in her emotional upset she kills herself by carbon monoxide poisoning (p. 157). During the last part of her life she was unproductive sexually, because her ovaries and uterus had been removed (p. 62). She does have a lively imagination, but she is no time-traveler. Once during intercourse she pretends that she is Queen Elizabeth I and that Billy is Christopher Columbus (p. 102). As she associates sex and glamor with war, she provokes
Billy into thinking about the past (pp. 104-105). In her materialism and ugliness Valencia becomes the symbol of Billy's weakness of having sold out to power and money, a "symptom" of his malaise, as he calls her (p. 93).

Robert Pilgrim

We know that Billy's son Robert was an alcoholic at sixteen; then he flunks out of High School and is arrested for tipping over tomb stones in the cemetery. Ironically, he straightens out after joining the Green Berets in Viet Nam (p. 21). He cuts his hair, becomes clean and neat, has a good posture and his shoes are shined and his pants pressed (pp. 163-164). Billy feels he does not know his son, although he "couldn't help suspecting that there wasn't much to know about Robert" (p. 151). This shows the lack of contact and love in the Pilgrim family which may be seen as an average middle-class family. When, as a teenager, Robert protests against sterility and death in life by turning over tomb stones, it is of course unacceptable, but when he kills people in Viet Nam under government auspices, it is approved of. The emphasis on his outer appearance once again underlines the hollowness of middle-class values. \(^1\)

Barbara Pilgrim

Billy's daughter Barbara also marries an optometrist who is set up in business by his father-in-law, as was once Billy. She is "fairly pretty," but has "legs like an Edwardian grand piano" (p. 25). She is called a "bitchy flibbertigibbet," because she tends to act superior to her father (p. 25). Barbara thinks of him as a child, reproaches him for one thing or another, thinks he is senile as a result of the plane crash (p. 24). She is accused of taking "his dignity away in the name of love" (p. 114), constantly asking: "'Father, Father, Father - what are we going to do with you?'' (p. 117; cf. pp. 25 and 142). Like her brother Barbara represents the

\(^1\) Cf. Eliot Rosewater who after his nervous breakdown becomes very neat in appearance after having been notoriously sloppy.
lack of love and the prevalence of hypocrisy in the middle-class family. Her outward "care" makes Billy escape into fantasy (p. 114). Also, she is an example of how history repeats itself in business and marriage.

In addition to the immediate family, Billy also encounters some people while hospitalized. Once he shares room with a history professor, for instance, who comes to represent the official U.S. attitude to Dresden. There is also the professor's wife Lily who plays a minor role, but nevertheless permits Vonnegut to make certain observations. Finally there is Eliot Rosewater whom Billy meets in 1948 at the Veterans' Hospital in upstate New York. He serves the role of being a case parallel to Billy's and he also provides Billy with some assistance.

Eliot Rosewater

Eliot Rosewater, then, provides us with a parallel to Billy. Although Eliot is "twice as smart as Billy," they are both "dealing with similar crises in similar ways. They had both found life meaningless, partly because of what they had seen in war" (p. 87). Eliot is a former infantry captain who, by mistake, had shot a fourteen-year-old fireman. He had taken to drinking but he became tired of being drunk and had thus ended up in hospital in the bed next to Billy's.

Besides being a case parallel to Billy's, Eliot Rosewater also fulfils another important function: he furnishes Billy with something that has already helped himself and will help both to "re-invent themselves and their universe" (p. 87). It was science fiction and, in particular, the writings of Kilgore Trout. Under Rosewater's bed there is a huge collection of Trout books giving off a stench that dominates the ward.

Rosewater is a "big hollow man" (p. 89), who at one point experiments with

---

1 Vonnegut states that it is located "near Lake Placid, N.Y." (p. 86). Rather, it is near Tupper Lake, N.Y.
being sympathetic with everyone in order to make the world a more pleasant place. Billy's mother likes him because of his sympathy and politeness. Once Rosewater states that all there was to know about life used to be found in Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov, but that is not enough any more (p. 87). To a psychiatrist he also says: "I think you guys are going to have to come up with a lot of wonderful new lies, or people just aren't going to want to go on living" (pp. 87-88). These cryptic remarks once again point to Eliot's role in defining the problem and in assisting Billy in his soul-searching.

Any reader familiar with Vonnegut's God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater already knows the Rosewater character: a millionaire who is plagued by his wealth and tries to use it constructively to help people made useless by the capitalist system. In the end he is considered crazy by his environment, like most of Vonnegut's protagonists. Finally, he experiences a breakdown of sorts which is introduced by a vision of the Dresden firestorm. Thus Rosewater has a firmer connection with Slaughterhouse-Five than is apparent from that novel alone. He acts as Billy's forerunner, someone who paves the way for a confrontation with the Dresden catastrophe and the sense of meaninglessness.

Bertram Copeland Rumfoord

Professor Rumfoord is Billy's roommate at a hospital, just like Eliot Rosewater was. After the airplane crash on Sugarbush Mountain, Billy has to share a room with this Harvard professor due to crowded conditions. Rumfoord had broken his leg, skiing, at the age of seventy, while honeymooning with his fifth wife. She was "one more public demonstration that he was a superman" (p. 159). A retired brigadier general, he is a multi-millionaire from birth who has published twenty-six books. Being the official Air Force Historian, his books naturally deal with the Second World War, although his most popular publication is a book on "sex and strenuous

1 Another Rumfoord, Winston Niles, plays a central role in The Sirens of Titan (1959).
While hospitalized, Rumfoord is working on a condensed one-volume history of the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II. In the complete twenty-seven volume history there is little mention of the Dresden raid, "even though it had been such a howling success" (p. 165). After keeping this success secret for twenty-three years, Rumfoord had realized that "'Americans have finally heard about Dresden.... So I've got to put something about it in my book'" (p. 165). The learned professor thus comes to represent official U.S. disregard on this subject which Vonnegut himself had run up against when trying to do research for his book (p. 10). When Billy informs him, repeatedly, that he has been in Dresden, has partaken in what Rumfoord is turning into history, the professor consistently ignores him. "For his own comfort," Rumfoord insists, for instance, that Billy has echolalia, "that an inconvenient person, one whose death he wished for very much, for practical reasons, was suffering from a repulsive disease" (p. 166). Finally he gruffly accepts the fact that Billy had been there, but true to his superior manner, he still maintains that "It had to be done" (p. 171).

In addition to representing the official American attitude to Dresden, Rumfoord also becomes a stark contrast to Billy, his roommate. Despite his age, the professor regards himself as an Übermensch and holds a contemptuous view of the weak. "'That's not a human being anymore,'" he says of Billy and recommends that he be shipped on to a veterinarian or a treesurgeon (p. 164). The staff at the hospital, whose job it was to help the weak and the dying, thought that Rumfoord was a "hateful old man, conceited and cruel," because he believed that "people who were weak deserved to die" (p. 166).

**Lily Rumfoord**

Lily, twenty-three, is an ex-go-go dancer, a High School dropout who is married to the virile professor (p. 159). She is a symbol of how a rich and powerful man can more or less buy a young wife whom he uses as a pub-
lic demonstration of his own potency. Lily herself, who has an IQ of 103, does not read too well (p. 159). She reads out loud to her husband from the Truman document concerning Hiroshima and from Irving's book on Dresden, but she obviously does not grasp everything she reads. She only serves as a complement and a servant to her husband. Obviously she must have been enticed by his money and position. "I don't know" is her simple-minded response three times (pp. 164-165) or otherwise she says very little. Besides enacting the role of a stupid female, Lily serves as an interpreter between Billy and the professor and she also introduces some documents on the war.

Fantasy level

To judge by his loveless family situation and his dreadful war experience, it is understandable that Billy retreats into a fantasy world. Excepting the little green creatures on Tralfamadore, who are "just made up," according to Vonnegut, 1 Billy creates one major character who becomes his mate on that planet. She embodies celestial love, sex and reproduction which may not be an uncommon dream for an unhappy man on earth.

Montana Wildhack

In many ways twenty-year-old Montana becomes drab Valencia's opposite. Montana as her very name implies is "mountainous," likened to the gorgeous pre-war architecture of Dresden, as she, stark naked, is brought to Tralfamadore (p. 115). On earth she had been a "wild hack" acting in blue movies. Billy first sees her in a New York pornographic store in a movie machine as well as in a pornographic magazine where she is reported dead (pp. 176-177). A Kilgore Trout novel gives him the idea of a human couple being kidnapped to another planet. Billy is first brought to Tralfamadore alone and later Montana is brought to him for mating purposes, as is commonly done with animals in a zoo. On Tralfamadore they have "heavenly" sex (p. 116), Montana becomes pregnant (cf. sterilized Valencia), is "big

1 McCabe, p. 94.
and rosy" with child, and later she breast-feeds their baby (p. 153). Billy's and Montana's life, although in a cage, is made to seem idyllic and harmonious. This prison away from earth in fact becomes a heaven. Billy finally lives a life there that contains everything that his own family life is lacking. The protection and the security of the cage frees him from the control of the "enormous forces" that otherwise reign in the world. In that atmosphere with Montana, Billy is also able to confront his Dresden experience, which he had been unable to face with Valencia. She kept asking him about it and he only answered in monosyllables until he excused himself, went out and time-traveled (pp. 104-107). With Montana, on the other hand, he is able to tell about Dresden's destruction in detail (pp. 153-155). Besides being Billy's wish-fulfilment of a sexy contrast to Valencia, Montana consequently aids Billy in facing his war experience.

III BILLY PILGRIM

Just as the secondary characters are used by the author to illustrate or represent certain ideas that contribute to the overall effect of the novel, so is Billy Pilgrim. He is indeed the central character, the focus of attention throughout the novel. However, he is no hero, as would be expected in a war novel. Instead, he is used by Vonnegut to display the effects that the war, and not only war, but also contemporary society in general, have on an average, sensitive person. He is the one character that spans over all four levels, private, military, fantasy and the author level as well, if we consider him as a projection of the author.

Billy's private life is obviously filled with emptiness as far as his family is concerned, while business-wise he is a glowing success. His own father had apparently tried to bring him up in a male tradition, where aggression and survival of the fittest are essential, to judge from the pool incident. His mother, on the other hand, seems to represent spiritual emptiness which she attempts to fill with meaningless knick-knacks. She manages to give Billy guilt feelings, because he is not grateful to her for giving him the gift of life. Billy does not identify with either parent, it seems. Unlike Derby, Lazzaro, Weary and many other secondary
characters who identify with an aggressive, patriotic or revengeful way of life, Billy does not. He does try to fit into society by marrying the right person and by climbing the social ladder.

However, inwardly Billy cannot accept these values and he rebels, in his own fashion. During the war, for instance, his quiet rebellion turns him into a pitiful, passive, at times clownish figure. Then he experiences a nervous breakdown after his engagement is announced. Finally, he escapes into fantasy. Still his protest, although personally inward and non-violent, comes to represent tolerance and pacifism in contrast to the dominating forces in society. In sum, Billy is used by Vonnegut as a modern Everyman of sorts, a pilgrim set on a modern crusade to make us realize the state of the world and man's inclination to cruelty and inhumanity.

Billy's private life is filled with boredom and a feeling of inertia. Although he recognizes problems and misery around him, he feels powerless to do anything about it all. One day, as he drives through the ghetto in his town, which reminds him of a war landscape, he ignores a black man who wants to talk to him. To just drive on was "the simplest thing" (p. 51). The same goes for some cripples who come to his door selling magazine subscriptions. Billy ignores them too, because he thinks their motives are suspect (p. 54). However, as he thinks about the cripples, he begins to cry. Even before they rang on his door, he had been weeping.

"Every so often, for no apparent reason, Billy Pilgrim would find himself weeping .... It was an extremely quiet thing Billy did, and not very moist" (p. 53). In other words, Billy is capable of crying and probably feels for a suffering mankind. This is how he resembles the Christ described in the Christmas carol that constitutes the book's epigraph. Vonnegut explains that although Billy cried very little, "he often saw things worth crying about" (p. 170). Note, however, that this was the only respect in which he resembles Christ. Vonnegut emphasizes this by saying: "in that respect, at least, he resembles the Christ of the carol" (p. 170).

Billy also has a tendency to fall asleep in the midst of work. Once he did
so while examining a female patient (p. 48). This, as well as his subdued weeping, is yet another sign of his existential anxiety. His method of alleviating this anxiety is to go to bed and to turn on a vibrator called "Magic Fingers," recommended by his doctor (pp. 53-54). This technical and impersonal device further emphasizes the loneliness and isolation of Billy, despite success, wealth and family.

Billy is a perfect example of what Vonnegut calls people acting as "listless playthings" (p. 140). One critic, C.C. Walcutt, calls this a state of "moral inertia" that modern fictional characters frequently suffer from. It is caused by chaotic reality around them. Walcutt explains it this way: "The self has shrunk to a point of frightened view, surrounded by neuroses that it does not see as aspects of its essential self, just as it does not assume moral responsibility for the social evils among which it fearfully moves."\(^1\) Billy fits into this description up to the point when he encounters Rosewater and they begin to "re-invent themselves and their universe" with the help of their imagination (p. 87). Before that, Billy's quiet rebellion has been centered on himself in the form of a breakdown and general withdrawal. His later attempts to modestly rebel and to change his world involve "prescribing corrective lenses" for all the blind who do not realize the truth about time, death and Tralfamadore as well as spreading his message at public rallies, in letters to the local paper and by appearing on TV talk shows. This, in sum, represents Billy's only development of character, from an inward to an outward protest, however slight it may be.

During the war, Billy is a passive character. His innocence is rampant. He is, with great irony, saved by the enemy from being beaten to death by Weary (p. 44). As a soldier, Billy suffers from complete "moral inertia." He simply exists. He does not care, for instance, about the clothes he wears. In his toga, silver shoes, beard and tiny fur-collared impresario's coat, he is indeed a laughable character, a clown. The Germans laugh and laugh at him, because he looks so silly, "one of the most screamingly funny things they had seen in all of World War Two" (p. 78).

No wonder Billy escapes into time-travel, jiggling Magic Fingers, fantasies and dreams. In the British compound, under the influence of morphine, Billy has a dream of giraffes. He is also a giraffe, this having to do with his exceptional tallness. The important point of the dream is that "the giraffes accepted Billy as one of their own, as a harmless creature as preposterously specialized as themselves" (pp. 85-86).

Just as on Tralfamadore where he is as exotic a creature as a giraffe in the northern hemisphere, he is nevertheless accepted as he is and even appreciated for what he is. In both dream worlds there are tender loving females present. Billy's dream as well as his fantasy life on Tralfamadore point to his need to escape from earth where problems and crises seem to dominate.

At times, Billy is made into a Christ figure. His mother introduces him from the beginning to the sufferings of Christ by giving him the gruesome crucifix. Then there are several references where Billy is associated with Christ and his sufferings. The adult Billy's ideas on death, for instance, are reminiscent of Christ's resurrection: "it is time for me to be dead for a little while - and then live again" (p. 124). Once, during the war, he hears "Golgotha sounds," but they pertain to men building a latrine, ironically enough (p. 119). Jammed into the boxcar he feels "self-crucified" (p. 69), and when snoozing in the horse-drawn carriage at the end of the war, Billy hears voices whose "tones might have been those used by the friends of Jesus when they took His ruined body down from His cross" (p. 169). It turns out that the voices are lamenting the horses' misery, not paying any attention to Billy at all. Thus most of these references are ironically intended.

Still, David L. Vanderwerken claims in an article that Billy "identifies himself fully with Christ."¹ Since he is a chaplain's assistant with a "meek faith in a loving Jesus" (p. 26), I don't think Billy, in the face of

death, makes any unusual associations. During the war Billy is certainly no Saviour, instead his baby innocence is emphasized throughout. However, Vanderwerken is correct in stating that, after the war, Billy tried in Messianic fashion to prescribe "corrective lenses for Earthling souls" (p. 25). Unfortunately, he is not very successful in his talk of "flying saucers, the negligibility of death, and the true nature of time" (p. 164). The family is ashamed of him and he withdraws from his practice. At the time of his death, however, on February 13, 1976, he is addressing a large audience in Chicago and does seem to have a following by then, but that is the only reference to any success of Billy's attempt to spread his Tralfamadorian philosophy (p. 123).

Vanderwerken draws the conclusion that Vonnegut is "affirming a humanly centered Christianity," due to the quoted Serenity Prayer which Vanderwerken claims is transformed by Vonnegut into a "viable moral philosophy." I cannot agree with this, since there is no evidence in the book that Vonnegut endorses any particular religion. Neither can I see how the Serenity Prayer is implicated as a workable philosophy for Billy. He is actually so stuck that he feels unable to change either his past, present or future (p. 52). Vanderwerken recognizes this as well, but still maintains that Vonnegut suggests that it is possible to change the present. Nowhere in the novel is it shown that Billy or any other character can change circumstances, such as war, glaciers or poverty. Billy recognizes misery around him but weeps over his inability to change anything. In this state of "moral inertia" Billy sees fantasy as his only means of escape from the present.

Although Vonnegut does not endorse any particular religion as Vanderwerken believes, I can support the idea that Vonnegut is affirming, albeit vaguely

---

1 Vanderwerken, pp. 149-150.
2 It is curious to note that Billy's date of death coincides with the date of Dresden's bombing.
3 Vanderwerken, p. 147.
4 Ibid., p. 152.
and weakly, certain humane concepts, such as love and brotherhood that do belong to Christianity — and a score of other religions. There are some, but few, tender moments of brotherhood, warmth and feeling between individuals in the novel. At Christmas all American prisoners are allowed by a blind innkeeper to sleep in a stable (p. 156). Earlier they have shared whatever they had as prisoners in the train car (p. 61). At one point Billy sleeps with his head on a rabbi's shoulder (p. 48). Many people "nestle like spoons" throughout the novel to be close to someone. Derby bursts out in tears when given a spoon of syrup (p. 138). These events may all seem insignificant, but they do stand out in the novel as fleeting moments of peace. It is interesting to note that these instances do not involve sexual encounters, as Billy's fantasies and dreams do.

What is the reason then for Vonnegut's use of Christian references? Vonnegut admits in an interview that he admires "Christianity more than anything — Christianity as symbolized by gentle people sharing a common bowl."¹ His reason for invoking Christian references, not only in Slaughterhouse-Five, is probably that in the western world, the Bible and basic Christian ethics are familiar references to a large public. "There has always been so much talk about Christianity around," as Vonnegut puts it.¹ Thus, Vonnegut uses the Christ identification in the first place to lend depth to his protagonist and his suffering. However, Vonnegut also criticizes Christianity in several instances. The subtitle, The Children's Crusade, testifies to that. Also, Trout's new gospel which probes into the question "why Christians found it so easy to be cruel" emphasizes the need for Jesus to be a nobody, rather than somebody "well connected" (p. 94).

The main emphasis in Slaughterhouse-Five is not on Billy's Christ resemblance, nor on his small development of character from an inward to an outward protest, but rather on the long-range effects of his upbringing and the Dresden experience. In other words, the novel demonstrates how the human soul reacts and tries to recover from atrocities. At first he retreats into a personal sphere, but gradually he emerges into a prophetic

¹ Standish, p. 60.
mission. In both stages, his sanity may be in question. The causes of his behavior are indeed plentiful and his reactions are fully understandable. Billy, then, is mostly an observer of the world around him, used by Vonnegut to define and explore the nature of the human condition. "Trapped in another blob of amber," Billy feels unable to change or improve anything (p. 52). Disillusioned, even disgusted, he divorces himself from the mainstream of life. However, he possesses one faculty which aids him in confronting Dresden and other disasters: his imagination. With the help of fantasy he succeeds at least in accepting reality and in adjusting to it as well as he can. This naturally creates a parallel with Vonnegut himself who also faced his Dresden experience, after numerous years, and turned it into a work of the imagination.
CHAPTER 4. VONNEGUT'S USE OF SOURCES

One striking feature in Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five is his frequent use of sources quoted or alluded to. This is not an unusual phenomenon among contemporary novelists. The French author Michel Butor has composed an entire book, a collage of the American continent entitled Mobile (1962), that consists of nothing but quotations. Earlier in this century T.S. Eliot was a writer who excelled in invoking external sources. Vonnegut, for his part, has employed this device from his very first novel Player Piano (1952), where we find some songs and poems as well as a play within the novel. Mother Night (1961) is about a playwright who also keeps a pornographic diary which is later published by someone else. Cat's Cradle (1963) features calypsos from The Books of Bokonon, the bible of the imaginary religion Bokononism. God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965) contains even more sources quoted. There is a passage from the Kama Sutra of Vitsayana, a Senate speech, Eliot Rosewater's love poems and a letter to his wife addressed as Ophelia. There are also two Blake poems quoted as well as some lines from Donne who thus supplies a freak poet with an unusual book title: Get With Child a Mandrake Root. Kilgore Trout, who figures in several Vonnegut novels, is first encountered in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, where he emphasizes the many references to Hamlet with his novel 2BR02B. A quote from Hans Rumpf's The Bombing of Germany also prepares the way for Slaughterhouse-Five where the device of invoking other sources is fully developed and incorporated into the structure. Thus, this device has always been used by Vonnegut, however modestly at first, to later become a full-fledged literary device in Slaughterhouse-Five.

Quite often, quotes from external sources are employed to expand the literary medium. Sharon Spencer feels that "any quotation necessarily incorporates a perspective on the subject of the book in which it is cited."1

1 Spencer, p. 143.
Since the number of sources is unlimited and the author may employ them as he pleases, Spencer further believes that "the ultimate inventive powers of reprinted materials are theoretically enormous." Due to the fact that Vonnegut's quotations in *Slaughterhouse-Five* figure in such quantities, over thirty, they warrant investigation to discern any general pattern. As Spencer implies, the perspectives and associations inherent in inserted quotations add to the complexity of a work of fiction.

Citations also affect the structure of a work. Most directly, the typography of the printed page is broken up whenever a song or a poem is introduced (pp. 2-3 or 18-19, for instance). Vonnegut, for his part, also inserts three drawings in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (pp. 106, 108 and 181) that further dispel monotony. However, not only the individual page but also the entire structure of the work is naturally broken up by frequent quotations. This occurrence is then a strongly contributing factor to the above discussed fragmentation in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Spencer makes a telling comparison between the visual art of collage or montage with this kind of literature in which "free combinations of elements may ... determine the nature of structure."²

Each quotation selected by Vonnegut and used in his short compressed statement on war and the world must obviously serve a purpose. Often it illustrates or underlines a point Vonnegut wants to make or it reinforces a theme. Compared with other writers, Vonnegut seldom omits naming his sources with the intended purpose of aiding rather than annoying the reader. The Horatian quote on page ten is an exception. That particular quote is left in its original Latin and later on Goethe is quoted in his mother tongue, German (p. 16). The effect of using foreign languages is, once again, one of fragmentation and interruption.

There are two kinds of quotes mainly used by Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five*: historical ones, inclusive of biblical quotes, that reflect reality

---

1 Spencer, p. 146.

2 Ibid., p. 141.
- after all, the novel is based on a true event; and fictional ones, published as well as non-published works, that pertain to fantasy. Among the fictional works there is a group of entirely fictitious sources, i.e., the author has created them himself but quotes from them as if they were published and recognized sources. In sum, the quotes found in Slaughterhouse-Five reinforce the Dresden/Tralfamadore dichotomy that can also be expressed as reality/fantasy. I will here seize on some of the most outstanding quotes used in order to find out how Vonnegut employs this technique of invoking other sources.

I HISTORICAL SOURCES

Throughout Slaughterhouse-Five Vonnegut reminds us that the Dresden catastrophe was a true event. Although his novel is a work of fiction, we are never allowed to forget the reality behind the story. Just as Vonnegut intrudes into the narration several times with the phrase "I was there," he also inserts historical quotes to verify the truth of the story. His historical sources all deal with the Second World War, war and crusades in general, and the history of Dresden in particular. Alfred Kazin has remarked that due to "the fictionality of our world ... certain things remain unbelievable. So there is a literary passion for documentation, a striking need to push us to that knowledge of evil which our literature in particular has long repressed."¹ This is probably why Vonnegut feels a need to document his experiences when using them in a novel.

Mary Endell's book Dresden, History, Stage and Gallery, published in 1908, is apparently a book no longer in print, on the art, music, architecture and history of Dresden. Vonnegut chooses two sections from Endell's book and places them early in his novel as an introduction to the city where most of the novel's action takes place. The first short section emphasizes the beauty and the artistic advancement of Dresden (p. 15). Vonnegut later

uses this information when Billy arrives in Dresden "enchanted by the architecture of the city" (p. 130). Its "skyline was intricate and voluptuous and enchanted and absurd. It looked like a Sunday school picture of Heaven to Billy Pilgrim" (p. 129). Also, Montana's body is reminiscent of Dresden's fantastic skyline, "before it was bombed," Vonnegut adds (p. 115). These positive descriptions of beautiful Dresden are made in order to emphasize how tragic it was to bomb Dresden. The Allied bombing is made to seem ridiculous, unnecessary and cruel.

The second quote from Mary Endell concerns the history of Dresden (pp. 15-16). An historical parallel is suggested between the Prussian siege of Dresden in 1760 and the attack during World War Two. The destruction was equally devastating both times. Even "when Goethe as a young student visited the city, he still found sad ruins." Endell then goes on to quote Goethe in German expressing his disgust at what the enemy has done to the Frauenkirche in particular. This comparison of the Prussian and Allied devastations of the same city suggests circularity. History seems to repeat itself.

The very same conclusion, that history repeats itself, can be deduced from the biblical quote Vonnegut uses on page nineteen. The subject there is the famous destruction of sinful Sodom and Gomorrah. In addition, Vonnegut identifies himself with Lot's wife who, despite warnings, did look back and was turned into a pillar of salt. His process of writing Slaughterhouse-Five is a way of looking back, but he feels it was a human act, for himself as well as for Lot's wife.

Yet another parallel of destruction is drawn: the bomb dropped on Hiroshima by the Americans. The man responsible for this act, President Truman, is quoted well over a page by Vonnegut (pp. 160-161). Even decades later it is a frightening document. The President speaks of retribution: "They [the Japanese] have been repaid many-fold" and he promises the bomb to be a "new and revolutionary increase in destruction .... even more powerful

1 Harry S. Truman, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, April 12 - December 31, 1945 (Washington, 1961), pp. 197-200.
forms are in development" (p. 160). He finally reveals that the Americans are ready to "obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city" (pp. 160-161). These words speak for themselves in their revengeful, war-mongering tone fully exposing the ugliness of war. It is significant that Vonnegut has chosen these particularly vehement sections of the statement and has left out the more peaceful parts, such as those concerning the cooperation with British researchers, the cost and the secrecy of the project as well as Truman's suggestion that a commission for atomic control be established.

The inclusion of a reference to The Execution of Private Slovik by William Bradford Huie also serves to emphasize the same tone of cruelty, this time on a personal level. Billy happens to find this book under the cushion of his chair in a waiting room. It is a true story about Slovik who was "the only American soldier to be shot for cowardice since the Civil War," according to Vonnegut (p. 39). One cannot help thinking of Derby's similar execution for a petty offence. In Slovik's case the crime was desertion. But both are the victims of martial rules effective in wartime when the maintenance of discipline is far more essential than the rights of the individual. Only one page earlier (p. 38), Billy has himself had an experience that was "like an execution," when his father wanted to teach him swimming by the sink-or-swim method.

Charles Mackay's book Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds is quoted right after Vonnegut assures Mary O'Hare that he will certainly not contribute to the further glorification of war. Instead he will emphasize the innocence of young soldiers sent into war. As a token he will give his novel the subtitle The Children's Crusade. When later looking up crusades in Mackay's book his belief is verified. Crusades of all forms are squalid according to Mackay (p. 14). While history tells us of the blood, tears and bigotry involved, romance has mag-

nified the crusaders' deeds into heroism and piety. The Children's Crusade was, no doubt, the worst of all crusades. Mackay shows quite well the uselessness and waste of the crusades in terms of human as well as material resources. The same ideas can easily be applied to war. This is most likely Vonnegut's purpose in quoting Mackay. He thereby explains the subtitle and consequently reinforces the baby and innocence theme.

However, David Irving's book The Destruction of Dresden is undoubtedly the most important historical source invoked by Vonnegut. One critic has noted that Irving's book "is a valuable complement to Slaughterhouse-Five, corroborating many of the novel's events and statements."

When reading Irving's detailed account of how Dresden was bombed in February, 1945, one is struck, time and again, by the recognition of descriptions also found in Slaughterhouse-Five. It seems obvious that Vonnegut has been influenced by Irving's factual account of the atrocity. When trying to remember their experiences in Dresden both O'Hare and Vonnegut were at a loss (p. 12). In an interview, he has explained that he believes the human mind is equipped with "circuit breakers" which protect us from memories too unbearable. "We all have forgetteries," as he calls them. In the case of O'Hare and Vonnegut, their Dresden forgetteries were very effective and most likely Irving's book helped Vonnegut to recall latent or repressed memories. Once again, his fictional account is mixed with facts from reality; the borderline between the two is sometimes difficult to distinguish.

Vonnegut makes two direct quotes from Irving's book. The first one is taken from the introduction where Ira Eaker, retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General, makes excuses for the death of at least 135,000 people in Dresden, because British civilians had also been killed. His line of reasoning follows the logic of retaliation (p. 161).

The second quotation from Irving's book is also the pronouncement of a

1 Donald J. Greiner, "Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five and the Fiction of Atrocity," Critique, XIV, No. 3 (1973), pp. 43-44.

2 Helander interview.
military expert: British Air Marshal Robert Saundby. In contrast to Eaker, Saundby sounds more humane in that he emphasizes the fantastic destructive powers of all warfare, with conventional as well as nuclear weapons. If one reads on in Saundby's foreword not quoted in Vonnegut, one finds further evidence of this military man's abhorrence of war. About Irving's book he states: "This book tells, dispassionately and honestly, the story of a deeply tragic example, in time of war, of man's inhumanity to man. Let us hope that the horrors of Dresden and Tokyo, Hiroshima and Hamburg, may drive home to the whole human race the futility, savagery, and utter uselessness of modern warfare."¹ Thus, these two military men who were part of the destruction display two somewhat different attitudes to war. That is probably why Vonnegut chooses them in order to balance his quotes.

However, in addition to these two identified quotations, there are several other influences from Irving's book throughout Slaughterhouse-Five that I would like to draw some attention to. First of all, there is a photograph facing page 145 in Irving, of a horse-drawn carriage. The caption reads: "Dresden, 25th February 1945: Soldiers driving commandeered farm carts have brought the victims to the cordoned-off Altmark Square. After last identification attempts the bodies are stacked on makeshift pyres." This seems to be the kind of "coffin-shaped green wagon" that figures at the end of the novel (pp. 167-170 and p. 186). Although there is no color in the old photo, the general outline of the wagon could certainly be called "coffin-shaped." Whereas Billy Pilgrim used the wagon for snoozing and sunbathing, Irving explains that they were actually used for transporting corpses.

Whenever an attack was planned, a detailed map was prepared of the area in question by the Air Force. Irving describes the colors used, the cross-hatching, black circles drawn, and, in particular, that the target was done "in a distinctive orange color" (Irving, p. 117). Perhaps this is where Vonnegut got his idea of concretely outlining the raid on Dresden

as he does in Chapter One. He also used different colors, his children's crayons, plus "orange cross-hatching" for Dresden (p. 5). However, in the case of Dresden no map was prepared which, Irving notes, was very unusual (Irving, p. 117).

Irving also mentions the fact that the young Goethe had surveyed the previous destruction of Dresden in 1768 (Irving, p. 180). Vonnegut enlarges this point by quoting from Mary Endell's book entitled Dresden, History, Stage and Gallery, where Goethe, in German, relates his impression of the ruined city and emphasizes the fact that the Frauenkirche was still standing (p. 16). Irving also mentions that strangely enough the same church had been spared by the Allies (Irving, p. 180). Eventually, it did collapse, according to Irving (p. 185).

Derby's execution for stealing a teapot had many parallels in World War Two according to Irving. An American had been found with a tin of food and a French Canadian had taken some ham. Both were shot (Irving, p. 183). The irony is great when one considers the outrageous injustice of the Dresden horror as compared with justice in the individual case.

Irving reports that after the major attacks on the city were completed there was "low-level strafing of the city" by Americans (Irving, p. 181). Vonnegut describes this phenomenon in his own way: "Absolutely everybody in the city was supposed to be dead, regardless of what they were, and that anybody that moved in it represented a flaw in the design .... American fighter planes came in under the smoke to see if anything was moving. They saw Billy and the rest moving down there. The planes sprayed them with machine-gun bullets ...." According to Vonnegut, the reason for it was "to hasten the end of the war" (p. 155). He underscores the inhumanity of the design.

Vonnegut also seizes on other details that emphasize the real cruelty of

1 See the chapter on imagery for a discussion of the symbolic function of the Frauenkirche, p. 118.

2 Greiner has also pointed out this irony, p. 46.
the situation far better than statistics and long descriptions would. Irving states that during the fire-storm, for instance, a soldier assigned to rescue work found "corpses, shrivelled in the intense heat to about three feet long" (p. 184). Vonnegut calls them "seeming little logs lying around" (p. 154). The "stench of decay [that] pervaded the city" in Irving's account (p. 198) is turned into a smell of "roses and mustard gas" in Vonnegut's personal narrative (p. 185). The Maori grave digger dies from those gases which Irving points out were dangerous for rescue workers (Irving, p. 187).

In one of the "corpse mines," as Vonnegut calls them, dozens of bodies were found sitting on benches, caught there by death (Vonnegut, p. 185; Irving, p. 194). "The girls sat there as though stopped in the middle of a conversation (describes the leader of the squad which first reached the hostel's basement). They looked so natural, even though they were dead, that it was hard to believe they were indeed not alive" (Irving, p. 194).

Fortunately the basement shelter containing Billy and his fellow Americans never became a corpse mine. While imprisoned there the group is visited one night by Howard Campbell who tries to recruit Americans for the "Free American Corps" to fight on the Russian front (pp. 140-141). According to Irving, there was no such American unit, but instead there was a "Free British Corps" with exactly the same purpose (Irving, p. 183). It seems as if Vonnegut has adapted this idea of a volunteer division for his book. In both cases the corps was pitifully unsuccessful in its recruitment.

Vonnegut's novel ends in springtime and that was also the season in which the war ended. Irving notes that in the middle of March, 1945, "an inordinately warm early spring sun beat down on the dead Inner City" (Irving, p. 199). At the end of the novel, green leaves are coming out while the birds are singing once again. For the average reader, unfamiliar with the

---

1 See p. 103 for further discussion of "roses and mustard gas."

2 See pp. 119-121 for a discussion of the symbolic meaning of birds and the color green.
particulars of the Dresden raid, it is impossible to know what is fiction and what is fact in Vonnegut's novel. Therefore it is interesting to have certain events, such as the above, verified by Irving's factual account.

In sum, it can be stated that the historical sources quoted serve the purpose of verifying true events that the novel is based on. In the case of Irving's book, it was probably an aid to Vonnegut in recalling unpleasant details that he, consciously or unconsciously, makes use of in his novel. Several quoted historical sources draw parallels in history with other destructions, e.g., Hiroshima, Sodom and Gomorrah and even an earlier demolition of Dresden. They all point to the fact that atrocities tend to be repeated. The subjects of the historical quotes are wars, crusades, and destructions throughout history. One deals with execution in wartime, thus suggesting a parallel to the novel's intended climax, an execution. Most of the quotes are placed in the first chapter as an introduction and tone setter. The Saundby, Eaker and Truman statements are placed at the end of the novel, where they form a stark contrast to the hospitalized Billy, who, after all, shows the concrete effects that war has on the individual human being, regardless of the excuses made by military men and politicians.

II FICTIONAL SOURCES

A great variety of sources is grouped under this heading, all sharing the same purpose: to stimulate the reader's fantasy. They all disrupt the narrative to provide a point of clarification, to support or illustrate major themes or simply to furnish the reader with possibilities for free association and additional perspectives. Vonnegut seems to believe in fantasy as a necessary counterbalance to atrocities like Dresden. Hence, the creation of Tralfamadore, the planet with little green men, and the inclusion of fictional sources.

First, there is a fictional group consisting of published, acknowledged works where we find Céline, Dostoevsky, Horace, Niebuhr, Blake, Roethke, Mailer, Crane, Jacqueline Susann and others. Some of these are only al-
cluded to in passing, others are directly quoted from. Second, there is a group of miscellaneous popular sources, such as limericks, the epigraph and several songs, some published, some not. In the third and last group of fictional sources, we find some works created by Vonnegut himself and used by him as any other source from the first or second group. I have chosen to label this group "fictitious" sources, i.e., sources entirely made up and treated as published and recognized material. Kilgore Trout's novels and Campbell's monograph fall into this group. Except for this "fictitious" group, the general trend is toward brevity among all fictional sources, as compared to the rather lengthy and extensive quotes from historical sources.

A Literary sources

Although many literary works and authors are merely alluded to in Slaughterhouse-Five, they nevertheless succeed in adding an extra dimension to the novel. The Red Badge of Courage as a comparison with, and a parallel to, Derby's situation has already been mentioned. Another example would be Valley of the Dolls (1970), the bestseller by Jacqueline Susann, later also made into a successful film. It happens to be the only book available to Billy in the flying saucer on his way to Tralfamadore (p. 75). Why has Vonnegut chosen this particular novel to be briefly mentioned in this way?

Billy thinks it is good, but admits to getting tired of the same "ups and downs over and over again" (p. 75). Vonnegut is making a pun here, while also criticizing the heavy emphasis on sex in Susann's book. There is very little description of sex in Slaughterhouse-Five, as is true of all Vonnegut novels. James Goshorn has also noted this "lack of interest in realistic, detailed description of sexual acts or aberrations...." In other words sex is mostly seen as a reproductive function, not for leering or titillation, which places Vonnegut out of the bestseller mainstream that easily

1 See the chapter on character, p. 53.
turns sex into pornography, such as Valley of the Dolls. Thus, a seemingly insignificant reference may be loaded with associations and meanings.

Another literary quote that, in spite of its brevity, is equally loaded with meaning, is the single line taken from Horace's Odes II, xiv, 1 (p. 10). The correct quotation should read "Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume, Labuntur anni," according to The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Quotations. The vocative "Postume" has been omitted by Vonnegut, probably to make the quotation more general. In translation this means "Ah me, Postumus, Postumus, the fleeting years are slipping by."

The subject is time, the passage of time. In Chapter One Vonnegut thinks of this Horatian quote as he is trying to recall a specific date, i.e., the last year of the New York World's Fair. In a larger context Vonnegut is, at the time, on his way to see Bernard O'Hare to recall and possibly discuss their joint war experiences. This quote reinforces Vonnegut's central theme of time, and illustrates how time has slipped by since the war without Vonnegut having come to terms with the subject which, in turn, is also a major theme. Later the Horatian quote is echoed as a question, "where have all the years gone?" uttered by Billy in his office. He is then in the same position as Vonnegut was earlier. He cannot remember the exact year either (pp. 48-49).

Still another author is invoked on the subject of time, namely the French writer Céline. Vonnegut is fascinated by a scene in Death on the Installment Plan, in which Céline wishes to arrest time in a bustling street crowd. He wants to make people freeze, stop and cease all movement so that they will not disappear (p. 19). This is, of course, impossible as well as contradictory. Such a wish, to arrest time, can only result in death or stasis. "Time obsessed him," Vonnegut says of Céline with the implication that he shares the same obsession.

Vonnegut and Céline also share an obsession with death. Vonnegut quotes
Céline as claiming that no art is possible without a dance with death and that "the truth is death" (p. 18). Here we are given the explanation of the subtitle A Duty—Dance with Death. In order to turn it into art, Vonnegut must confront death, dance with it, festoon it and waltz it around, as Céline suggests, rather than fight against it (p. 18). In this context, Slaughterhouse-Five can be seen as Vonnegut's duty as a writer to dance with death in order to accomplish a work of art. The quotes from Céline are taken from Erika Ostrovsky's book Céline and His Vision which can hardly be classified as fiction, but I have nevertheless placed these quotes within the fiction group, because the citations themselves are of a fictional nature. They reinforce three of Vonnegut's central themes: time, death and the author's role.

When delving into the past, collecting material for his Dresden book, Vonnegut brought two books with him on his way back to East Germany. Ostrovsky's book was one. The other one was a collection of poems, Words for the Wind, by Theodore Roethke (p. 18). The three lines by Roethke quoted in Slaughterhouse-Five, however, are not from that collection, as Vonnegut claims, but from an earlier one entitled The Waking (1953) which is also the title of the poem cited.

These three lines bring up subjects and themes, such as the states of sleep and awakening, fate and free will, that are reechoed throughout the novel. "I wake to sleep" suggests a mélange or reciprocal substitution of the two states. On that dreadful march with Roland Weary, Billy had experienced what Roethke's line suggests, for he "could scarcely distinguish between sleep and wakefulness" (p. 29). Pope Innocent III said of the child crusaders: "'These children are awake while we are asleep!"' (p. 14). Once again, sleep and wakefulness have been interchanged. The subject of sleep and unconsciousness further suggests that time, during those states, exists out of the bounds of chronology and order which may serve as a small introduction to Billy's state of being "unstuck" in time.

---


The structure of this Roethke poem is also of significance. It is a villanelle which is an old French form consisting of "nineteen lines on two rhymes in six stanzas, the first and three lines of the opening tercet recurring alternately at the end of the other tercets, and both repeated at the close of the concluding quatrain."¹ Since Vonnegut quotes the first tercet, these are the crucial first and third lines of the poem to be repeated in a pattern throughout the villanelle. Wayne McGinnis has pointed out that this is a form whose "complexity and artificiality, should give an impression of simplicity and spontaneity, like Slaughterhouse-Five itself...."² The comparison is striking as well as fitting. Slaughterhouse-Five also appears simple and uncomplicated on the surface, but reveals great complexity when investigated. The circularity in form and content of the villanelle also runs parallel to Slaughterhouse-Five's form and content. The themes of time, renewal and cyclic recurrence are benefited by such a literary reference. It is interesting to note that Vonnegut injects this reference without any accompanying comment. It is simply one of the books he has brought on the plane back to Dresden. Yet this quotation is pregnant with significance.

Is man unable to change his own life or the course of history? This is a question that seems central in Slaughterhouse-Five. Billy adheres to some fatalistic belief that he can not change the past, the present, or the future (p. 52). Still, he keeps a prayer on his wall that indicates "his method for keeping going, even though he was unenthusiastic about living" (p. 52). His motto is the so-called "Serenity Prayer," originally written in the early 1940's by Reinhold Niebuhr, the Protestant theologian, and subsequently widely used by various personages and organizations. Alcoholics Anonymous chose it as the guiding motto for their members.³ Vonnegut uses the prayer twice in the novel. The second time it occurs, it

² McGinnis, p. 57.
³ For the history and the authenticity of the prayer, see a personal letter to the author from Ms. Ursula Niebuhr, October 13, 1975.
occupies an entire page inscribed on a heartshaped locket placed between Montana's breasts (p. 181). It is one of three drawings by the author in Slaughterhouse-Five. This page is the very last one before Chapter Ten, the epilogue. The repetition and the strategic placement of this prayer naturally add to its significance. When Billy finds life meaningless, he does not seek solace in Christianity, as the prayer on his wall would indicate. Instead, he seems to disbelieve the existence of free will, which is the basic concept of the prayer, and that is why he is attracted to Tralfamadorian fatalism. Fantasy and time-travel become his means of survival. The reason why Vonnegut includes and even emphasizes the Niebuhr prayer is most likely in order to provide an alternative which, by its very vagueness, would suit many: "A lot of patients who saw the prayer on Billy's wall told him that it helped them to keep going, too" (p. 52).\(^1\) Billy, however, feeling trapped as he does in his life situation, rejects it in favor of other solutions.

B Popular sources

This group of popular sources of a fictional nature contain several songs, a limerick and an epigraph. Most of them are unpublished sources. Although some of the songs have most likely been printed, they remain popular, some well-known, and may therefore be distinguished from the purely literary works in the other group of fictional sources.

The book's epigraph is such a popular source. It is taken from a well-known Christmas song that emphasizes how little baby Jesus cried. This provides a comparison with Billy who also rarely cries. Vonnegut offers this explanation himself on page 170. The epigraph's relationship to Billy has been dealt with in the chapter on character.\(^2\) Suffice it here to say that the epigraph is mainly a reflection of Billy's poor emotional life.

In the initial chapter we encounter a limerick and a popular song as early

\(^1\) For further discussion of the prayer and other Christian references, see the chapter on character pp. 71-74.

\(^2\) See p. 69.
as page two. The limerick is bawdy in tone:

There was a young man from Stamboul,  
Who soliloquized thus to his tool:  
"You took all my wealth  
And you ruined my health,  
And now you won't pee, you old fool." (p. 2).

Vonnegut himself claims that he thinks of the limerick when considering his efforts to write down his Dresden experience, thus implying a comparison. The impact of his war experience had been immense, even if his health and wealth were still intact. However, when he wanted to turn it into something useful that would at least bring him some money, then "not many words about Dresden came from my mind ...." (p. 2). He even had difficulties remembering what had actually happened. That is why he felt his Dresden memory had been "useless" and, yet, how "tempting" it had been all along to write about it.

The same difficulties of coming to terms with his Dresden experience remind him of the Yon Yonson song. John Johnson is a lumbermill worker in Wisconsin who is often asked about what he does and he then tells people:

My name is Yon Yonson  
I work in Wisconsin,  
I work in a lumbermill there (p. 2).

In a recorded version of excerpts from Slaughterhouse-Five, Vonnegut actually sings this song.¹ The song goes on indefinitely without ever arriving at an end. Over the years people also asked Vonnegut what he was doing and he kept replying that he was working on a book about Dresden which apparently seemed like a project ad infinitum. In addition, Vonnegut's own life also fits into the Yon Yonson cycle: "And they're [our babies] all grown up now, and I'm an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls. My name is Yon Yonson, I work in Wisconsin, I work in a lumbermill there" (p. 6). The circularity of the song also complements the structure of Slaughterhouse-Five.

¹ Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., reads Slaughterhouse-Five, Caedmon Record TC 1376 (1973).
The barbershop quartet called "The Febs" sings two songs at the Pilgrim anniversary party. The first one is "That Old Gang of Mine," but only a few lines are quoted from it, about having and missing old friends. Billy "had never had an old gang, old sweethearts and pals, but he missed one anyway ...." (p. 148). Actually, it is not the song, but the men's way of singing that upsets Billy (p. 151). He understands that by the time they sing the second song which is "Leven cent cotton" (p. 151).

Although it is the manner of singing and not the content that perturbs Billy, it is nevertheless interesting to note which songs the author has selected. The first one, in spite of its brevity, emphasizes the loneliness of Billy. He had never had any friends, of either sex, and must feel left out when hearing the song. The subject of the second one is not emotional but material poverty. How can one live on "Leven cent cotton, forty cent meat?"

The general tone is one of pessimism. Whatever initiative is taken, it is bound to fail. All the time "Things gettin' worse, drivin' all insane." In fact, there is "No use talkin', any man's beat." The song's tone of inevitability fits in with certain Tralfamadorian beliefs expressed in Slaughterhouse-Five, such as concentrating on happy moments, the lack of free will due to being trapped in time or the permanence of all moments (pp. 100, 66 and 23). This song has definitely been published as indicated in the acknowledgements concerning copyrights.

In addition to thematic reinforcement, the purpose of including songs is to break up the narrative, to let the reader's eyes rest on some shorter lines with rhymes. "The Febs" are featured in two more songs, onboard the plane that crashes (p. 134). They are both on the subject of Poles, because Billy's father-in-law enjoys that kind of song. The first one is bawdy in tone, providing Lionel Merble with plenty of laughs. It tells a story about a man, imprisoned because he had had intercourse with a Polish woman. This reminds Billy of war-time Dresden where he had seen someone hanged for the same "crime." That time the roles were reversed, the man being Polish and the woman German. Thus, the painful recollection from the war stands in sharp contrast to the gay, laughable song. On the subject of executions, it also provides a parallel with Private Slovik and Derby.
The second song consists of merely four lines that tell about the simple life of two Poles working in a Pennsylvania coal mine. They work, get paid, have a free day and then work again. A certain circularity is suggested in this kind of life. Both Polish songs provide us with a break in the narrative, a bawdy tone and an associational link with a war event that both suggests a parallel and, at the same time, functions as a striking contrast.

C Fictitious sources

Vonnegut has himself created some sources that he freely quotes from in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, as if they were real sources. One has already been mentioned and analyzed and that is Campbell's monograph on American enlisted men, their behavior and style of dressing. In the chapter on character I have discussed how Vonnegut uses this piece of writing for social and political criticism. It need not be further dealt with here.¹

Kilgore Trout's science-fiction books, however, which are introduced in *Slaughterhouse-Five* as if they were real, published novels, will be dealt with more extensively. According to Eliot Rosewater, Trout's greatest fan, his ideas, rather than his style, were important (p. 95). Hence, it is essential to examine the ideas expressed in these summarized novels to find out what Vonnegut's purpose could be in creating them.² In *Slaughterhouse-Five* there are seven of them, some with titles, some without. Most of them seem to serve the purpose of reinforcing central themes or they highlight certain aspects of American culture or values already hinted at in the novel.

¹ See p. 59.

² In 1974 a Trout book appeared on the market, *Venus on the Half-Shell*, which naturally complicates the case. This book had been summarized in Vonnegut's *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (p. 133). To this date, it is not clear whether Vonnegut is the author behind the published pseudonym Kilgore Trout. Please, see articles by Mauritz Edström, "En förklädd Vonnegut berättar för oss om den andra sidan," *Dagens Nyheter*, October 15, 1976, p. 4 and October 19, 1976, as well as Gunnar Gällmo, "Kilgore Trout är inte Kurt Vonnegut," *Dagens Nyheter*, October 19, 1976, p. 4.
The Big Board is a Trout novel which inspires Billy's time-travels. It tells a story about two human beings who like Billy and Montana have been kidnapped to another planet (pp. 174-175). In addition, this book reveals the power money has over human beings. The Earthlings are told by their captors that an investment has been made for them on the stock market and that it is up to them to manage it well. The trick works and the human couple performs "vividly" before the big stock market board, which of course is a fake. Fluctuations are simulated to make them "jump up and down and cheer, or gloat, or sulk, or tear their hair, to be scared shitless or to feel as contented as babies in their mothers' arms" (p. 174).

Still another Trout book ridicules the attraction money holds for human beings. It tells of a "money tree" on which bonds, dollars and precious gems grow. "It attracted human beings who killed each other around the roots and made very good fertilizer" (p. 143).

The Gutless Wonder is another Trout novel that exposes hypocritical values. A robot who drops napalm on human beings from the air is unpopular because of bad breath, until he clears up this halitosis and is "welcomed to the human race" again (p. 144). This plot is strikingly similar to Robert Pilgrim's development. As a juvenile delinquent he was also unpopular, but as a well-groomed soldier, trained and paid to kill, he was acceptable.¹

These parables naturally require the reader to make his own interpretation and to work out their connection with Vonnegut's main story. The plot summaries are simply injected, incidentally, into the narrative. The money tree story, for instance, is told after Kilgore Trout has lectured to one of his newspaper girls: "'You think money grows on trees?'" (p. 143). To another child Trout says: "'What are you? ... Some kind of gutless wonder?'" thus introducing the plot summary of The Gutless Wonder in a similar off-hand way (p. 144). Otherwise Trout's books are presented merely because they happen to be the novel Eliot Rosewater is reading at the time. One

¹ See the chapter on character, p. 63.
of the books Rosewater reads is *Maniacs in the Fourth Dimension* (p. 90). Since it tells of incurable mental diseases in the fourth dimension, it is quite appropriate for Rosewater to be reading it in a mental hospital. Perhaps Billy also got his ideas on the fourth dimension from this particular book.

Rosewater is also the one who tells Billy about *The Gospel From Outer Space* by Kilgore Trout. In that book, a Tralfamadorian studies "why Christians found it so easy to be cruel" (p. 94). He reaches the conclusion that, because Jesus had been a Son of God, "well connected" at the outset, the intended goal of love, mercy and compassion has been missed. Instead, the visitor from outer space presents Earth with a retold gospel in which Christ actually was a "nobody," a "bum," and not divine until adopted by God on the cross (p. 95). Another book, actually, involves a time-traveler who is permitted by a time machine to return to the time of Jesus. He wants to check if Christ was really dead. With his stethoscope he verifies the humanness of Jesus: "The Son of God was dead as a doornail" (p. 176). Vonnegut has often displayed concern with religion and usually ends up exposing its false illusions. In this case he also retells the gospel to correct any mistakes.

The inclusion of Trout's many stories underscores the central themes and ideas, e.g., our misplaced hypocritical values, human cruelty, the capitalist system's emphasis on money, time-travel, mental illness and the place of religion. The fact that Trout is called a "cracked messiah" puts his writings in an ambiguous light (p. 143). The obvious similarities between Vonnegut and Trout, in career development and in problems shared serve to reinforce the theme of the author's role in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

The frequent use of quotations from other sources in a rather short novel naturally has a multitude of effects. First of all it results in an immediate visual effect, since a different typography is employed. In the case

---

1 Trout is also discussed as a character, see pp. 51-52.
of rhymed songs or poems, shorter, indented lines are used. In a few cases other languages appear, as well as some drawings. In one sense, this break-up of the narrative further contributes to the fragmentation of the structure, while in another sense it also prevents the reader from ever getting bored with one page looking exactly like any other page.

Although on a structural level, inserted quotes may seem disruptive, they also serve the purpose of thematically involving the reader in new events, new associations, new perspectives. It is often left to the reader to connect the quotes with the themes and ideas expressed in the novel. Most quotes are short, except for some historical sources, and seem to be chosen with Vonnegut's didactic purpose in mind. Together with Vonnegut's use of short sentences and paragraphs, dialogue stripped down to the bare essentials and little jokes everywhere, the quotes succeed in providing additional depth and perspective in a minimum of space.

This enrichment of the text by means of quotes serves as an expansion of the literary medium. Each quote brings with it inherent associations and ideas that serve certain purposes in their new contextual surroundings. Often central themes are reinforced in this manner, e.g., war, death, renewal, innocence, the course of history, inhumanity, time and the author's role.

On the one hand, there are historical and biblical quotes to confirm the parts of the story anchored in reality. On the other hand, there are quotes from fiction which have the purpose of stimulating the human imagination or highlighting our need for fantasy in the cruel and absurd world depicted in the historical quotes. The tension between the two, reality and fantasy, historical and fictional quotes, is well expressed in the two extremes of Dresden and Tralfamadore. The popular fictional sources seem mostly to call forth associations with Billy's empty private life, while the fictitious sources express general social and political criticism of the American system of values.

One transcending purpose of all literary quotes is to operate as a means
of uniting different times, places and cultures. Vonnegut can, with the aid of quotes, for example, tie Dresden and Hiroshima together, thus providing us with parallels that give us new thematic perspectives. While he appears to be fragmenting the structure, he is actually arranging the separate quotes in such a way that they lose their own identity and become integrated into the total structure of the work.
CHAPTER 5. "POO-TTEE-WEEET?" - IMAGERY

As prisoners-of-war, Billy and his fellow soldiers were locked into a boxcar for transportation deep into Germany. The journey took several days. The German guards likened this train to a "single organism which ate and drank and excreted through its ventilators. It talked or sometimes yelled through its ventilators, too. In went water and loaves of black bread and sausage and cheese, and out came shit and piss and language" (p. 61). This comparison illustrates, in a nutshell, how sordid human existence can be, at least in wartime. The loss of individuality is complete. Language is here placed on a level with human waste products. Since Vonnegut writes with an ulterior motive in mind, to awaken his readers and to make them ponder upon the human situation, his use of language has a more refined and distinct purpose than in the metaphor above. In fact, as this chapter will show, Vonnegut makes use of metaphorical language to serve his explicitly stated purpose. Rather than a waste product it is used as an asset to reinforce central themes and to lighten up rather serious subjects.

In this thesis I will use the two terms "imagery" and "figurative language" interchangeably to include not only metaphors and similes, but also symbols and oxymora. These literary figures all share the same purpose: to make a comparison or a juxtaposition of two entities that are seemingly quite different. Frequently, their internal relationship appears obscure, it may often startle the reader. Such a constellation may be hitherto unthought-of and may thus reveal totally new resemblances. Images can also, on the other hand, illuminate and clarify to give the reader an experience of déja-vu. In this way, figurative language may widen and deepen the reader's impression and experience of the work in question. Naturally figurative language lends itself to vagueness and ambiguity, since it leaves interpretation up to the individual reader. Especially in the case of symbols, total explanation is often resisted.
All figurative language involves "a complex interaction of thoughts and emotions." In particular, it appeals to the human imagination which, as has already been shown, is an important survival mechanism for Vonnegut. One critic, Ursula Brumm, finds human "imagination hungry for images." In this sense, figurative language provides a link between the outer and inner worlds. In Billy's case, that means between his every-day reality and his time-travels. Also, figurative language provides a certain continuity in the otherwise fragmented structure of Slaughterhouse-Five as regards the relationship between different temporal and spatial spheres. Vonnegut achieves this effect by the frequent repetition of imagery.

In spite of the fact that Slaughterhouse-Five treats a serious subject, even a morbid one, its tone is frequently humorous, particularly in the use of imagery. It seems as if the author has consciously chosen this approach in order to reach a wide reading public. Of course, humor is also just about the only reaction possible in the face of the absurd world depicted in Vonnegut's novels. Vonnegut admits that "laughter is a response to frustration, just as tears are, and it solves nothing, just as tears solve nothing. Laughing or crying is what a human being does when there's nothing else he can do." As a child he had learnt that by being funny he could get some attention which otherwise was a difficult task, since he was "the youngest kid in my family by far." Vonnegut then sees joking as a way of adjusting to life and as a means of attracting attention.


4 Partridge finds that if the two parts involved in any metaphor are very far apart, the tension between them frequently lends itself to wit and humor, p. 48.

5 Standish, p. 64.

Vonnegut's imagery attracts attention, not always because of its startling or humorous effects, but often as an elucidation of central points or ideas. Metaphors and similes have been divided here into two groups according to the subjects "war" and "people." Since war is the main subject of the novel it naturally becomes the focus of central imagery. Sensory imagery pertaining to war will be discussed under two subdivisions, i.e., auditory and olfactory imagery. The effect that war as well as other "enormous forces" in the world have on people will be seen in the section on imagery pertaining to human beings. Whether human beings are compared to animals or every-day objects, the purpose seems to be the same: to belittle humans and to make us realize our place and role in the scheme of things. The appearance of oxymora in Slaughterhouse-Five perhaps best exemplifies the feeling of incongruousness and absurdity in the Vonnegutian world. No particular distinction between metaphor and simile will be made. Vonnegut uses mostly similes introduced by "like" or "as," this being the simplest and most direct way of making a comparison. However, in order not to exclude those metaphors that do exist, all comparisons will be treated on an equal basis. It is their content, tone and function that are more important than their form.

I METAPHORS, SIMILES AND OXYMORA

A Imagery pertaining to war

Since the central subject and theme of Slaughterhouse-Five is war, there is naturally quite a lot of imagery in it pertaining to war. Some emphasize the sound or smell of war and will each be treated in separate subsections. Weapons are described in a variety of ways. There are "potato-masher grenades" (p. 56), "bullets the size of robins' eggs" (p. 168), or a bullet is metaphorically called a "lethal bee" (p. 29). These comparisons with familiar and quotidian objects are probably made in order to concretize the war. Derby's description of the barrage from an air-attack that precedes his capture is made in the same way: "little lumps of lead in copper jackets were crisscrossing the woods under the shellbursts" (p. 92).
People can also be described in war terms. Trout, who has a "paranoid face" looks like a "prisoner of war" (p. 143). The Englishmen who never see action but keep themselves fit for the fight display calves and arm muscles that are "like cannonballs" (p. 81). That very same image is applied to still another group of men: the young men found on photographs in the pornography shop that Billy visits in New York City. Their muscles are eternally "bulging like cannonballs" to emphasize their virility (p. 173).

Military vocabulary is even applied to nature, as trees in the German woods are found to be planted "in ranks and files" (p. 34). On his way to see Bernard O'Hare, to gather material for writing the book, Vonnegut stops with his daughter and her best friend to look at the Hudson river. War was apparently on his mind, because the carp they observe in the river are described to be "as big as atomic submarines" (p. 10).

Most of the war imagery is frightening, naturally emphasizing the negative effects of war. However, Vonnegut does not indulge in gory details when it comes to war, except, for instance, in the case of Weary's obsession with torture. In another quite extended metaphor on the subject of war, he creates instead a coy, amused tone when comparing a military operation to sexual intercourse:

The Germans and the dog were engaged in a military operation which had an amusingly self-explanatory name, a human enterprise which is seldom described in detail, whose name alone, when reported as news or history, gives many war enthusiasts a sort of post-coital satisfaction. It is, in the imagination of combat's fans, the divinely listless loveplay that follows the orgasm of victory. It is called "mopping up" (p. 45).

This sequence of images emphasizes the reaction of "combat's fans" or "war enthusiasts" who derive a sick sexual satisfaction from descriptions of war. Sex is once again seen as a rather sordid business. Its comparison with a military operation certainly does not heighten its value. The

1 Cf. with the remarks on the subject of sex in the chapter on sources, pp. 85-86.
idea of showing "war enthusiasts" as being almost perverse also coincides well with Vonnegut's original promise to Mary O'Hare: to degloryfy war and to create no parts for heroes. She had felt that books as well as movies were instrumental in encouraging wars (p. 13). Vonnegut's war imagery, on the whole, serves this purpose of degloration by emphasizing the noisy, negative and concrete effects of war. In addition, it reinforces the main subject and theme of the novel.

1 **Auditory imagery**

Sound is used to reinforce the negative effect already established by war imagery. Bombs naturally make a tremendous noise when falling to the ground. Down in the meat locker the bombs falling above sound like "giant footsteps" which must have made the people below feel small and powerless (p. 152). There is an antitank gun that makes a "ripping sound like the opening of the zipper on the fly of God Almighty" (p. 30). Valencia's car, after her accident in which it lost its exhaust system, "sounded like a heavy bomber coming in on a wing and a prayer," as she drove up to Billy's hospital (p. 158).

On the whole, the sounds in *Slaughterhouse-Five* are strong and negative, pertaining to war or merely emphasizing unpleasant sounds of suffering. Throughout the novel there are also sirens going off, further denoting an atmosphere of war and imminent danger. In addition to sirens and other distinctly negative loud sounds, there are references to big dogs barking in many places in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The sound of these dogs further reinforces Billy's fear of war and death in the German woods.

The very first time we hear a dog barking is in the German woods as Billy is coming unstuck in time. Then "somewhere a big dog was barking" (p. 37).

---

1 The sirens will be treated as symbols later on in this chapter, pp. 111-113.
2 Dogs abound in Vonnegut's writing. Kazak is the dog that space travels in *The Sirens of Titan*. The first one to die from Ice-9 in *Cat's Cradle* is a dog, thus predicting the end of the world. In *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* there are dogs everywhere.
A few pages later the dog barks again, this time its voice sounds like a big bronze gong whose effect is achieved "with the help of fear and echoes and winter silences" (p. 42). Vonnegut here makes the suggestion that it is a combination of fear and a wintry location that magnifies the dog's sound.

A big dog also barks somewhere when Billy is kidnapped by Tralfamadorians, once again demonstrating the existence of fear before the unknown (p. 65). When the Americans arrive at the prison camp, exactly the same two sentences quoted above are repeated, as Billy once again faces something new and unknown: "Somewhere a big dog barked. With the help of fear and echoes and winter silences, that dog had a voice like a big bronze gong" (p. 71).

The fact that Trout is scared of dogs naturally emphasizes the association of dogs with fear (pp. 144 and 146). Trout also tells Billy of what happens to a dog that realizes he is standing on nothing, i.e., a mirror, because Billy has displayed a similar look of "standing on thin air" (pp. 150-151).

However, the tremendous fear associated with barking dogs is greatly reduced as the dog in question is identified and described. Not only was it a friendly German shepherd. It was also a female among all the soldiers, a dog that had no notion of what was going on: "The dog, who had sounded so ferocious in the winter distances, was a female German shepherd. She was shivering. Her tail was between her legs. She had been borrowed that morning from a farmer. She had never been to war before. She had no idea what game was being played. Her name was Princess" (p. 45). This description shows the tame truth behind the vicious sound. Still, Vonnegut uses the sound twice again when Billy encounters strange and uncertain situations (pp. 65 and 71), perhaps with the added knowledge that the seemingly ferocious bark belongs to something as innocent, when it comes to war, as the soldiers themselves.

Olfactory imagery

In Slaughterhouse-Five only unpleasant smells are used for imagery. The author, for example, characterizes himself twice as "an old fart" (pp. 2 and
6. Weary constantly smells of bacon, an odor he cannot get rid of (p. 30). Billy's bed in Ilium "smelled like a mushroom cellar" with its electric blanket turned up high (p. 116). Rosewater's beloved books in the hospital "gave off a smell that permeated the ward - like flanel pajamas that hadn't been changed for a month, or like Irish stew" (p. 87).

In sum, then, the smells are merely emphasizing negative aspects of characters or objects. One recurring simile directly connected with war can be said to set the very smell of the novel: the odor of "mustard gas and roses." Twice it is used to illustrate the author's breath when drunk (pp. 4 and 6), and once the breath of some other drunkard, over the telephone (p. 63). When inverted into "roses and mustard gas" it represents the stench of rotting corpses in the final chapter (p. 185). Most sources, strangely enough, claim that mustard gas has practically no odor. However, one source states that its smell can be reminiscent of onion or horseradish, if not completely pure. This would be close to a drunk's bad breath. Still, the combination of a poisonous gas with roses, a thing of beauty and fragrance, is peculiar. The link between this simile and the two different situations it occurs in, must be one of association of ideas through smell.

Late at night, when Vonnegut stays up thinking about his "famous book about Dresden" recalling the war, he has some drinks, and his foul breath reminds him of a similar smell experienced in Dresden in quite a different situation (p. 16). This olfactory image also links the living drunks with the dead. Life still goes on, in spite of the decay producing the same smell in mouths as well as corpse mines. This image may combine life and death in the smell of roses and gas respectively. The alcoholic who is slowly drinking himself to death may have a premonition of death in life by means of his foul breath, reminiscent of the stench of corpses.


The examples of animal imagery in Slaughterhouse-Five are abundant. In some
similes and metaphors, inanimate objects are compared with living animals, 1
but the most striking animal images compare human beings and animals. The
protagonist, for instance, is likened to a "filthy flamingo," due to his
height (p. 29). Note that the flamingo is not considered a majestic and
dignified bird, but rather a dirty one. Lazzaro is also negatively compared
to a chicken. The Blue Fairy Godmother, the Englishman who fought with him,
did not think he weighed even as much as a chicken. "'If I'd known I was
fighting a chicken,' he said, 'I wouldn't have fought so hard'" (p. 110).
Weary is a "toad in a fishbowl," the way he is bundled up in all his cloth­
ing (p. 41). Later he is also called "bug-eyed" (p. 47). German soldiers
are equally negatively described, being "toothless as carp" (p. 45). Campbell
is called a "snake" by Derby, although he is actually "something much lower
than a snake or a rat - or even a bloodfilled tick" (p. 141).

As is evident from the above examples, animal imagery is used to ridicule
human beings by reducing them to the level of animals. The animals chosen
for comparison certainly do not possess the beautiful or dignified grandeur
of the animal kingdom, but are rather small, insignificant, even pitiful
animals, such as the toad stuck in a fishbowl, the toothless carp, the vam­
pire bat or the deadly bee. As a consequence, these negative characteristics
reflect on the objects, and of course the people who are compared with them,
to make the reader see Lazzaro, Billy, the German soldiers or Weary as
pitiful. In this respect, friend and foe are treated as equals. The depre­
ciatory view of human beings culminates in the crawling soldiers being de­
picted as "the big, unlucky mammals they were" (p. 34).

1 Billy's coat looks like a "vampire bat hanging upside down" (p. 118),
bullets are "lethal bees" (p. 29), and an old typewriter is in size and
shape a "beast" (p. 24).
Finally, all humans are seen on a small scale as "great millepedes" (p. 75). That is how the whole human race is viewed by Tralfamadorians who thus complete the animal imagery by reducing man to one of the least significant of animals, frequently regarded as ridiculous. According to de Vries' dictionary of imagery millepedes suggest "the uncanny associations of Multiplicity."¹ Multiplicity in turn can be seen as a form of degeneration or disintegration, since individual identity is lost.² Human beings then, portrayed as crawling millepedes, would reinforce Vonnegut's emphasis on the littleness of man viewed from outer-space. On the whole, Vonnegut's animal imagery reduces human beings to show their true place in the universal scheme of things.

2 **Every-day imagery**

Most of Vonnegut's images, either similes or metaphors, involve comparisons with every-day objects, well known to everyone, such as buttons flying off like popcorn (p. 47), the "wet salad of the lawn" (p. 65), or piles of coats resembling three haystacks (p. 70). They are frequently unusual combinations, that is why the effect may be humorous. The reason for choosing such a concrete and quotidian vocabulary seems to be a wish to simplify otherwise complex and difficult matters. This would tie in neatly with Vonnegut's didactic intentions.

We have already witnessed how simple images are used for Vonnegut's characterizations. Billy Pilgrim is not only described as a "filthy flamingo" (p. 29) with a chest and shoulders like a "box of kitchen matches" (p. 28), but also as a "broken kite" (p. 84) or "shaped like a bottle of Coca-Cola" (p. 20). His decrepit mother has "papery lips" (p. 38). His daughter Barbara has stout legs like an Edwardian grand piano (p. 25), while his father-in-law, Lionel Merble, is simply a machine (p. 133). Tralfamadorians who are

---


² Ibid., p. 332.
green and only two feet high look like "plumber's friends," i.e., plungers, with one little hand at the top of the shaft with a green eye in the palm (pp. 22-23). The faces of Russians always glow like radium dials (pp. 71 and 78). Rosewater looks "as though he might be made out of nose putty" (p. 88).

German reserves have teeth "like piano keys" (p. 55). Weary, in his layers of clothing, is a "roaring furnace" (p. 35). After the Germans take his boots and give him clogs in return, his feet are slowly transformed into blood puddings (p. 55). This is how he got gangrene and died. The ski instructors saving Billy after the plane crash are described as golliwogs, i.e., "like white people pretending to be black for the laughs they could get" (p. 135). From his top-floor hotel room in New York, Billy looks down at the crowd below. People then look like "jerky little scissors" to him (p. 172). After the fire-storm in Dresden, people look like little logs (p. 154). Finally, the author characterizes himself as a "trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue and suspense and confrontations ..." (p. 4) or simply as "an old fart" (p. 2).

All these every-day images used to portray people, greatly contribute to giving us a concrete and at times humorous picture of an otherwise quickly sketched character. Some images can also be used to compare different people. Stomachs can be contrasted, for example, to show the different conditions of different people in the war. Poor Lazzaro's stomach was his main concern, rather than the avenge he had promised Weary. "His stomach had shrunk to the size of a walnut. That dry, shriveled pouch was as sore as a boil" (p. 79). This pitiful, painful digestive system stands out in sharp contrast, only two pages later, to that of the English officer group. "Their bellies were like washboards," i.e., they were well nourished and well trained (p. 81).

A repeated image, pertaining to feet, reinforces the theme of ever-present death. Billy's bare feet are "blue and ivory" because his oil burner has broken down (p. 24). In the war, Billy sees corpses with blue and ivory feet (p. 56). Even the hobo's "bare feet were blue and ivory" (p. 128).
When Billy is about to be kidnapped he goes into the backyard on his "blue and ivory feet" to meet the flying saucer (p. 65). Just as the phrase "so it goes" appears well over one hundred times throughout the novel as a reminder of death, the image of blue and ivory feet, used for both living and deceased persons, serves the same purpose.

Still another image that links the living with the dead, while at the same time emphasizing a human need for contact and warmth, is the oft-repeated occurrence of people "nestled like spoons." On Christmas, a season of peace, brotherhood and good will, the prisoners "nestled like spoons" in the overcrowded railroad car (p. 61). Billy nestled with a hobo. Later on this man tries "even in death to nestle like a spoon with others" (p. 128). Billy also nestles like a spoon with his wife Valencia (p. 62), especially on their wedding night (p. 109). In the British compound the American prisoners once again assume the fetal position of nestled spoons (p. 125). This image testifies to the need for body contact between human beings, particularly in war situations, even in death. Since the novel is permeated with death, this image, although simple in its use of spoons, brings forward associations of warmth and snuggled comfort. By repetition it links the cuddled fetal position of newly-borns with that of lovers, soldiers or the dead.

C Oxymora

According to Shipley's Dictionary of World Literature an oxymoron is "a statement with 2 components, seemingly contradictory."¹ In other words, it is an apparent self-contradiction, a paradox of almost epigrammatic nature, such as "the sound of silence." The fact that Vonnegut uses oxymoron in Slaughterhouse-Five has so far gone unnoticed. With its built-in effect of absurdity, this literary device very well supports situations and events presented in Slaughterhouse-Five.

Our first example of an oxymoron is taken from a war scene. As the scouts wander behind the German lines we learn that they live in "useful terror, thinking brainlessly with their spinal cords" (p. 42). At least to the layman, it seems impossible to think merely with the spinal cord and without the aid of the brain. The process of thinking seems to presuppose a brain, thus this statement appears incongruous. In addition, how does one live in "useful terror"? Can terror ever be useful? These two oxymora well illustrate the aimless wanderings of the terrified scouts and how they barely exist from moment to moment. In that sense their terror is useful in that it helps them to survive.

Another oxymoron treats the passage of time. After the end of the war Billy was sunning himself in the wagon while the others were busy collecting booty, or souvenirs. According to Tralfamadorian philosophy, he was concentrating "on the happy moments of his life," later rephrased as the process of staring "only at pretty things as eternity failed to go by" (p. 168). Eternity being of definition indefinite in duration, can naturally not pass by. This oxymoron also reinforces the concept of time as being an entity subjected to the individual's apprehension.

Another oxymoron involves sound in a situation where sound would normally be unexpected. Vonnegut feels that Céline "screams on paper" in the quote from Death on the Installment Plan (p. 19). Since written words are silent, they cannot scream on paper. However, once again, the expression well demonstrates the frustration experienced by Céline when trying to stop a bustling street crowd.

An equally startling contrast is found in the expression "excrement festival" (p. 109). It is used in connection with the effect the feast in the British camp had on the starved stomachs of the Americans. A "festival" certainly implies something enjoyable, gay and festive, whereas "excrement" more or less connotes the opposite. The union of the two terms is indeed a unique combination.

Finally, Barbara Pilgrim expresses bewilderment at her father's apparent
craziness by clapping her hands. In this way "she celebrated frustration" (p. 26). A feeling of frustration is not usually "celebrated," but in this context it well expresses Barbara's helplessness in the face of a difficult situation.

The above oxymora all have the effect of startling the reader, since the juxtapositions are rare, in fact, incongruous. Obviously, they are used in frustrating, absurd situations, e.g., Barbara confronted with Billy's talk of another planet, the soldiers who are wandering with death imminently lurking around the corner, the unpleasantness of diarrhea, and the inability of an author to arrest time. Only Billy's snooze in the sun represents a peaceful situation when, in fact, time is successfully stopped. Vonnegut has chosen a literary device that illustrates extremely well the absurdity of the world he describes. It also reinforces the negativeness of war imagery and the reduction of human beings to the trivial and insignificant seen in animal and every-day imagery.

II SYMBOLS

Slaughterhouse-Five is by no means to be considered a symbolic novel. Nevertheless there are certain central symbols in the novel that should be dealt with, for instance, the singing birds or the recurring fire sirens. Symbols are very much part of the structure of the work and must be seen in context as one element that supports other elements. In Slaughterhouse-Five, as in most literature, symbols are used to enrich the work by stimulating the thoughts and emotions of the reader. Rollo May, who is a literary critic as well as a psychoanalyst, notes that "man is uniquely the symbol-using organism" and that this ability is an expression of human self-consciousness. In fact, language is symbolic, as N.A. Whitehead claims. He goes on to state that "symbolism ... is inherent in the very texture of

1 May, pp. 20 and 33.
human life." \(^1\) We have already noted that Ursula Brumm feels that we all hunger for images. This is due to the fact, she continues, that "our lives are somehow determined by indefinable principles which operate outside the domain of cause and effect but which leave a hidden meaning that manifests itself in external phenomena." \(^2\)

Symbols coincide well with these ideas of the "indefinable" and "hidden meanings." As far as similes or metaphors are concerned, there are always two elements being compared. A symbol, in this sense, is like half a metaphor. \(^3\) This is why any definitive explanation of a symbol is impossible, since the other half of the analogy remains implicit. Symbols evoke the unseen, the inexpressible, the felt, the abstract, by suggestion. William Tindall's definition of symbol will be used here with some modification: "A symbol seems the outward sign of an inward state." \(^4\) "State" here means feeling or thought. I would like to add that state can also signify idea or mood. For Tindall, "a sign is an exact reference to something definite and a symbol an exact reference to something indefinite." \(^5\) This specification emphasizes the intangible nature of symbols. Consequently, something concretely described or shown, means something more than meets the eye, by virtue of association on the part of the reader. An idea or mood or conception is evoked. Alex Preminger has stressed the economy, even the advantage, of using symbols to express or evoke complex ideas: "Thus, an idea which would be difficult, flat, lengthy, or unmoving when expressed prosaically and by itself, may be made intelligible, vivid, economical, and emotionally effective by the use of symbols." \(^6\) In Vonnegut's short novel, symbols certainly serve this purpose of provoking abundant associations in a minimum


\(^2\) Brumm, pp. 362-363.


\(^4\) Ibid., p. 5.

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 6.

of space, as we have already seen in the case of sources invoked or cited.

The major symbols of *Slaughterhouse-Five* mainly fall into two large groups. On the one hand, there are those that center around Billy and his existential problems, his fear and need to escape. On the other hand, there are symbols associated with the themes of renewal, hope and the knowledge that life still goes on, in spite of all catastrophes.

A Symbols pertaining to Billy's life situation

1 War

a Dresden

Billy's war experience in Dresden seems to become the epitome of the inhumanity he has already sensed in life. The mere fact that beautiful and non-strategic Dresden is utterly destroyed is enough to make the city into a symbol of the human inclination to destroy. Stanley Schatt has suggested that Dresden becomes "a symbol of the human potential for destruction and senseless slaughter."¹ Peter Reed echoes the same idea that "Dresden becomes the symbol, the quintessence" of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. I must agree with these critics, since Dresden's destruction is so very central to the novel. With the help of historical parallels, as has been shown in the chapter on sources, and also the comparison with cruelty found in individuals, such as Weary who virtually indulges in torture, Vonnegut constantly focuses on this nuclear setting and event. Practically everything else stated can be referred to or related to this epitome of violence, death and annihilation.

b Sirens

The sirens of Dresden serve as audible symbols of potential danger and


fear. Sirens sound three times in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In Dresden "sirens went off every day, screamed like hell, and people went down into cellars and listened to radios there" (p. 129). However, the enemy planes were always directed to some other target, because Dresden only manufactured cigarettes, food and medicine, no weapons (p. 129). This situation prepares the way for the holocaust to come. While Derby was speaking for his American ideals the air-raid sirens of Dresden once again "howled mournfully" (p. 141). The Americans then took refuge in a meat locker and this time the attack was a fact. The next night, the Allied planes zoomed in over the city. David Irving also reports on sirens from Dresden. In some areas they did sound, but by the time of the second attack the electric power had failed so that no sirens sounded any longer and that is why people were then completely taken by surprise.1

Billy is scared once more by a siren. He is standing in his optometry office when the fire siren "housed in a cupola atop a firehouse across the street" simply announces that it is noon (p. 50). He naturally associates the sound with wartime experiences. "He was expecting World War Three at any time" (p. 50). As he closes his eyes the sound of the siren brings him directly back to the war in which he had participated.

Any alarm or siren naturally means apprehension. It is sounded in order to issue a warning of approaching danger. The importance of sirens in *Slaughterhouse-Five* increases in view of the fact that sirens are also heard in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*.2 Vonnegut seems to imply that mankind needs a

1 Irving, p. 142.

2 Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (New York, 1965), p. 211. It is interesting to note in this connection that Vonnegut himself was a volunteer fireman in the village of Alplaus, near Schenectady (see p. 9 in *Slaughterhouse-Five*). He wore badge 155 according to a biographical note on the back cover of *God Bless You*. Eliot Rosewater who had killed three firemen by mistake was more or less obsessed by fire departments, firemen and alarms. Each chapter in the hard-bound edition of *God Bless You* is introduced by a fireman's badge. Eliot answers all fire calls and releases the "doomsday horn," the siren located across the street (p. 172). As far as he knew, "it was the loudest alarm in the Western Hemisphere. It was driven by a seven-hundred-horsepower Messerschmitt engine that had a thirty-horsepower electric starter. It had been the main air-raid siren of Berlin during the Second World War" (p. 92). This provides yet another link between a siren and the Second World War.
warning, not only in wartime or not only for Billy. Since he has stated a didactic purpose for his writing, he obviously intends to awaken his readers to the condition of man, the state of the universe and the inevitability of death. In this sense his entire novel is an alarm. Those who respond to fire alarms, firemen, are "'almost the only examples of enthusiastic unselfishness to be seen in this land,'" Trout states in trying to explain Eliot's "devotion to volunteer fire departments."¹

Adjustment to life

Billy's life situation certainly requires adjustment on the individual level either in order to escape or in order to seek protection for survival. The war situation centering around Dresden with its howling sirens would be enough for anyone. In addition, Billy also has to contend with an empty private and professional life. He seeks solace in being a modern pilgrim, in time-travels and in using optometry for more than merely improving eyesight. Whenever things become too overwhelming around him, he creates a cave situation for protection. The fact that he is a seeker, rather than entirely passive, may be seen in his very surname.

Pilgrim

As we follow the "dazed wanderer," Billy Pilgrim, we begin to realize that he takes on symbolic proportions as a character. His name is initially suggestive of this. Pilgrim stands firstly for "the human being on earth, travelling towards the Mystic Centre" and secondly, "the human soul," according to de Vries.² If we combine these two interpretations, Billy becomes an Everyman, a representative of modern man trying to find some meaning in a world filled with misery. That is the dilemma of the human soul today. In modern psychological terms a pilgrim also signifies "transcen-

¹ Ibid.

² de Vries, p. 366.
dence, release, the decisive step in life, to be taken without the help of others."\(^1\) Billy Pilgrim's transcendence is far from spectacular, but he does finally face his war experiences on Tralfamadore, with the help of Montana. According to de Vries, this process is "often directed by a mistress."\(^1\) Billy also goes his own way, except for the influence of Eliot Rosewater and his Trout books. Billy is quite alone in spreading his truths about Tralfamadore, time and death, appearing on television and writing to newspapers. This sort of pilgrim is drastically different from Paul Bunyan's questing protagonist, Billy's namesake (1678), or from any other traditional pilgrims who are characterized by religious zeal. Vonnegut's twentieth-century pilgrim is rather beset by existential malaise than devotion.

b Time-travels

The fact that Billy actually travels also reinforces the quest of the modern version of a pilgrim. That he also time-travels, makes him more complicated and indicates an inner quest, rather than a journey in space. I interpret his time-travels as a symbolic representation of Billy's inner turbulence. His travels in time are responses to social pressures around him, as the context of each time-travel episode indicates. By this method, he escapes from various pressing situations ranging from war and hospital visits to being left alone on his daughter's wedding night. His time-travels also help him survive by encouraging his creation of a fantasy world.

c Optometry

Billy's profession, that of an optometrist, must have been chosen with symbolic intentions. Originally, Billy was interested in the business side of optometry. Quite early it is pointed out that Ilium, New York, was particularly good for optometry, since the largest industry there required safety glasses for all employees. Ironically, it is noted that "frames are where the money is," not in the lenses per se (p. 21).

\(^1\) de Vries, p. 366.
After his discovery of Tralfamadore, Billy got more interested in the corrective power of lenses than in business. He then wanted to make people "see," to understand how he perceived matters. He felt he was "prescribing corrective lenses for Earthling souls. So many of those souls were lost and wretched, Billy believed, because they could not see as well as his little green friends on Tralfamadore" (p. 25). There is even a scene reported in which Billy actually tries to convey his ideas to a patient. The good advice is not appreciated and Billy is simply taken for a fool (p. 117).

Caves

At one point, Billy visits a real cave, but several times in the book he also finds himself in cave-like circumstances. This points to a certain significance attached to the protagonist being encaged, boxed in or imprisoned. It expresses his feeling of being trapped like "a bug in amber," be it a real situation or one created. "Cells, small rooms, oubliettes, fences and prisons abound in the novels, underlining the air of confinement," Peter Reed has noted, without any further development of the idea.\(^1\) Billy had taken a trip with his family to the West at the age of twelve. After the Grand Canyon they visited Carlsbad Caverns which scared Billy no end. As a matter of fact, he "was praying to God to get him out of there before the ceiling fell in" (p. 77). When all the lights were turned out, he "didn't even know whether he was still alive or not" (p. 77). In other words, his original cave experience is unpleasant, scary, even associated with death.

Later on in life, however, the cave becomes a refuge for Billy. Whenever his mother visits him in hospital, he hides his head under the blanket, thus making himself a dark cave. He was ashamed in front of his mother, who had brought him into the world, because he "didn't really like life at all"

\(^1\) Reed, p. 209. Peter Jones has also noted these "protective cubby-holes for Billy" as he calls them, without going into details. He points to the fact that Vonnegut first introduces this series of cave or womb images in *The Sirens of Titan* where the Caves of Harmoniums are found on Mercury. Peter Jones, *War and the Novelist* (Columbia and London, 1976), pp. 202–223. The above quotes are taken from pp. 219 and 207.
In this instance the "cave" is an escape from something threatening. While covered Billy falls asleep (p. 90), travels in time and reawakens, still covered (p. 92). Even his prenatal stage, all "red light and bubbling sounds," can be viewed as a positive enclosure (p. 37). His pool accident, when he loses consciousness and is near drowning, can also be seen in the same vein, for he resents being rescued, since he hears "beautiful music everywhere" (p. 38).

The meat locker in *Slaughterhouse-Five* also acts as a shelter in all the senses of the word (p. 152). Although it actually is a prison, it saves the Americans and their guards from the holocaust above ground. Ironically, the meat locker was intended for death, the dead bodies of animals, but in fact, on that occasion, it saved lives. Once again, a cave-like situation provides not only escape from frightful reality, but also survival.

The boxcars containing prisoners-of-war are also a means of survival for the soldiers. Although they are locked in, confined, they can feel secure in their prison, since the last car of each train is marked with a black-and-orange-striped banner. This means that this particular train is "not fair game for airplanes" (p. 60). It is this prison train that the German guards regard as a "single organism" that performs all human functions necessary for existence (p. 61). Despite terribly crowded conditions, where the floor resembles a "warm, squirming, farting, sighing earth," the prisoners manage to retain their humanity (p. 61). They take turns standing up and they all share the food available. Whenever food arrives, they are "quiet and trusting and beautiful" (p. 61). This is one of few peaceful moments in the novel. The German stable where the Americans spend Christmas huddled together, is another such enclosed, but serene, moment.

Another kind of entrapment is used to illustrate how limited the human concept of time is. The Tralfamadorians imagine human heads to be "encased in a steel sphere ..." with only one eyehole and a pipe to look through (p. 99). The entire person is also strapped to a "steel lattice which was bolted to a flatcar on rails, and there was no way he could turn his head or touch the pipe" (p. 99). This imprisonment is not voluntary. Whatever the
human being perceives through his hole and pipe, he can only conclude: "'That's life'" (p. 100).

In this case, the cave image points to the workings of the human mind. In other examples, the cave serves as a hiding-place, a sort of womb, a place of security as well as survival in some instances. Although Billy's original cave visit as a teenager merely scared him, he learns in life to withdraw from reality whenever it becomes threatening or unpleasant, and he finds confinement a source of security.

It is natural then that Billy's fantasy life, a heaven three million miles away from earth, also serves as a prison. After all, he is forcefully taken from his home and placed on display in a cage, a "simulated Earthling habitat" (p. 97). Tralfamadarians are delighted at even his simplest movements, such as brushing his teeth, urinating, eating etc. The Earthlings are being watched like animals in a zoo. Although there is no place to hide or escape to, the atmosphere outside being cyanide, Billy still enjoys his incarceration, mainly because once again, the "cave" provides him with security and protection against war and misery. In the Tralfamadorian zoo, void of all social restraints and demands, he even begins to enjoy himself and his body to the point of wanting to reproduce.

B Symbols pertaining to renewal, hope and rebirth

1 Syrup for pregnant women

In the midst of burning war, a factory in Dresden is manufacturing malt syrup. That is where Billy and his fellow comrades are put to work as prisoners. "The syrup was enriched with vitamins and minerals. The syrup was for pregnant women ... everybody who worked in the factory secretly spooned it all day long. They weren't pregnant, but they needed vitamins and minerals, too" (p. 138). Spoons were hidden all over the factory. On his sec-

Cf. de Vries, pp. 87-89.
ond day there, Billy finds a tablespoon and finally dares make a "gooey lollipop" (p. 138). "Poor old Edgar Derby" catches sight of him through the window and wants a lollipop as well. Upon tasting the healthy syrup, he bursts into tears. This is one of the rare moments in the entire novel of human warmth, sharing and feeling.

It is, of course, ironic that men should be taking the syrup intended for mothers-to-be. What is even more ironic is the fact that while planned and intended mass killing is going on, someone is thinking of nourishment for the unborn. The syrup is consequently made into a symbol for the inherent human will to go on, to continue life. This is true of all symbols in this section. When viewed against the massive background of death and inhumanity found everywhere else in the novel, they testify to an almost incredible belief in life and survival.

Die Frauenkirche

When the Prussians destroyed Dresden in 1760, the devastation was nearly complete except for the Frauenkirche, "from the curves of whose stone dome the Prussian bombs rebounded like rain" (Mary Endell as quoted in Vonnegut, p. 15). When Goethe visited the ruined city, he then viewed it from the dome of the Frauenkirche. It is significant that it was the Church of Our Lady that remained intact. Like the pregnancy syrup, this miraculously spared church also testifies to the continuity of life vested in females, be they women or churches. In the case of the Frauenkirche, even a spiritual survival is implied in its physical survival.

Irving also emphasizes the importance of the Frauenkirche: "Miraculously, however, Dresden's most famous landmark, the 300-foot dome of Georg Bähr's Frauenkirche cathedral, was still standing, ... If the Frauenkirche was still standing, then somehow the destruction of Dresden was incomplete."

Irving, pp. 179-180. We know from Irving's account that the dome later did collapse. However, this was only indirectly due to the war. There were film archives in its basement. These caught fire in the extreme heat from all the fires around, and this caused the collapse. Since this is not reported in Vonnegut's novel, we should, when reading it, disregard Irving's fact in favor of Vonnegut's intention of leaving the church intact (Irving, p. 185).
The final scene of the novel takes place in springtime which, by its very contrast to the general war setting, assumes symbolic value. One day, when the prisoners are released and the war is over, "the trees were leafing out" (p. 186). The dominant color of this scene is green. The springy trees are green and there is an abandoned wagon that is green as well. Earlier, Billy has been riding in it. The curious fact is that the wagon is also "coffin-shaped" to serve as a reminder of death.

Spring naturally symbolizes a rebirth of nature and the color green has traditionally been associated with the return of spring, with renewal, "fertility," "life," "resurrection" and "hope."¹ According to de Vries' dictionary of symbols it is also a "feminine" color.² This would once again emphasize the female as carrier of life and its continuity. It may also signify "freshness" and "innocence" as well as "peace," which is exactly what reigns at the end of Slaughterhouse-Five. Life still goes on after any holocaust, however terrible. There seems to be no stopping of trees leafing out or of birds singing. Still, death is omnipresent in the form of the coffin-shaped wagon. This composite image of birth and death encapsulates life in a nutshell.

After springtime breaks out in Dresden, a bird singing "Poo-tee-weet?" provides the novel with its final word. The bird reoccurs several times in Slaughterhouse-Five. Readers familiar with other works by Vonnegut will recognize the bird and its question from other novels. In view of its repetition and its strategic placement as the final word in Slaughterhouse-Five, the possible symbolic meaning of these bird-callings warrants investigation.

In Cat's Cradle (1963) the bird also appears toward the end of the novel in Chapter 116. This time it asks 'Poo-tee-phweet?" Jonah, the protagonist,

¹ de Vries, pp. 226-227.
² Ibid., p. 227.
has just witnessed a married couple committing suicide with dignity. He then thinks of doing the same, of diving "downward into a blood-warm eternity with never a splash." He is awakened from this suicidal dream by a "darting" bird. "It seemed to be asking me what had happened." Jonah is brought back to reality and steps away from "the abyss, full of dread." The bird, in this instance, acts as alarm and savior by posing a simple question.

In *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* Eliot Rosewater experiences a fire-storm in Indianapolis, after which he suffers a total breakdown. When he wakes up again he hears a bird "singing in the sycamore tree. 'Poo-tee-weet?' it sang. 'Poo-tee-weet. Weet, weet, weet.'" As he looks up at the bird, he realizes that there had been no fire, that he had made it up. Once again, the bird brings a character back to reality, down to earth. Actually, Rosewater wished he were "a dicky bird, so that he could go up into the treetop and never come down." At this point, the bird signals Eliot's wish to escape something unpleasant, i.e., his psychiatrist and lawyer who are approaching. The bird makes Eliot recall and face reality twice more. All the suppressed memories from his blackout come back, as well as a solution that will solve the sense of guilt he suffers from, caused by his being extremely wealthy.

"Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds. And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like 'Poo-tee-weet?'" (p. 17). This is Vonnegut's own explanation for poo-tee-weet and why it rounds off his novel. "Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again" after a massacre (p. 17). Yet, there are always birds. In this sense, Vonnegut links himself with the birds that survive to sing. He also survived to publish *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which in this sense becomes Vonnegut's own

1 Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Cat's Cradle* (New York, 1963), p. 211.
3 Ibid., p. 204.
poo-tee-weet.

Since Vonnegut seems to imply a connection between bird and author, it must be taken into account that Vonnegut has formulated what he calls a canary-in-the-coal-mine theory of the arts. "This theory says that artists are useful to society because they are so sensitive. They are super-sensitive. They keel over like canaries in poison coal mines long before more robust types realize that there is any danger whatsoever."¹ According to this concept, Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five is the product of a "sensitive" artist who is trying to alert his audience.

The question mark after poo-tee-weet has made Peter Reed believe that it is an "existential 'Why?'"² This would then echo the repeated "'why me?'' expressed by Billy (p. 66) and another American (p. 79). A German guard retorts "'Vy you? Vy anybody?'' showing that there is no answer to such a question, that there is no discernible scheme of things.

Raymond Olderman interprets Vonnegut's birds as a "running symbol ... of detachment."³ Their poo-tee-weet, he claims, may stand for "so what" or "I see the dimensions of human life and I survive!"⁴ Olderman feels that Vonnegut expresses his "cosmic cool" by using these birds as well as the phrase "so it goes."⁴ I certainly agree with Olderman's interpretation as regards survival, but I hardly think that the birds merely stand for "detachment." I feel rather that the birds come more to represent the inherent human will to survive, the inevitable cycle of nature providing annual rebirth and new hope.

These positive symbols indicating renewal, hope and continuity, i.e., springtime, birds singing, syrup for pregnancies, trees leafing out and the inde-

² Reed, p. 199.
³ Olderman, p. 198.
⁴ Ibid., p. 199.
structible church of Our Lady, stand out in sharp contrast to the negative symbols associated with Billy and the negative emphasis noted in all imagery in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. This is also true of the rare moments of peace in the novel. Billy's rather sketchy characterization is naturally enriched by symbolism which presents the reader with concrete outer signs of his inward state. His name as well as his occupation illustrate both his wish to "see" better and his zetetic wanderings. Sirens remind him of war and fear. Dresden itself becomes the epitome of inhumanity. As a consequence, Billy resorts to time-travel and hides in cave-like situations to escape a cruel reality.

Metaphors and similes are not any less negative. War imagery, for instance, is used to deglorify war, which is one of Vonnegut's stated intentions. In other words, he emphasizes the negative aspects of war and its attributes. People, objects or anything at all can be seen in military terms. Since most war images in *Slaughterhouse-Five* are loud and noisy, the dominating sounds of the novel are also stentorian. A repeated sound is the ferocious, gong-like bark of a dog that comes to illustrate Billy's fear.

If the sounds in *Slaughterhouse-Five* are, on the whole, negative, the smells can be said to be foul. Olfactory imagery is used to emphasize negative aspects of objects or characters. The same is true of animal imagery which belittles and ridicules human beings. Tralfamadorians see us all as crawling millepedes which concretely shows us the insignificance of man seen from an outer-space point of view.

In general, Vonnegut's imagery employs a simple, concrete vocabulary. There are dogs, zippers, paper bags, flannel pajamas, scissors and other familiar items invoked to illustrate sounds, smells, looks and above all for characterization. If we keep Vonnegut's didactic purpose in mind, this use of every-day imagery seems natural. A concrete, familiar vocabulary is more accessible to everyone, and, in addition, better lends itself to humorous effects than would a more highfalutin choice of words.

In sum, most imagery in *Slaughterhouse-Five* points to the negative and de-
structive nature of man. Whatever man touches or controls seems to result in foul-smelling, noisy, belligerent or animalistic effects. The very absurdity of the world man has created for himself is, for example, well illustrated in Vonnegut's use of oxymora.

The cycle of nature, however, is something that man does not yet control. This is why the positive symbols indicating hope and rebirth chiefly depend on the annual return of spring, which occurs without the aid of man, even in spite of him.

We have seen in this chapter how Vonnegut employs figurative language to serve his purposes. Rather than being a waste product, as the German guards considered the language of the captured Americans, Vonnegut makes use of it to reinforce central themes and ideas. His imagery, often humorous, appeals to the reader's emotions and hopefully serves as a provocation. By frequent repetition, Vonnegut's imagery also serves as an element of continuity in the general fragmentation of the story.
CONCLUSION

In this study, Vonnegut's general concern for the reader and the influence of his didactic purpose of writing on the treatment of theme and structure in *Slaughterhouse-Five* have been investigated. Selected elements of structure, such as point of view, the treatment of time, the depiction of character, the use of other sources, and imagery have been related to the major themes. The fact that Vonnegut himself experienced and survived the Dresden bombings during the Second World War has resulted in an unusually personal novel, which is particularly reflected in his point-of-view technique. It was found in Chapter One that Vonnegut himself acts as author-narrator in the introductory and the concluding chapters of his novel. To gain distance to this painful subject, a fictional character, Billy Pilgrim, was created whose story is told by an impersonal third-person narrator. Four times this narrative is interrupted by authorial intrusions which can be seen as direct expressions of Vonnegut's didacticism. Evidently, he feels a need to remind us of the veracity behind the fictional story. There are also indirect intrusions, comments such as "so it goes," that are dispersed throughout the novel. The physical and biographical similarities between the author and his protagonist cause the reader to fuse the two. The division into double narrators reflects a dichotomy between reality and fantasy that prevails in the entire novel.

The existence of different narrators can also be seen in the creation of different time levels in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. It was found in Chapter Two that Vonnegut spatializes time, which results in emphasis on space and ideas, rather than a linear depiction of time. Structurally, this process results in a fragmented narrative, consisting of mosaic pieces that form what Vonnegut terms his telegraphic schizophrenic style. Thematically, the protagonist comes unstuck in time, travels in time and is generally out of bounds with chronological time. Time is developed into a theme that is inevitably connected with that of death. Throughout the novel we follow the protagonist's struggles to transcend death. Finally, he does
accept human mortality with the help of some alternative concepts of time introduced in the novel. The irregular structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five* thus reflects the quirks and equally irregular workings of the human mind, as well as the chaotic and often disjointed state of the world.

As was demonstrated in Chapter Three, the individuals in such a society are depicted by Vonnegut as "bugs in amber." Physically, man is truly stuck, reduced to a mere insect, unable to change anything. Psychologically, man still possesses the ability to come unstuck in time, to use his fantasy for escape and survival. It was found that characterization is also dispersed throughout the novel contributing to the general fragmentation. However, as a didactic element that assists the reader in recognizing these sketchy characters, Vonnegut equips them with marks of recognition, for instance, recurring epithets. Names, such as Weary, Montana or Pilgrim, also serve the purpose of providing quick clues to the personality in question. It was shown that Billy Pilgrim is the only character that spans over all levels of the book and thus provides a certain continuity. As a consequence of his way of portraying character, Vonnegut appears to use characters mainly as vehicles for expressing ideas and reinforcing themes. The majority of his characters are males, thus representative of our male-dominated society. All characters are shown to be isolated and lonely whether found in a war, family or work situation. Material values seem to reign. There is a general lack of feeling and warmth. Altogether, there are only a few peaceful moments in the entire book when people show compassion and care for each other. As a complete contrast to Billy's loveless family situation and horrifying war experience, we are shown scenes from his fantasy life on Tralfamadore which contains everything that he lacked on earth: a gorgeous female, reproduction, acceptance and respect for what he is, and no war.

Although Vonnegut's style is characterized by great economy and brevity, as was seen in his sketchy way of depicting character, he still manages to use the literary medium to its fullest. His inclusion of sources quoted is one such way of expanding the medium, of providing new perspectives and associations in a minimum of space. It may seem as if inserted quotes
would break up and further fragment the narrative. However, didactically speaking, these interruptions give the reader both direct information and a break. Typographically, they break up the monotony of the printed page. Thematically, they supply us with new angles on subjects already invoked, akin to Vonnegut's system of short paragraphs and frequent jokes. This process necessarily involves the reader who must connect the various pieces of the narrative on his own.

In Chapter Four, it was found that Vonnegut's carefully chosen sources fall mainly into two large groups: historical and fictional sources. Vonnegut's choice of sources also reflects the dichotomy between reality and fantasy, between Dresden and Tralfamadore. The former group was shown to be used for the verification of facts, such as the Dresden catastrophe. Like the authorial intrusions, these historical quotes are included to convince us that some of the events in the book have actually occurred in real life. Several historical parallels are provided by means of these quotes, with the pessimistic conclusion that history tends to repeat itself and that man throughout history has been unable to change or improve the world.

The fictional quotes, on the other hand, encourage fantasy. They are intended as a stimulation of the human imagination which is also Billy's way of surviving. In this sense, the fictional quotes counterbalance the cruel world revealed by the historical sources.

In Chapter Five it was found that imagery in Slaughterhouse-Five is used to enrich a style otherwise characterized by great economy. As in the case of sources invoked, it is up to the reader to interpret and connect the various elements presented. Much of the imagery strikes a humorous tone. A simple, concrete, quotidian vocabulary is used which, from a didactic point of view, makes the imagery accessible to everyone. In the case of symbols, however, which by their very nature frequently resist definitive interpretation, provocative ambiguity reigns. Metaphors and similes generally serve a negative purpose. War imagery, auditory and olfactory, is used to deglorify war by emphasizing respectively the loudness and
the negative odors. People are by means of animal imagery belittled and ridiculed. As with Vonnegut's way of depicting characters as bugs in amber, animal imagery also reduces man to an insignificant role in the universal scheme of events. The use of oxymora in *Slaughterhouse-Five* further underlines the absurdity and incongruity prevailing in the world described by Vonnegut.

The symbols in *Slaughterhouse-Five* fall mainly into two groups: those pertaining to Billy's life, and a cluster of positive, hopeful symbols. Billy's life is, to a great extent, marred by what he experiences during the war. Sirens become symbolic, as does Dresden itself, this epitome of senseless slaughter. Billy's method of adjusting also becomes symbolic, as his very name Pilgrim implies. Even his profession, optometry, is seen by himself in symbolic terms. His time-travels, as well as the fact that he frequently finds himself in cave-like situations, testify to his need to escape. As a contrast, the positive symbols, pertaining to hope, renewal and rebirth, are often connected with the cycle of nature. The novel thus ends on a note of optimism among springy green leaves and birds singing "poo-tee-weet?"

In this study, it has been shown how two factors have greatly influenced the treatment of theme and structure in *Slaughterhouse-Five*: first, the author's personal involvement in the events that serve as a base for the novel; and second, the didactic purpose Vonnegut has stated for his writing. The two are closely interlinked since it was through his own experiences in World War Two that he realized the state of the world and felt a need to tell others about it. This fact is consequently used as a *modus operandi* in order to warn us so that we, poisoned by his humanity, will strive for a better world.

The fragmented, at times circular, structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is truly a dance with death, a dance containing many twists and turns and even twirling pirouettes. In Céline's sense, death is the writer's own muse that he must dutifully dance with in order to create his work of art. Vonnegut uses this idea not only for structural but also for thematic
purposes. Death, also in the form of destruction, war and lifeless personal relations, is under constant examination. Although Slaughterhouse-Five presents us with a dismal picture of the world, Vonnegut's humanity nevertheless seems to succeed in leaving an imprint on us. Through Slaughterhouse-Five, Vonnegut demonstrates the existence of a human wish to go on living, in spite of gigantic forces to the contrary.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I PRIMARY SOURCES BY KURT VONNEGUT, JR.

A Novels


B Short stories


C Plays


D  Poem


E  Records


F  Articles and miscellaneous writings


"Foreword" to Transformations by Anne Sexton. Boston, 1971, pp. vii-x.

"In a Manner That Must Shame God Himself." Harper's Magazine, November, 1972, pp. 60-68.


"Why They Read Hesse." Horizon, XII (Spring, 1970), pp. 29-31.
II SECONDARY SOURCES

A Works cited


Greiner, Donald J. "Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five and the Fiction of Atrocity." Critique, XIV, No. 3 (1973), 38-51.


Works consulted


