

The Victim of Derogatory Treatment in the Second War: An Analysis of Billy Pilgrim in Kurt Vonnegut's novel 'Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade.'

SUMARGI HUMAGAIN | DR. SHREEDHAR GAUTAM

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Sumargi Humagain

Makawanpur Multiple Campus, Hetauda

tsumargi10s@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The novel, 'Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade' by Kurt Vonnegut, is deemed as an anti-war book, primarily concerned with avoidance of the war and deliberate desire to escape from the recollection of the horrible devastation of the world war. This research aims to focus on Billy Pilgrim's bitter experiences of the brutality of war and horrific experiences imposed upon him by his fellow and the German soldiers in the Second World War. The purpose of this study is to identify the abuse of the power on victimizing the submissive character. The research is based on the qualitative research to explore the contexts and dialogues revolving around the major characters relevant to their exploitative and derogatory natures dictated on Billy Pilgrimage. The research gathers sources of information primarily from this novel and secondarily from the concerned journals, theses and books. This research enables the learners to seek out series of predicaments, challenges and hardships during the world war notably relevant to Billy's derogated experiences and instill feeling of the anti-war.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE WRITER AND HIS PERSPECTIVES IN THE BOOK

Vonnegut was born in 1922 in Indianapolis, Indiana. His family suffered financial losses during the Depression, a fact that led to his mother's eventual suicide. While a student, he wrote for both his high school and college newspapers. He attended Cornell University and the Carnegie Institute of Technology (Carnegie-Mellon), before enlisting in the army. In

1944, he was captured at the Battle of Bulge and imprisoned in Dresden, Germany. In February of 1945, the Allies bombed the city of Dresden, destroying most of the city and killing tens of thousands.

Slaughterhouse-five is Vonnegut's breakthrough novel, published in 1969. It is based on his real terrible experiences of Second World War in Dresden. Hoenenar argues that the story turns out to be semiautobiographical because Vonnegut applies his own experiences in war to relate Billy Pilgrim's story, particularly the

bombard of Dresden (3). Simply, it is an anti-war book that is primarily associated with free will and warfare. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to demonstrate the violence of warfare and traumatic experience, and the center of attention is on Billy and Vonnegut.

Vonnegut made a lot of effort to write *Slaughterhouse-Five*. He had been a combatant and kept as captive in a slaughterhouse by Germans in the city of Dresden. But then the allied forces bombed it and the whole city was shattered (Sidita 276). The experience of the second world war left horrible memento of injuries in Vonnegut and his friends. So he dared to write it. But, he strived a lot to find the best way to do it. So, he chose to use the aesthetic distance and at the same time, a flavor of humor that does not necessarily make you laugh (Sidita 276). Vonnegut writes about the most agonizingly troublesome things. "His novels have attacked our deepest fears of automation and the bomb, our deepest political guilt, our fiercest hatreds and loves" (Crichton 2). Nobody else dares to write books on these issues. They are unapproachable to common novelistic outlooks.

Rushdie comes to identify the rudimentary approaches of the novel and states that Vonnegut's novel deals with the certainty of human brutality. (par.18) According to him, mostly human beings are not brutal. They are not crueler than children are. "Give a child a machine gun, and he may well use it. Which does not mean that children are particularly violent?" (Rushdie, par.18) As Vonnegut underwent the misery, Billy was handcuffed and dictated to restrain in the manufacture vitamin supplements in an underground meat locker, where the captives detained as refuge from allied bombing. He was incarcerated in Dresden during its devastating bombards. Hence, most of the events included in the book unveiled from Vonnegut's memory. In Trudeare Zywiec's *The Encyclopedia Britanica*, the novel has been studied as an endeavor to reconstruct his Dresden incident in fictional form. The book regards bombing attack as a symbol

of the brutality and annihilation of war down through the centuries (430). Hence, the novel revolves around the horrendous reflections of the war and its adverse impacts upon the soldiers like Billy Pilgrim.

1.2. ANALYSIS OF BILLY PILGRIM AS THE MAIN CHARACTER

It is seen that *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s protagonist, Billy Pilgrim stands as an example of a lonely individual. Pilgrim's experiences on the front and his trauma after the Second World War show the devastating power of war. Even the survivors of the war psychologically hold on the wounds of this experience. So, that does not have to be just a physical wound.

Despite the fact that on the shallow level, the novel is the story of the writer's experiences in Dresden, in the underlying level, it is also the story of Billy Pilgrim, a man extremely victimized and shattered by the burden of the past. So, he finds it necessary to restore his own reality (Simpson 148). Through this novel, Vonnegut wants to deliver a message to all people not to take part in any war or encourage any aggressive feelings because war causes only atrocities and traumatic experiences.

In the novel, Billy is a characteristic image of an anti-hero, a term which could be illustrated as a main character in a story that does not consist of the qualities a conventional hero would possess, such as bravery and vigor. Kimblad further states that Billy is instead an ordinary, feeble and hilarious man. He gets drafted into a war but badly equipped to be a part of. In addition, his name, Billy, is a more childish name alike William and further helps to portray how absolutely non-heroic this protagonist really is. (2)

Billy Pilgrim is a disinclined American soldier in Europe. He is captured and transported to Dresden, Germany. He succeeds to survive in the Allied firebombing of Dresden sheltered with other captives in an underground slaughterhouse (Raj and Kumar 239). Having witnessed the razed city, Billy returns home a free man, marries his well-

off fiancée Valencia Merble, and becomes heir of his father-in-law's properties. Later, he lives an affluent life as an optometrist. Yet, the war has not forsaken him. He gets out of the war 'unstuck in time' i.e. he can visit any moment of his life any time and the journeys are away from his grip (Raj and Kumar 239). Billy keeps fleeing from one to another state after the war. He longs to escape from the present predicament, left as the shocking aftermath of the war.

In the novel, Vonnegut has portrayed a leading figure, Billy Pilgrim, who also experienced deplorable journey, or more accurately, an almost frantic time travel of the Protagonist Billy Pilgrim was described in the novel. Vonnegut skillfully created a novel about the time travel of Billy who shared the tremendous mournful experiences in the Second World War with that of Vonnegut. (Shi 553) Either caused by the enemies or the fellow victims. Either caused by the enemies or by the fellow victims the large portion of the plot that associates with the war hovers around the unbearable sufferings of the main character, Billy Pilgrim.

1.3. NARRATIVE METHOD

The narrative technique of the novel is characteristic of postmodern fiction. This is why the events are related via both the author's omniscient narrator and Billy's own narration of his events in Dresden. Abu and et.al. state about the novel that the narrative technique of Slaughterhouse-Five adheres to the postmodern literary practice. Postmodern fiction portrays a huge deal of human experience subsequent to the Second World War (72). The story of the novel is related through the experiences of Billy who participates and survives in the war. Isik also states about the technique of the narrative in such a way that the technique of the ironies and non-linear narrative of Vonnegut provide a different place to Slaughterhouse Five in the history of the American Literature. Due to its significance for American Literature and its effect on the readers, Slaughterhouse Five's central character, Billy Pilgrim occupies a very unique stand. (358) All through the

novel, Billy Pilgrim endures a sequence of striking incidents in the path of the Second World War.

Vonnegut's purpose of using the time travel technique is to expose the truth that the earth has been so much devoid of humanity and spirituality (Shrestha 1). Due to the war, Billy longs for escaping from the earth and taking shelter in the imaginary world like Tralfamadore as he wants no longer live the atrocious and callous life as the people of the earth do.

This novel defies the conventional technique of plot. As a postmodernist novel it is created in fragmented forms. The fragments include the life of Billy based on Vonnegut's life, his fictionalized experience of fire-bombing in Dresden. The fragmented parts of Billy Pilgrim, life in the different sections are linked through time-travel. Primarily, the author adopted deftly non-linear narrative strategy to narrate Billy's leaping life experience including the war-time prison in Dresden, the after-war home in America.

1.4. A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NOVEL

Slaughterhouse Five is an antiwar novel concerned with Vonnegut's own experience in the World War II when he witnessed the horrible bombing of Dresden as he was confined by the Germans and was taken as a prisoner and crushed in a slaughterhouse. Thus, his description is authentic and reliable more than anyone else in the novel. That experience caused him an everlasting pain and sorrow that is reflected in this novel (Vees-Gulani 175). Dresden was never fortified or used for strategic purposes and, then, was not considered a military target. For this reason, thousands of refugees from all over Europe joined in Dresden for protection for its apparent safety for them (Bloom 1). Dresden becomes the safe shelter for the refugees before the devastation of the war. But, this thinking turns out to be wrong when it is razed to ashes.

The protagonist of the novel, Pilgrim enlists in the army to fight against Germans. In the course of the war, he is captured by German soldiers and taken to

an old slaughterhouse. After the Second World War, Pilgrim marries a girl named Valencia and starts working in an optometry clinic. Isik states "Billy witnesses the Bombing of Dresden, returns home safely but emotionally numb [. . .] eventually becomes 'unstuck in time'" (qtd. in Mustazza, 15). He has two children, Barbara and Robert. Barbara also marries an optometrist and Robert becomes a member of the famous Green Berets in Vietnam. On the night of his daughter's wedding, Billy is abducted by the aliens and is taken to another planet called Tralfamadore. He has a sexual intercourse with an Earthling movie star, Montana Wildhack. After coming back to earth, he carries on practicing optometry. On his way to a convention, he goes through the plane crash and is taken to hospital. After his recovery, he still talks about Tralfamadore and suffers from the nervous breakdown owing to his experience in war. Consequently, everybody including his own daughter blames him of lunacy (Noorbakhsh and Omrani 817). He finally makes a decision to travel to New York City and show up on a radio program to discuss about life on Tralfamadore and their 'wisdom.

2. ANALYSIS OF DEROGATORY TREATMENT OF BILLY PILGRIM IN THE WAR

Billy was a chaplain's assistant in the war as he was no exception. He was powerless to harm the enemy or help his friends. In fact, he had no friends. He was valet to preacher, expected to no promotions or medals, bore no arms, and had a meek faith in a loving Jesus which most soldiers found putrid. (Vonnegut 25) Billy Pilgrim is portrayed as a timid-hearted man who is not fit for the war conditions by Kurt Vonnegut. In the same way, David Simmons views that the truth Billy turns out to be a chaplain's helper rather than a soldier also figures him out somewhat of a tangential figure to the war. (qtd. in Mustazza 67). His nature doesn't fit him to be the soldier. Isik also states that Billy Pilgrim is not fitting to be a fighter in a war (358). Billy was ridiculous, little and short

figure like a box of kitchen matches. "He had no helmet, no overcoat, no weapon, and no boots. On his feet were cheap, low-cut civilian shoes which he had bought for his father's funeral" (Vonnegut 26-27). Here, Condition of Billy is pitifully humorous without any preparations for the war. Slaughterhouse-Five is dealing with World War II, particularly revealing people's feelings, experiences, and atrocities during and after wartime. (Antony and Trambo 3309). In the novel, Billy faces the bitter experiences from very beginning of the war. His posture and figure are humorously presented by the narrator.

Billy has no other option from putting on old, ragged and tattered clothes fully saturated with sweats. The narrator accuses him by using the underestimating words like, "He was the only one of the four who had a beard. . . He didn't look like a soldier at all. He looked like a filthy flamingo" (Vonnegut 27). While walking together with his fellows, Billy puts up with incessant strokes of criticism, expletive and vulgar words. The plot shows the misery of Billy:

Roland Weary and the scouts were safe in a ditch, and Weary growled at Billy, 'Get out of the road, you dumb motherfucker.' . . It was fresh and astonishing to Billy, who had never fucked anybody - and it did its job. It woke him up and got him off the road. (Vonnegut 27)

Other fellow soldiers use extremely disgraceful words against Billy Pilgrim. Billy takes no action against his fellow armies despite the unbearable warning, violence and cursing. The wars compelled people to be brutal towards their fellows. (Mala and et.al 4) Weary frequently gives vent to his exasperating and contemptible charges against Billy but he returns none of retribution. Billy Pilgrim is described throughout the novel as a prisoner of many worlds who never reacts, and endures everything with his trademark listlessness (Raj and Kumar 249). Obviously, Billy confesses his guilt of being attacked and scorned by his fellows. They use vulgar and execrable words again and again without

leaving even a clue of reverence towards Billy. “Saved your life again, you dumb bastard, Weary said to Billy in the ditch. He had been saving Billy’s life for days, cursing him, kicking him, slapping him, making him move” (Vonnegut 28). Even in that deplorable condition, Billy again and again requests his friends to move ahead leaving him behind. It shows that he needs no support to save his pitiable life. Weary scornfully bet Billy one time that he didn’t even know what a blood gutter was (Vonnegut 29). He is not particularly violent. He does nothing awful in the war or in his prewar or postwar life.(Rushdie, Par.19) Similarly, Weary humiliates Billy by asking if he ever knows the severest punishment is. Billy remains unanswered. Weary menaces him, “You stake a guy out on an anthill in the desert – see? He’s facing upward, and you cut off his eyelids so he has to stare at the sun till he dies”(Vonnegut 30). Weary wants Billy to face the same kind of plight. Weary also drags nails along Billy’s cheek to the extreme brutality. He threatens Billy, “How’d you like to be hit with this-hm? Hmhmhmhmhmhmhm” (Vonnegut 30)? Sometimes the soldiers who belong to the same troop betray each other. Billy claims that the writer attacks the mentality that instigates to people commit murder by revealing the main character, Roland Weary. Not only this, Weary also humiliates the learning of Billy achieved in the school. He attacks Billy on his level of study, “Shit. What do you know? What the hell they teach in college?” (Vonnegut 30) But, the poor Billy confesses the blame upon him instead of reacting to the friend’s disparaging words. The narrative also shows the merciful and submissive situations of Billy who is there without any preparations of the war:

He didn’t even have a gun or a knife. He didn’t even have a helmet or a cap. He couldn’t even walk right – kept bobbing up-and-down, driving everybody crazy, giving their position away. He was pitiful. The Three Musketeers pushed and carried dragged the college kid all the way back to their own lines, Weary’s

story went. They saved his God-damned hide for him. (Vonnegut 34)

Weary violently grasps the front of Billy’s jacket and knocks him against a tree. Subsequently, he drags and throws him away so that he can stand steadily. “It shows the violence of the wars that have made the people cruel and ruthless towards each other. Sometimes the soldiers who belong to the same troop betray each other” (Mala and et.al 4). Weary keeps kicking and jostling Billy to a mile distance. The scouts wait for him between the banks of a frozen creek.

It is clear that Billy has no motivation to even get out of the war alive. It is not because Billy does not value his life; he simply does not have the mental strength to keep going in extremely stressful situations (Kimblad 2). Billy Pilgrim ignores any kinds of tortures burdened upon him. He does not want his fellows to pursue and support him. Instead, he wishes to be deserted alone on the way.

Billy makes no intension to cause any harm and trouble to others for their disgust and insult. “Roland Weary was about to beat the living shit out of him. . . he shook Billy hard , rattled skeleton , slammed him against a bank” (Vonnegut 41). He reacts no more to Roland Weary though he mutilates him. Billy does not escape the war a stronger man than he was before; he only becomes more damaged, as can be observed through his newfound views on the world as well as his emotional distance from people close to him (Kimblad 2). Weary also criticizes Billy’s enlistment into the army as he is not worthy.

Weary socked Billy a good one on the side of his jaw, knocked Billy away from the bank and onto the snow –covered ice of the creek. Billy was down on all fours on the ice, and Weary kicked him in the ribs, rolled him over on his side. Billy tried to form himself into a ball. ‘You shouldn’t even be in the Army,’ said Weary. (41)

Weary keeps maltreating Billy like an animal. He physically hurls violence over him. But, Billy never retaliates against him

though he is extremely punished. Away from possessing these heroic attributes, Billy is instead a simple, weak and funny-looking man who happens to be drafted into a war he is ill-equipped to be a part of (Kimblad 2). Billy remains docile and helpless even in the torrents of attacks upon him. His unmanliness for a soldier is time and again ridiculed by his peers. Roland Weary, sick of Billy's weariness of saving his own hide, deems him unworthy of even being in the army. (Raj and Kumar 242) . None of his peers regard him as the soldier. Billy is surrounded by incessant criticisms and insults. Weary rips the Billy's clothes by dragging around his shoulders by aggression. So his back turns bare. "Weary drew back his right boot, aimed a kick at the spine, at the tube which had so many of Billy's important wires in it. Weary was going to break that tube" (Vonnegut 42). Weary becomes livid and lands heavy blows even on the sensitive parts of Billy. He overlooks any damages and injuries on the body. He stays docile and meek.

Vonnegut's novel is about that, about the inevitability of human violence, and about what it does to the not particularly violent human beings who get caught up in it (Rushdie, par. 18). Certainly, Billy becomes the scapegoat of the repetitive violence. The story shows the incessant tolerance of Billy in the world war. Cruelty and humour are entangled and their boundaries collapse (Kunze 49) .Eventually, they fall in the trap of the German soldiers and get arrested. They are crammed into the smug and cozy place.

Billy keeps doing parade with his hands on top of his head like Americans. Unwillingly, he collides into Roland Weary. Billy feels sorry for his mistake and says "I beg your pardon" (Vonnegut 53). Even after the captivity in the German camps, Billy gets alert and startled with his fellow victims. Actually, he longs nothing harmful to impose upon his fellows.

"Billy was packed into a boxcar with many other privates. He and Roland Weary were separated. Weary was packed into another car in the same train" (Vonnegut 56).

Meantime, one of the German soldiers warns him from outside treating him as if he has got juvenile immaturity. "He wagged his finger at him in affectionate warning, telling him to be a good boy" (Vonnegut 56). German prisons were high and low bursting with the American prisoners. There is serious scarcity of basic needs like food, fuel, sleep and space. They undergo a deplorable condition.

Nearly everybody seemingly had an atrocity story of something Billy Pilgrim had done to him in his sleep. Everybody told Billy Pilgrim to keep the hell away. So Billy Pilgrim had to sleep standing up, or not sleep at all. And food had stopped coming in through the ventilators, and the days and nights were colder all the time. (Vonnegut 65)

As a captive, Billy is exasperatingly underestimated and insulted in the train. Nobody provides him even a little space to sleep in. Billy feels too lethargic to get down the car. He thinks that he may stagger and fall down on the ground. "So the guards helped him down, cooing still. They set him down facing the train. It was such a dinky train now" (Vonnegut 66) . Billy catches the glance of his fellow victims' coats. He finds them duly made, fitting for the soldiers coat. "Their coats all had brass buttons or tinsel or piping or numbers or stripes or eagles or moons or stars dangling from them. They were soldiers' coat. Billy was the only one who had a coat from a dead civilian" (Vonnegut 67). He was outranked and derailed from the military identity. Nobody advises him to present himself as the soldier. Instead, they humiliate, curse and deride him. "He was looking around now, wondering which naked human being was Billy" (Vonnegut 69). He feels entirely disparaged in that environment. Billy and his fellow's clothes are fraught with the flea, blot, dirt and stench. The Germans get amused by the hilarious and haphazard posture of Billy in all of World War Two. "They laughed and laughed" (Vonnegut 74). Billy stands out to be the centre of their entertainment.

The Blue Fairy Godmother retorted frankly about how repulsive the Americans are. "Weak, smelly, self-pitying – a pack of sniveling, dirty, thieving bastards," he said. "They're worse than the bleeding Russians" (Vonnegut 105). Billy Pilgrim is described throughout the novel as a prisoner of many worlds who never reacts, and endures everything with his trademark listlessness (Raj and Kumar 249). Certainly, Billy puts up with all kinds of offensive expressions imposed upon him.

The Blue Fairy Godmother got entertained by giving vent to patronizing words against the Americans. "When he was gone, Lazzaro promised Billy and poor old Edgar Derby that he was going to have revenge, and that revenge was sweet" (Vonnegut 114). Lazzaro mainly targets at Billy as he is extremely irritated with his manner in the war. "I promised him I'd have this silly cocksucker shot after the war" (Vonnegut 116). Even the surgeon in the hospital mocks at him by reading his posture and personality out. "I take it you find war a very comical thing." Billy can't catch what he means to say. Common sense evades him that he is clowning. "It was Fate, of course, which had costumed him- Fate, and a feeble will to survive" (Vonnegut 125). Billy seems to be heedless and senseless to his messy clothing. War brings loneliness and frustration to the people who are affected by it, particularly soldiers. The prisoners of war are suffering a lot during their imprisonment. War is always depriving of the freedom of human beings (Antony and Ahmad 3310). Condition of Billy among his fellow-victims is miserable.

He takes shelter in the meat locker on the very night that Dresden is annihilated to ashes.

The place is shattered into pieces by high-explosive bombs. He finds the locker very safe. In spite of his cowardice and imprisonment, Billy manages to be alive in the war. (Kimblad 2) Even in that horrendous war, Billy succeeds to regain his life.

The calamity of war leaves an indelible impact on Billy's life after the war.

Mustazza states that Billy comes back home all right but sensitively numb (15). Vonnegut intentionally presents Billy as an inactive and docile character to exhibit the reader the devastation of war. (Marvin 55) Vonnegut shows the brutality of wars and shows explicitly what happens to the survivors of wars. Through the novel, Vonnegut presents a sarcastic analysis of "social injustice, war, and environmental degradation while managing simultaneously to express love and compassion for the weak, bewildered, and often lonely human beings he depicts" (Farrell 9). Billy undergoes the most heart-rending experiences in the war along with the torrents of the humiliation, derision and exploitation upon him. The novel demonstrates how he is ingrained with dismay, fault, and misery owing to his experience during his confinement. (Mhayyal and et.al.12-13). Billy gets enmeshed in the restless perambulation from one incident to another one throughout the novel.

3. CONCLUSION

Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five vividly narrates the story of the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, a onetime - American soldier and captive -of war in Dresden, Germany. The story of Billy is narrated in flashback through ten episodes. Vonnegut's helplessness, misery disappointment are reflected in the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, who cannot alter the misfortune that looms in front of him like the effect of violence and traumatic experiences during the wars and his prison time so that he is made to travel through all the periods, whether it is present, past, or future. The research has represented Billy as the quintessence of tolerance, patience and resilience in the midst of incessant criticism, humiliation and assault exerted by his fellow- soldiers. The analysis explores into the contexts and scenes of the horrible - exploitation of the fellow- American soldiers and the massacres of millions of people and the plight of the injured in the battlefield make an adverse impact on one of the survivors, Billy Pilgrim who become the

victim of the post-war psychological disorder due to disastrous and merciless recollections of the derogatory experiences in the warfare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Sumargi Humagain

Lecturer of English, Makawanpur Multiple Campus

Prof. Dr. Shreedhar Gautam (Co-author)

Tribhuvan University, Nepal

sgbhurtung93@gmail.com

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