

## Poetics of Postmodernism in Kurt Vonnegut's *The Slaughterhouse-Five*

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**Abstract:** This article is a postmodern critique of Kurt Vonnegut's *The Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). Literary experimentation and the historical aspects are the basic aspects of postmodernism which are the focus of this article. This article is a fictional critique of literary exhaustion. The characters, stage settings, and the narrator depict the modern literary mode. The article uses Brenda Marshall, Linda Hutcheon and Gerard Genette's narrative theory and historical metafiction to examine the historical aspects of the novel. It also depicts the miseries and sufferings of the people who were eyewitnesses of the Second World War. The article concentrates and examines Vonnegut's actualization of the postmodernist theory in writing "an anti-war book" which is based on his subjective experiences of war as a prisoner. Vonnegut unveils the atrocities committed on people and thus shows how Western nations mask their real intentions in launching wars and justify their brutal acts.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, American Novel, Anti-war literature, Vonnegut

### Introduction

Present article gives a thorough understanding of Vonnegut's *"The Slaughter House Five"* as a postmodern novel. Basic concern of this article is to read the novel within the framework of postmodernist thought in which the existence of man is questioned. The novel can be studied as an autobiography of the writer. The novel revamps the untold and silenced stories of the past. This novel is not only a fictional narrative, but it is a true representation of Vonnegut's subjective experiences of the Second World War. He belonged to a German family. In First World War the United States and Britain united against Germany.

In this way, German Americans lost their identities. The Anti-German feelings bred in the USA. This sense of loss can be seen in Vonnegut's writings. He became a soldier in the Battle of Bulge. The Battle of the Bulge was the largest defeat of America. He was then arrested by the Germans and he became a prisoner and was taken to an Army Camp in Dresden, a beautiful city of German, where he was put in a slaughterhouse. On 13 February 1945, the beautiful city was completely demolished through firebombing. This incident is marked as the largest massacre in European history. About 135000 people died in this brutal act. Vonnegut published *The Slaughterhouse Five* in 1969 right after 24 years of this firebombing. This incident gave him the initiative to write an "anti-war book" (*Slaughterhouse-Five*, 3). He was disappointed to see condition of his country as "a nation that has betrayed its founding principles of democracy, freedom, justice and opportunity for all" (Marvin, 2002).

*Slaughterhouse-Five* is a true representation of inhuman cruelty and brutal acts committed against people. This novel presents the sufferings and miseries

of the victims of Second World War. This also shows the hidden intentions of the Western world in launching wars. The name of the protagonist Billy Pilgrim is a parody of the sacredness of the pilgrimage. His pilgrimage is non-heroic and meaningless. Through the protagonist and setting the writer represents how Western nations glorify and justify their brutal and crucial act of war. The historiographic meta-fiction presents the untold and silenced stories of the past. Vonnegut "shatters the epistemic, ontological, and temporal rupture of warfare, simultaneously re-inviting narrative to re-invent the human" (Taylor 2013).

### Literature Review

Our world is changing daily due to which the fields of knowledge are increasing as well. Philosophical approaches are also changing at the same pace. The era from 1950 to the present is considered the postmodern era as it comes after the modern era. Postmodernism is a philosophical approach that is used to understand this world that includes social, cultural, economic, religious, political, and literary scenarios. The totality of human thought is questioned as well as challenged and then ultimately rejected by using this approach. Homogeneous way of perceiving the outer reality of the world is also questioned under the analysis of postmodernism. The world is becoming a global village and all the cities of the world are becoming cosmopolitan centers.

Like literature itself, postmodernism is difficult to define. Hutcheon (1988) argued that "for the sake of better understanding of the term/theory postmodernism, it should be defined in terms of period, characteristics and with comparison to its predecessor modernism" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 3).

Modernism consolidates the happenings and signs of the people who felt the traditional kinds of workmanship like art, designing, composition, religious certainty, thinking, social affiliation, and daily life activities of life were getting the opportunity to be out of date in the new financial and socio-political state of a rising industrialized world. Modernism suggests the trends that are modern while talking about anything in this world (Berry, 1994, p. 187). Sim (1998) elaborates on the idea and modern era and states that the "modern world continues to speak of reason, freedom and progress, and its pathologies" (Sim, 1998, p. 21). Postmodernism is quite different in terms of philosophical approaches as compared to modernism. Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines postmodernism as "a late 20th-century style and concept in the arts, and criticism, which represents a departure from modernism and is characterized by the self-conscious use of earlier styles and conventions" (OED, 2017). Furthermore, it is argued that postmodernism is comprised of various kinds of styles in terms of arts as well as media and it is also considered as distrust of theories.

The concept of fragmentation is very important to discuss while discussing the ideas related to modernism and postmodernism. Fragmentation has a significant place in the era of the twentieth century in terms of culture, society, art, politics, and religion. The treatment of modernism and postmodernism with this fragmentation is different. Modernism takes fragmentation as nostalgia for the previous age. In such kind of scenarios, there exists a tone of regret, negativity, and gloom related to the world due to which fractured forms of art are present in modern literature. Conversely, when fragmentation is considered within the domain of postmodernism then it is an elating and redemptive phenomenon. In a nutshell, it is considered that, on one hand, "modernism laments the presence of fragmentation, but on the other hand, postmodernism celebrates the presence of fragmentation" (Berry, 1994, p. 188). Different postmodernist themes and literary techniques like parody, pastiche, maximalist, irony, hyperreality, paranoia, fragmentation, illusion, etc. are used by postmodern novelists.

Hutcheon (1988) proposes that many words are more utilized and mishandled in discourses of contemporary culture than the word postmodernism, therefore, any endeavor to characterize the word will essentially and all the while have both positive and negative measurements (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 1). It will mean to state what postmodernism is yet in the meantime it should state what it isn't. Possibly, it can be conceived as a suitable scenario to take postmodernism as an entity that possesses a contradictory mode due to which it becomes inevitable to ignore the factor of politics. Postmodernism is a product of extreme skepticism and rejection of all those values that characterize order, harmony, stability, and

fragmentation. On one hand, it is the rejection of modernism, and on the other hand, it is considered a continuation of modernism. Because of this contradictory idea, postmodernism is taken as an ambiguous concept. It is important to mention that postmodernism is conceived as a continuation of modernism. As David Harvey, a well-acknowledged critic in the domain of literary theory, points out "there is more continuity than difference in the movement from modernism to postmodernism" (Hawthorn, 1992, p. 282).

Postmodernism, because of the possession of contradictory ideas, is not an easy philosophy to define in a clear-cut way and there are no hard and fast rules that are required for its understanding it becomes very difficult to know about the origins of this philosophy as a pure term. Postmodernism, as a term and lens, is used to elaborate various kinds of phenomena of this world that include literature, technology, society, politics, religion, architecture, and art. The importance of this critical approach is understood when it becomes successful in grabbing our focus on the major kinds of happenings as well as transformations that are going through in our daily lives, especially in cultural and social circles. (Sarup, 1993). At the start of this discussion, it is noted that postmodernism can be better understood in terms of certain characteristics. Postmodernists are the people who are not satisfied with the incapability of modern theorists in the mission of achieving the goal that is related to bringing peace, progress, and happiness in the circles of their social lives. Therefore, they challenge the traditional way of thinking and practice this thinking.

Postmodernism is against, at the same it challenges, any kind of meta-narrative such as reality, truth, religion, and fixed cultural or social values. It claims that there are no impartial truths but the subjective reality that is also presented in fragmentation. The objectives behind the fixed truths and realities are nothing but to get power because the criteria for truths and realities are purely set by the group of people whose goal is to get power by using their defined discourses and sets of values. Truth and reality vary from person to person because every individual in a society has his lens, point of view, perspective, and perception about a particular truth or reality. By focusing on this point of view it can be argued that truth, reality, and time are relative. In this aspect, there is no certainty. Facts and factuality, according to postmodernism, are innocent ideals that cannot be realized in a world that is always changing, as seen by the rise of diversity and globalization. In the realm of postmodernism, there is no such thing as objectivity. This world's new hallmark is subjectivity. In modernism, morality began to lose its legitimacy, and in postmodernism, it died. With the emergence of several ideas such as feminism, deconstruction, new historicism, archetypal and gender theories, and so on, postmodernism became the symbol of equality,

freedom of expression, and metafictional tales. In a fast-changing social environment, and technologically improved social life, modernism's traditional customs and metanarratives were out of date. In 1967, John Barth wrote *The Literature of Exhaustion* which is a rejection of modern literature. In general, postmodernism is defined as a self-aware, self-contradictory, and self-defeating theory. In a postmodern fiction story, the major issue is metafiction. Other features of postmodernism include societal disintegration, the search for truth, cultural and structural fragmentation, consumerism, parody, and self-rejection.

As far as the idea of poetics is concerned, it is considered a form of literary theory, and at the same time, it is taken as a literary discourse in philosophical terms. The concept of poetics is also understood as a theory that is especially related to poetry. But it is also necessary to point out that the concept of poetics is used to signify the ideas that are relevant to the theory itself. Poetics is concerned with how a text's many parts interact to generate certain effects on the reader, rather than with the meaning of the text. The term "poetics of postmodernism" refers to the study of postmodernism through the lens of specific features.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. is an American writer. Many critics have praised Vonnegut's contributions to postmodern novels. Bill Gholson describes his art in such remarkable words and claims that "Kurt Vonnegut is a self-professed agnostic firmly grounded in the tradition of his German freethinking relatives. As such, his morality comes without metaphysical props" (Boon, 2001, p.135). Furthermore, Boon points out that "his moral thinking and writing reflect a rhetorical orientation--one for which the self is never disembodied from the community, the history, and the discourses of which it is a part" (Boon, 2001, p.135). According to the critical thinking and writing approaches of Vonnegut, it is found that the understanding that is related to self-description becomes an inevitable characteristic of ethics as well as of identity, both elements have great significance in his works. Vonnegut tries to explore the real world of his era by taking the support of fiction. As Hooti (2011) depicts "a transworld identity between the real world and the fictional life one" (Hooti, 2011, p. 10) becomes necessary to discuss while writing a piece of writing.

Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* falls into the category of science fiction. The narrative of this novel is set within the time of World War II. There is also an element of his subjective experiences and expeditions which he has tried to unearth by using the character of Billy Pilgrim. This character is the protagonist of this novel who becomes a mouthpiece of Vonnegut to explore the horrors of war and the chaos of his civilization. There is no doubt that all works are very important in modernist literature but this novel, that is

*Slaughterhouse Five*, is taken as a masterpiece of Vonnegut. He is well-acknowledged in the circle of postmodernist novelists. There are many reasons why he is famous for his contribution to literature in the form of a postmodern novelist. The techniques he used in his novels purely belonged to the postmodernist approach of writing a piece of work; he dedicated a great portion of his novels to the depiction of themes that belong to the category of science fiction. His novels also are comprised of the significant elements of fantasy. He has used all these themes and postmodern approaches just to bring to light, unearth, and explore ironies as well as the horrors that were present in the civilization of the twentieth century. Through authorial metafictional addition to the text, experimentation served as a restorative replenishment for such fatigue and tedious narrative. The work has a distinct metafictional approach, yet it also shows the hardship of ordinary Americans after WWII. The novel's self-justifying and self-contradictory language emphasizes the author's critical voice for this goal. The major narrative point of view in the book gives rise to such a voice.

This novel belongs to the domain of metafiction. As far as the idea of metafictional writing is considered, Waugh (1984) claims that metafictional writing "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact" (Waugh, 1984, p. 2). Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* is a story of Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of the novel. He is a former American soldier in WWII and went to prison as war broke in, in Dresden, Germany. Billy has several challenges while serving in Dresden, which was destroyed by bombing during WWII. He was apprehended many times by German forces. He fled from jail many times but was apprehended each time. Finally, his good fortune worked in his favor, and he was evacuated by the American troops and sent to New York, USA. After returning to his hometown, he marries and gets the opportunity to meet a variety of individuals, including author Kilgore Trout. After the book, we witness Billy and his wife surviving an aircraft accident. As a result, he is brought to the hospital. He falls asleep and time changes to Dresden during his stay at the hospital. Billy's tale is recounted in 10 separate episodes in reverse order. The novel's narrative approach is similar to that of postmodern literature. This is due to the author's omniscient narrator telling Billy's narrative, as well as Billy's version of events during his stay in Dresden.

The narrative category in which *Slaughterhouse-Five* is placed follows the postmodernist tradition. After WWII, postmodern fiction focused on a variety of human experiences. The most brilliant evidence of human experience in the novel is the metafictional essence of the novel which makes it "a postmodern novel relying on metafiction, the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a writer's preface about how he came to write his novel" (Chellamuthu, 2005, p. 2).

The relative reality of postmodernism is described throughout the whole novel and throughout we see that "the factual method, whenever it becomes diagrammatical in this book, sketches long periods in the life of the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim" (Hoffman, 2005, p. 549). The profoundly grounded and inexperienced manner of representing the world from an everyday humane perspective and thinking is connected to the knowable, but at the same time aware, repudiation of reality in postmodern writings. As a result, we can observe that the Second World War left a harsh causality mark on society not just on the continent, but also around the globe.

Consequently, we see that the Second World War, left its unfeeling causality engraved on the society of the Continent, yet additionally traversing everywhere throughout the world. The awful results of the war energized numerous masterminds and savants to yield the historical backdrop of the post-war world in avant-gardist phrasing that is the qualities of postmodernity. Thus, human articulation in the domain of art, particularly writing, took an alternate and radical position. Before the entry of postmodernity, writing was frequently celebrated combined and had certain marks, e.g. present-day writing which was portrayed by a steady and expressive poetics of meta-stories. In any case, postmodern writing has been named by critics as giving an impactful name to the "new period". (Atchison, 2008, p. 27). Vonnegut is providing us with an "anti-traditional narrative point of view involving the author hints in the text" (Atchison, 2008, p. 27).

Yet, it is argued that postmodern literature was a philosophical revival and continuation of modern literature in the second half of the 20th century. So, a historical body of postmodern literature has been trying to make a "narrative that purports to recount universal history" (Vanhoozer, 2003, p. 11). Consequently, the poetics of postmodernity is a reactive and contradictory narrative convention to the previous stable "narrative" conventions, seeking to give its distinctive and characteristically affirmative literary features. Hence *Slaughterhouse-Five* has a "crucial concern with the novel's narrative point of view" (Pholer, 1997, p. 103). The work has been extensively researched in the disciplines of science fiction and metafiction in general. It may, however, be examined from a narrative standpoint. Patricia Waugh's self-reflexivity, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, and Gérard Genette's focalization are three narrative themes that may be included in the analysis of this work. The investigation of such narrative themes is based on a postmodern appreciation of the text's fundamental attributions. That is, postmodern fictional textuality eliminates the novel's text's essential and fundamental component. In summary, postmodern fiction depicts the building of a work through its narratology and formal devices, such as narrator, setting, and characters, to offer an adequate portrayal of both outer and interior reality.

## Theoretical Framework

Throughout centuries, various kinds of approaches have been used to explore history. By keeping in view, the postmodernist approach, many theorists have analyzed history and have catechized it captiously by taking the present into account. As Brenda Marshall, a postmodern theorist has proclaimed, "History in the postmodern moment becomes histories and stories." (Marshall, 4). Many scholars are mainly concerned with disclosing those stories that are masked and demand to be unrevealed to revamp other stories that are hidden and unstated for years, sporadically, those stories were jotted down in association with ideology by the predominant class of society. As Marshall proposes in his theory:

Postmodernism is about stories not told, retold, or untold. History as it never was. Histories are forgotten, hidden, invisible, considered unimportant, changed, and eradicated. It is about the refusal to see history as linear, as leading straight up to today in some recognizable pattern- all set for us to make sense of. It is about chance. It is about power. It is about information. And more information. And more. And that is just a little bit about what postmodernism [is]

Hayden White, a postmodern thinker and a great contributor to the historical narrative, has also critically explored the portrayal of the past and stated in one of his theories that "every representation of the past has specifiable ideological implications." (White, 69).

A common surmised was that the historian had truly refurbished the past incidents in his writings but with time his attempt to reconstruct the past events started to be questioned because his 'historical narrative' contained some facts but debarred other overriding facts secondly his explication of the incidents and events did not match with the objectiveness of his writings. As Carl Becker claimed "The facts in history do not exist for any historian until he creates them." (Hutcheon 122)

Even though historians should represent reality objectively, still there are multiple veracious portrayals of the same happening. Dominic LaCapra, in one of his great works about history, asserted that no work, by any of the historians, be acknowledged as "neutral evidence for reconstructing phenomena." (Hutcheon 122). In order. to write about history, historians have used various narrative techniques too. By using these techniques many writers became capable of finding out the likeness between the works of historians and literary writers. As E. L. Doctorow proposed both these writing styles are "cultural sign systems, ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearance of being autonomous and self-contained." (Hutcheon, 112). As these discourses ensure one pattern of thought, it is safe to say that the

basic purpose of this discourse is to depict the world without any subjectivity.

Some critics, like Hutcheon and White, in the postmodern era have asserted that there are no distinct boundaries between the limits of historical and literary discourses. To distinguish historical discourse from fictional discourse the historians attempt to locate the difference between what can be called real against what can be recognized as imagination. Here, the historian performs the same duty as performed by the novelist.

The deconstruction approach, used by postmodernist thinkers, is totally against the notion of finding reality or truth in written texts. Postmodernists claim that "all texts are opaque writing than approximate versions of direct speech" (Name, Year, p. 100). In deconstruction, those words are phrases are questioned and challenged which means the opposite of what they say in the text, the interpreter becomes able to do this just because of the nature of language because is flexible as well as rigid at the same time. Derrida believes in the concept of difference in terms of meanings. Derrida proposes that language is a never-ending signifying chain (Litlov, 2011) and this chain will never be broken if there are not any clear and definite ending points. Words are always relevant to one another and meanings are also a part of that relativity. Deconstruction opposes the idea that there is nothing outside or beyond the text and challenges this idea that suggests that we do not have any kind of need to take into account all the situations, circumstances, scenarios, and elements which are outside of a text to understand the meanings of that text, means to say that meanings of a text have to be founded in the text itself (Burr, 1995). Every text is a linguistic entity which is why a text can deconstruct itself because multiple layers of meanings are present in that text. Because of the multiplicity of these meanings, it becomes easy to understand that some of the meanings inherited in a text can contradict with each other (Cantor, 1988). Therefore, a text possesses the ability to deconstruct itself. There is not any kind of canonical signification to a text but there are several layers that are present in a text and these layers are loaded with various kinds of ambiguous meanings. It is possible that a text can contain indefinite meanings in itself, but it is impossible to get any single, objective, stable, or universal meanings (Derrida, 2017). A person who is reading a text can understand that text in terms of its meanings and he will interpret that according to his subjectivity and the context. Hence, it becomes possible that a single text can inherit an infinite number of meanings (Silverman, 1989). There, at this point, exists the necessity of an interminable analysis. It is a very significant idea that deconstruction does not believe in the idea that analysis of a text can end somewhere by locating the real meanings of the text. For instance, deconstruction opposes the idea of psychoanalysis because psychoanalysis suggests that we can approach the real or final meanings that are

located in the subconscious mind of a person (Derrida, 2017).

According to postmodern critics, postmodern fiction inherits some contradictory means which enable them to exploit that particular text. It is also questioned by the postmodern approach where does the center exist? Afterward, the authority of the past being true reality is questioned. Postmodernism and deconstruction assert that the world is multicentered which is the reason we cannot know where is the center. Here, at this point, we can also consider the theory of relativity that was given by Einstein. This theory asserts that truth is relevant (Barry, 2002). We come to know that truth is known differently by different people by applying different approaches. Therefore, if truth is relevant and not fixed then it also becomes possible to argue that there is no center because the center is also considered as the form of truth (Carter, 2012). In one sense this truth or center can relate to us and become sensible but at the same time it will not apply to the other people of this world, that is why Peter Barry proposes his ideas about truth and points out that "truth is provincial" (Barry, 2002, p. 64). In deconstruction, first structures are broken, and then new structures are formed i.e. it involves the making and destroying which is taken as construction and deconstruction.

Mode of narration is also another critical approach that is used by postmodernists to reconstruct the concept of the past. As Hutcheon, a postmodern theorist, argues "historiographic metafiction" appear to modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity: multiple points of view or an overtly controlling narrator" (Name, Year, p.117). Some gaps, loopholes, and contradictions are found in the literary text in terms of the past and afterward, these contradictions are countered by postmodernists. The characters in the narrative use the counter-discourse of the past to establish their present identity. The past, being contradictory and ambiguous, contributes a lot to the formation of fragmented reality and the present identity of the characters.

In the process of the reconstruction of historical events, postmodern rethinking of history is used to contextualize present events in the comprehension of historical knowledge. This kind of postmodern rethinking is also taken into account for epistemological as well as ontological status that is related to the historical fact and in this fact, furthermore, past events do not rely on objectivity. By using the character of Billy, and his dedicated struggle, an attempt has been made in the next chapter to know about the truth and nature of history by visiting the past of the protagonist at the same time. The relationship that exists between the literary as well as historical discourses will be elucidated in the next chapter by taking into account the similarities that existed in the narrative of Slaughterhouse-Five.

## Analysis

Vonnegut in his fictionalized novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a postmodernist work, discusses a historical event of the firebombing of Dresden, a city in Eastern Germany, which happened during World War Two. An American soldier is the narrator of the story who was a survivor of war, he was in Dresden at the time of war. He shares his personal experience with the readers and tells them how he became "unstuck in time". The story moves from past to present and vice versa. It can also be called an autobiographical work. The writer shares some distressing incidents that happened to him when he was a prisoner of that war.

When the world war started the protagonist was sent to Europe. The writer represents the life experiences of Billy Pilgrim. The protagonist is the eyewitness to the fury, anger, and injustice of war. To represent the harsh and miserable incidents that the protagonist has faced during the war he retreats from the historical and literary discourse. On one hand, the writer discusses his subjective experiences; on the other hand, he discusses the historical events that took place during the world war, through the character of Billy Pilgrim.

In 1945, when the war was about to end, the Allies and the British troops took a collective decision to drop bombs on Germany. Almost 2,000 civilians died as a result of the bombing. The firebombing of Dresden is the major event discussed in the story. The protagonist was in a meat locker, with another American; therefore he is the eyewitness of that dreadful firebombing. Before joining the military academy, he was a student of the Ilium School of Optometry. When the war broke out, he was in Europe at that time. He also took part in the Battle of Bulge in Belgium, where he was arrested by the Americans and taken to a concentration camp as a prisoner of war. He faced the fury and horror of war. He became the victim of "mild nervous collapse" (24). He got engaged to the daughter of the school of optometry's owner after the war. After marrying her, he became the father of two children Robert and Barbara. In 1968, he got a severe head injury in an airplane crash. His wife deceased in a car accident. His daughter used to take diligent care of him, Barbara was 21 years old at that time and was newly married. She thinks that her father has gone mad therefore, she admits him to a mental hospital for intensive care.

The writer creates a fictional situation when Billy tells her about the supernatural creatures who seized him and took him to an alien planet "tralfamador". He shares his experiences and lessons that he has acquired from those worldly creatures, by sending a letter to the radio station. Considering that he is suffering from a serious mental ailment, her daughter sends him to a mental hospital. His all-life incidents are portrayed in the novel with the narrator's thoughts and descriptions that how war has severely affected him and how this war proved fatal for him and his family.

This novel helps the readers to peep into his past and memories. He is "unstuck in time" and continues to move back and forth throughout the novel. The narrator describes Billy "as a time-traveler, he has seen his death many times, has described it to a tape recorder." (141). As per the narration style and narrative structure are concerned, the plot is fragmented. Incidents and events do not follow a set chronological pattern, which shows that there is instability and disorientation similarly, there is instability in the physical and mental state of Billy Pilgrim.

There is a discontinuity in the plot similarly there is a discontinuity in time too. Billy is moving back and forth in time. As the narrator says, "he came stuck in time." (43). The novel is replete with such instances where the protagonist leaps in time and space. One such example is when he is afraid of swimming and is going with his father to learn how to swim. Then he travels to 1965 where he refers, to his visit to see his mother who was living in an old people's house. Then he takes his audience to 1958 and refers his visit to his son's banquet. His son, Robert was a member of the league team. By reading all these events readers become acquainted with the inconsistent, discontinuous, and confused state of mind of Billy Pilgrim.

To make the story fictional one writer has used the fictional character of aliens. The protagonist has a hallucination that one day aliens will seize him and take him to an unknown planet Tralfamador in a flying saucer. There is a discontinuity in time as one of the aliens says, "All time is time. It does not change. It does not lend itself to warnings or explanations. It simply is. Take it moment by moment, and you will find that we are all, as I've said before, bugs in amber." (86). The events happening with Billy are fixed and never changing even the time cannot be altered. Kurt describes how an alien asks Billy to take off his clothes the same was happened with the prisoners of war in the Army camp. He was compelled to move to the strange planet unwillingly. Aliens used to communicate through gestures they put Billy in a zoo as a strange object to be watched. The firebombing of Dresden affected him badly and made him silent therefore he used the philosophy of time and death of Tralfamador to revamp the past.

The title of the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or *The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* is also very significant it is also called "Schlachthoffünf," which means Slaughterhouse-Five. He also refers to the concentration camp where he was taken after his arrest. The palace was "...built as a shelter for pigs to be butchered. Now it was going to serve as a home away from home for one hundred American prisoners of war." (152). He also discusses the beastly attitude of Americans towards the prisoners of the war. He still remembers the schoolmaster Darby, who was killed mercilessly because he stole the teapot. The other part

of the title *Children's Crusade* is a direct reference to the army of children who were sent to North Africa as slaves in 1213. Here, the writer again portrays the past event of Billy and his friends that they fought the same war as fought by this Children's army when they were young. Billy was a foreigner and was the Chaplain's assistant who was sent to Germany to fight for the honor of his country, he was endangered as he was unarmed he even didn't have a gun to protect himself from enemies. The novel is the true depiction of the miseries and hardships of the prisoners of war.

Derrida's concept of Deconstruction can also be applied to this text *The Slaughterhouse-Five*. The protagonist is living a dual life. He is oscillating between real and unreal life. On one hand, he is suffering from the traumatic experience of war on the other hand; the head injury from an airplane crash has affected him badly. He is unaware of his condition and that he is living in a dual world. Sometimes, it becomes difficult to distinguish in which time frame Billy is whether he is in the present, in the past, or future. At present, he is a happy, healthy, wealthy, and famous optometrist but, at the same time, he is frail, weak, and sick and is admitted to a mental hospital. The continuous use of morphine at the mental hospital has also affected his mind. As the narrator states, "Under morphine, Billy had a dream of giraffes in a garden (...) Billy was a giraffe, too. He ate a pear. It was a hard one." (99). Billy's mental and physical state helps the readers to understand the traumatic effects of war on Billy who is now passing through a complex and confused mental and emotional state. Billy is passing through a confused state of mind he, himself is unaware of where he is existing. There is no distinct boundary between imagination and reality. Sometimes he sleeps in the real world and then, wakes up in Tralfamador. His unbalanced state of mind helps the reader to travel from various stages of his life in the shortest period.

Vonnegut has also used Intertextuality to convey the true essence of his novel. He gives references to some historical books *Dresden*, *History*, *Stage and Gallery* by Mary Endell to describe the event of the firebombing of Dresden. The narrator describes his meeting with his friends O'Hare and his wife Mary. He is reading a book about the period of the firebombing of 1760 and continuously making intertextual connections between past and present. He also refers to an American movie about war and describes some characters like Hitler, and Adam and Eve (75). He also mentions another book "*Children's Crusade*" Derby and the narrator know that the war was fought by babies, "' My God, my God-' I said to myself, 'it's the Children's Crusade.'" (106).

The standpoint of Americans about war is evident in President Harry Truman's announcement:

The advocates of nuclear disarmament seem to believe that, if they could achieve their aim, war would

become tolerable and decent. They would do well to read this book and ponder the fate of Dresden, where 135,000 people died as a result of an air attack with conventional weapons. On the night of March 9th, 1945, an air attack on Tokyo by American heavy bombers, using incendiary and high explosive bombs, caused the death of 83,793 people. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima killed 71,379 people. (188)

This statement gives a brief account of the lethal and fatal effects of war. Similarly, in another announcement, he states, "An atomic bomb...The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East." (185). The writer wants to tell his readers how some people especially the authorities are in favor of war and they think that they have taken the correct decision to put the horror at its end, in this way, they justify their crucial actions. The narrator asserts that there is nothing good in war. It was just a massacre.

He then refers to *Official History of the Army Air Force in World War Two* by Rumfoord, who was a history professor and was with Billy, when he was admitted to the hospital he states, "...there was almost nothing in the twenty-seven volumes about the Dresden raid...The extent of the success has been kept a secret for many years after the war - a secret from the American people. It was no secret from the Germans, of course, or from the Russians..." (191). The firebombing of Dresden was more fatal and lethal than the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. *The Slaughterhouse Five* can also be taken as a counter-discourse as it also tells the American perspective of war.

There is another reference to the book *The Big Board* by Kilgore Trout. The narrator narrates; narrator maintains that the story "was about an earthling man and woman who were kidnapped by extra-terrestrials. They were put on display in a zoo on a planet called Zircon 212." Billy was kidnapped by these creatures. He learned many things from them. Billy lost his dear ones during the war his father, his mother, his wife, his best war friend, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Jesus, and the people who died in the bombing of Dresden. There were five sexes on Tralfamadore. Tralfamadore was a peaceful planet. Aliens tell him that there were wars too as wars are on Earth, but we give priority to forgetting the bad moments of the past and enjoying the present. Billy developed a positive viewpoint after reading this book. But all this was happening in imagination.

As per the mode of narration is concerned, in the beginning of the novel, there is first person narration then, the narrator is third person narrator as the story develops. This novel can be called an autobiographical novel as the narrator's voice is as same as Vonnegut himself. Both of them were prisoners of war, both of them had their own experience of bombing, and both were writing books to share their experiences as POWs. As he states, "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." (2). The writer has employed the metafictional technique and tells the readers about the whole process of writing as he writes, "It begins like this: Listen: Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time. It ends like this: Poo-tee-weet?". Similarly, at another place, he says, "That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book." (125) He shares the darkest experience of his life with the readers in such words, "prisoners of war from many lands came together that morning at such and such a place in Dresden. It had been decreed that here was where the digging for bodies was to begin. So, the digging began." (213)

In *Slaughterhouse-Five* the plot is unstable. The protagonist is moving in different time frames. The plot is circular. As the protagonist himself has faced the enormity, horror, and terror of war, therefore, he wants to show his readers how the army and other people have lost their families and loved ones. This novel is a counter-discourse as it tells the events of the war from American and Canadian perspectives.

## Conclusion

Many authors have attempted to explore the concept of history from different perspectives. Postmodernist authors have portrayed this historical concept with a new perspective as in the postmodern era, the faiths and beliefs of people scattered because the new postmodernist thinkers started to problematize and question their beliefs about truth, universe, and reality that, truth is not static but relative and reality is not objective but subjective.

These beliefs resulted in a lack of certainty and instability. In the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the author has beautifully explored the historical narrative. The author has tried to revamp the past through those stories that have been untold and silent for years. The writer has explored self-reflexive historiography in a new specific ideological perspective and has blended historical and literary discourses to give a more critical view of history to its readers.

The postmodernist thinkers have the view that the texts sometimes hide the true and hidden meanings. Many of its parts are misinterpreted. Postmodernist thinkers' view is that there is a need to revamp the stories of the past to deconstruct the history, that was not given much importance in the past, then it will become easy for the readers to point out and fill the gaps and fissures provided by the protagonist. Through this text, the author has given a platform to those marginalized and subaltern people who do not have a voice to speak. The writer has tried to give them a voice to speak. He has allowed those marginalized people to speak with their voices to tell the people how miserable and pathetic they were in the past. The author has adopted several narrative strategies to revamp the past in chronological order. Intertextuality and modes of

narration are the key features used in the novel. Fragmentation is the main characteristic of the postmodern era therefore he has created fragmented stories to tell the truth and reality of the present by going back to the past. The protagonist knows the mere official version of history is unable to answer all questions therefore he has combined the historical and literary discourses to revamp the past to tell its readers, what they used to be before the war. The writer has shared all his memories of the past, his subjective experiences of imprisonment in an army camp, and the horrors and terrors of World War two.

Vonnegut describes the story of an American soldier who shares his subjective experiences of imprisonment in an Army camp. He revamps the story of his past as he was the eyewitness of the firebombing of Dresden and World War two. He revisits his past with a new perspective. Time is relative. He has become "unstuck in time". He tells a three-dimensional story.

He narrates the story in such a way that the reader feels that he is part of the story and all incidents are happening in front of his eyes. Vonnegut deconstructs the history to reconstruct some historical events. To make the story closer to the present time he has used intersexual references, flashbacks, thoughts, and feelings of the characters.

The novel is written to encounter the American and Canadian discourses of war. He describes the miseries of war and how people lost their families and dear ones. It is a critique of the harshness and bitterness of the war and the merciless and crucial attitude of Western Governments toward other countries.

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