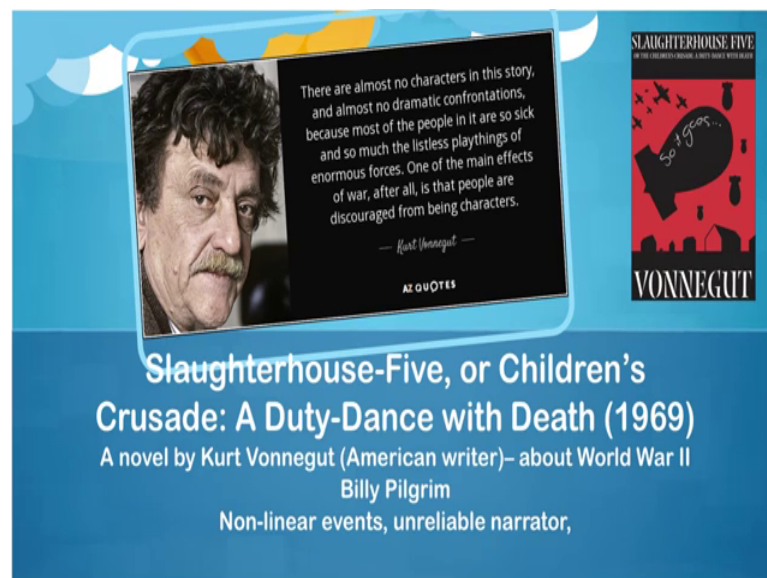


Postmodernism in Literature
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Lecture - 23
Reading Postmodern Fiction: Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut

Good morning I am happy to welcome you to yet another session of the NPTEL course Postmodernism in Literature. In today's lecture we shall be talking about one of the foremost postmodern fiction slaughterhouse-five the novel authored by Kurt Vonnegut if you recall one of the earliest discussions that we had in the foremost weeks we did talk about a particular novel titled slaughterhouse-five where the.

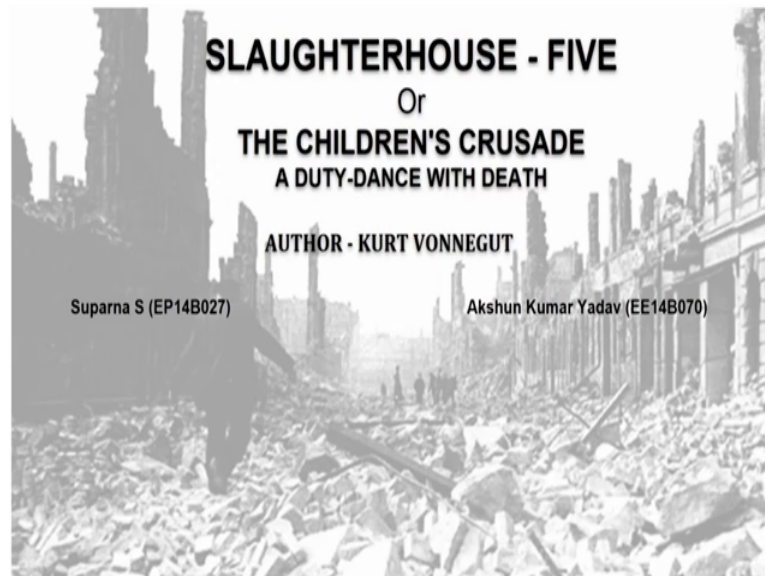
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Author tells us that there are almost no characters in the story and almost no dramatic confrontations because most of the people in it are. So, sick and. So, much the listless playthings of enormous forces one of the main effects of war after all is that people are discouraged from being characters.

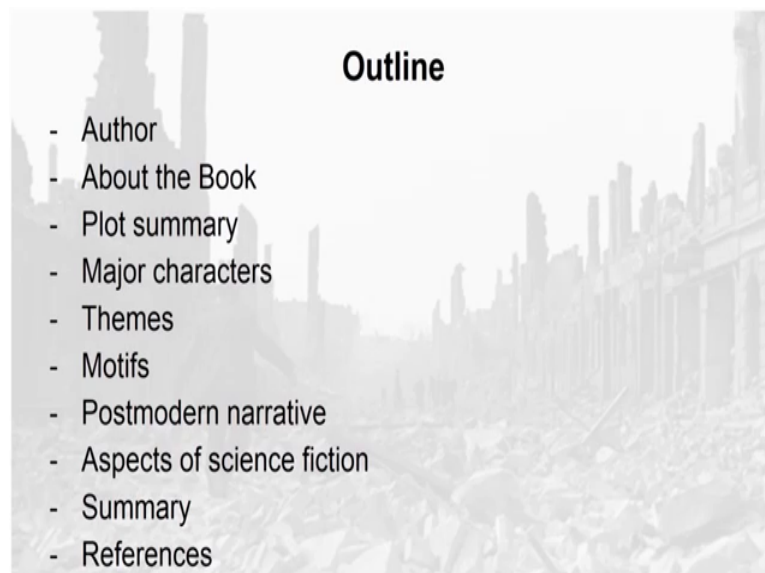
So, we did talk about this author Kurt Vonnegut who has also been considered as a poster child of post modernist literature and in today's session we have to offer students Akshun and Suparna introducing the text to us I hope this will be a joyful ride to you and also encourage you to take a look at this normal slaughterhouse-five written by Kurt Vonnegut.

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Student: slaughterhouse-five or the children's crusade a duty dance with death the author is Kurt Vonnegut and the it will be presented by me Akshun and Suparna basic outline first we will be talking about the author then the book.

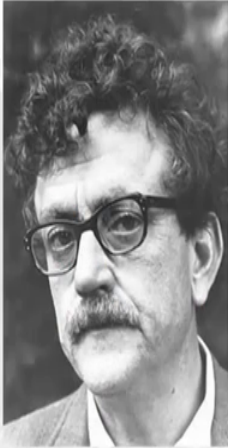
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The plot summary major characters themes motifs postmodern narrative aspects of science fiction and then, references.

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AUTHOR - KURT VONNEGUT



- US Citizen, lived from 1922-2007 (aged 84)
- He was a novelist, short story writer, playwright, and has also written non-fiction.
- His works blend satire, black comedy and science fiction, and were very postmodern in their style.
- Social critic and has been dubbed the 'counterculture's novelist'.
- Most famous works include : *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Breakfast of Champions*, *Cat's cradle*.

Kurt Vonnegut he lived from 1922 to 2007. So, he was a novelist short story writer playwright and has written several nonfiction mostly towards the end of his career his works are known for the satire the black comedy their irony laden fiction and of course, science fiction. And he is one of the major forefront writers of postmodernism he is a well known social critic and has been dubbed the countercultures novelist one of many his most famous works includes slaughterhouse-five breakfast of champions cat's cradle.

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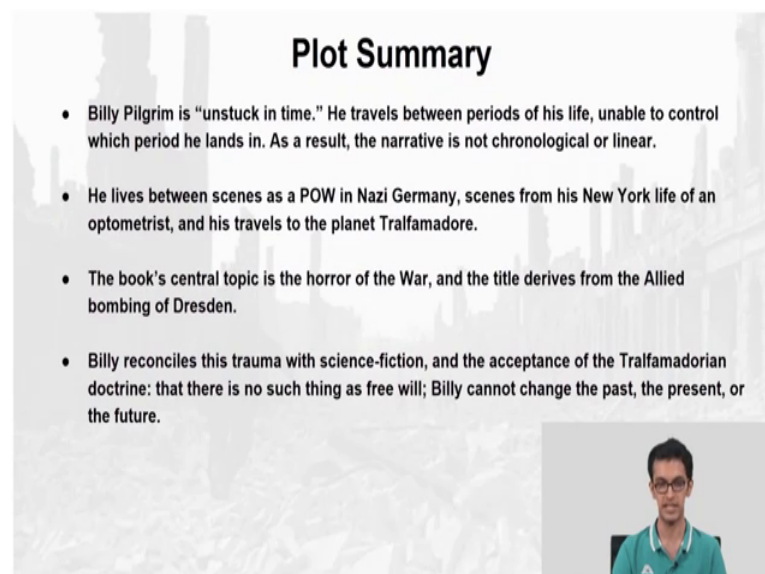
About the Book

- Genre - Antiwar novel; historical fiction; science fiction; semi-autobiographical fiction
- Time and place written - Approximately 1945–1968, United States
- Date of first publication - 1969 (during Vietnam War)
- Point of view - The author narrates in both first and third person. The first-person sections are confined mainly to the first and last chapters.
- Since it was published, *Slaughterhouse-Five* has been banned or challenged on at least 18 occasions.

So, the book is basically an anti war novel it also has aspects of historical fiction science fiction and it is semi autobiographical fiction it was written around 1945 to 1968 in USA; the publication was during 1969 during the Vietnam war. So, as an antiwar novel it gained a lot of popularity because at that time the Vietnam war was also losing support in the US.

Now, the author himself was part of world war two in during the historical bombing of Dresden by the allied forces on the Nazi town or Dresden. So, the first person sections are mainly in the first and last chapters they mostly talk about how the novel was written, but the or inserts himself several times during the course of the book and it has been banned or challenged on at least 18 occasions by different agencies.

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Plot Summary

- Billy Pilgrim is “unstuck in time.” He travels between periods of his life, unable to control which period he lands in. As a result, the narrative is not chronological or linear.
- He lives between scenes as a POW in Nazi Germany, scenes from his New York life of an optometrist, and his travels to the planet Tralfamadore.
- The book’s central topic is the horror of the War, and the title derives from the Allied bombing of Dresden.
- Billy reconciles this trauma with science-fiction, and the acceptance of the Tralfamadorian doctrine: that there is no such thing as free will; Billy cannot change the past, the present, or the future.

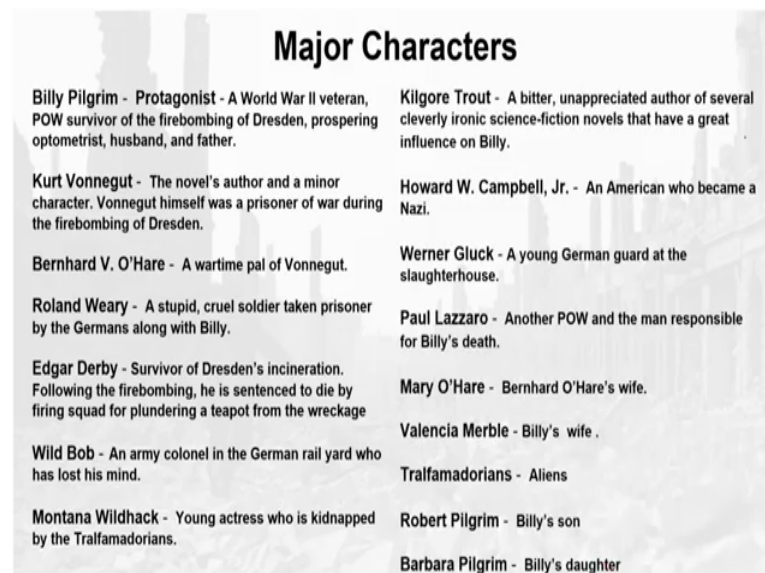
The plot the plot is basically about this man called Billy pilgrim who is unstuck in time this is how chapter two begins chapter one as I said was a whole the narrator that is Kurt Vonnegut narrates about how he wrote the book basic outline of his own experiences write in the book.

So, Billy pilgrim is “unstuck in time.” He travels between different periods of his life, unable to control which period he lands in. As a result, the narrator is non-linear and basically he lives between scenes as a prisoner war in Nazi Germany and scenes from his boring life in New York as an optometrist and his travels to the planet Tralfamadore the book central topic is the horror the war and the p t s d that Billy pilgrim had to go

through because of which it is very heavily implied that he invents this life or as a time traveller and as a traveller to the planet Tralfamadore well I say traveller I mean he was abducted. So, this way he or reconciles this trauma with science fiction and the Tralfamodorian doctrine that is there is no such thing as free will Billy cannot change the past the present or the future, but he can accept them all.

Student: I am Suparna and I will be continuing with major characters in this text. So, let us move on and see the first of all is the protagonist Billy pilgrim. So, he was a prisoner of war.

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And he was one of the survivors of the firebombing of Dresden and then it is the author Kurt Vonnegut who comes in this novel and his appearance recurs quite a bit and then Bernhard O' Hare he is also a wartime pal of Vonnegut and there are many others who accompany Billy pilgrim along his way during the wartime.

Next let us move on to Roland Weary a Edgar Derby and wild bob these are people who he meets during the wartime and as he was a prisoner of war then Montana wild hack was the young actress was also kidnapped by aliens. So, Kilgore Trout he was one of the science fiction writers who comes in the story he is a fictional character of course, who inspires Billy pilgrim a lot and then we go to Howard W. Campbell, Werner Gluck, Paul Lazzaro, Mary O Hare, happens to be the wife of Bernard O Hare and Valencia Merble

Billy's wife Tralfamadorians who are the aliens Robert pilgrim Billy son Barbara pilgrim Billy's daughter.

So, let us move on to the themes the first of all is the destructiveness of war.

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Themes **The Destructiveness of War**

- Shows the reality of war, no glamour, no hero, no enemy.
- *"Sam—here's the book." It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. 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?"* (Chapter 1)
- **Dramatic Irony** - Reader understands or knows something that a character or the characters do not.
 - Englishman was describing to the American prisoners where they will moving to next, *"You needn't worry about the bombs, by the way, Dresden is an open city. It is undefended, and contains no war industries or troop concentrations of any importance."*
- **Situational irony** - irony involving a situation where actions have an effect opposite from what was intended
 - the personal irony of the hobo's and Derby's situations magnifies the injustices of war.
 - untimely deaths in absurd circumstances.

So, this novel shows the reality of war without actually showing any glamour or exaggerating anything here is an excerpt which says "Sam here is the book it". So, short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about the massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. 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, is things like "poo-tee-weet?"

So, he shows the obviousness of what can somebody say about war what can be done about a war there is quite a bit of a irony that is there in the novel. So, one of them is dramatic irony where the reader understands the future knows about something in the future, but the characters do not.

So, the characters are misled by one of the Englishmen who says you need not worry about the bombs by the way Dresden is open city it is undefended and contains no war industries or troop concentrations of any importance, but it happens that Dresden is

bombed right after their move to the slaughterhouse and next a situational irony here the irony involving a situation where actions have an effect opposite what was intended.


So, we see this when actually hobo and derby situations where hobo is actually in both of these are in this cabinet which is actually moved from one place to another and ultimately though one of them says that they have seen much worse situations in life happens to die right while they were travelling the next theme which we get to see here is the illusion of free will.

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Themes

Predestination or the Illusion of Free Will

- Billy's thought of "free will" seems to be challenged by the Tralfamadorians.
- *"I am a Tralfamadorian, seeing all time as you might see a stretch of Rocky Mountains. All time is all 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." "You sound to me as though you don't believe in free will," said Billy Pilgrim. "If I hadn't spent so much time studying Earthlings," said the Tralfamadorian, "I wouldn't have any idea what was meant by "free will." I've visited thirty-one inhabited planets in the universe, and I have studied reports on one hundred more. Only on Earth is there any talk of free will.*
(Chapter 4)
- The Aliens believe - all moments of time have already happened (since all moments repeat themselves on parallel planes) possess an attitude of acceptance about their fates - figuring that they are powerless to change them.

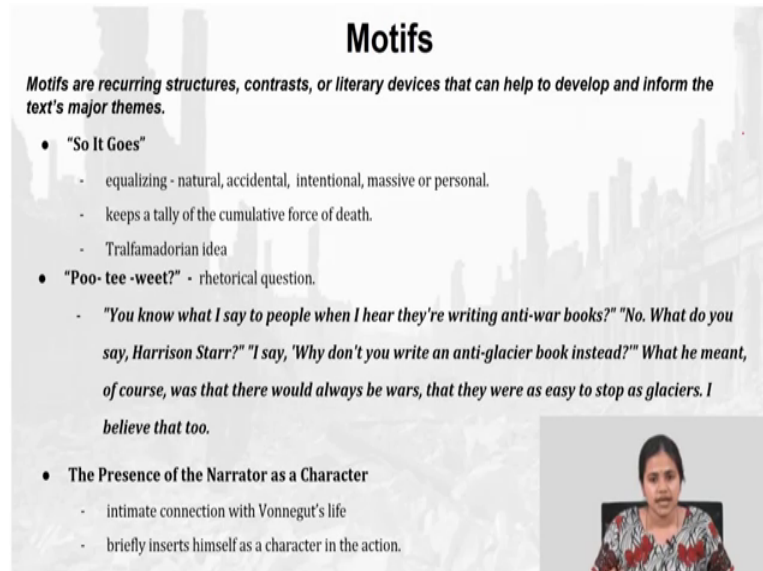


This comes mainly from the part of the novel about the aliens where free will is said to be something that is inexistent, but people are bound to be the way they are going to be in future.

So, here is an excerpt which highlights this more I am a Tralfamadorian seeing all time as you might see a stretch of rocky mountains all time is all time it does not change it does not lend itself to warnings or explanations and later Billy pilgrim goes on and asks if they believe in free will for which they say if I had not spent so much time studying earthlings I would not have any idea what was meant by free will I visited 31 inhabited planets in the universe and have studied reports on 100 more only on earth is there any talk of free will. Since, these aliens are able to see time in the past future and in the present like the stretch of space like we see Rocky Mountains they are able to see everything and know that everything happens simultaneously at all times.

So, since this concept is inbuilt in the aliens they do not quite believe in the fact that we can change the future which is already happened or is happening and will happen to them and next we will move on to motifs.

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Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

- "So It Goes"
 - equalizing - natural, accidental, intentional, massive or personal.
 - keeps a tally of the cumulative force of death.
 - Tralfamadorian idea
- "Poo-tee-weet?" - rhetorical question.
 - *"You know what I say to people when I hear they're writing anti-war books?" "No. What do you say, Harrison Starr?" "I say, 'Why don't you write an anti-glacier book instead?'" What he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars, that they were as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that too.*
- The Presence of the Narrator as a Character
 - intimate connection with Vonnegut's life
 - briefly inserts himself as a character in the action.

So, these are recurring structures or literary devices that highlight something very important in the text. So, it goes this is a phrase that keeps coming in the text and it has an equalising fact it actually shows the natural accidental and all types of deaths and keeps an account of all these deaths. So, this comes from the Tralfamadorian idea to that whatever it might be it is bound to happen and we have no control over it.

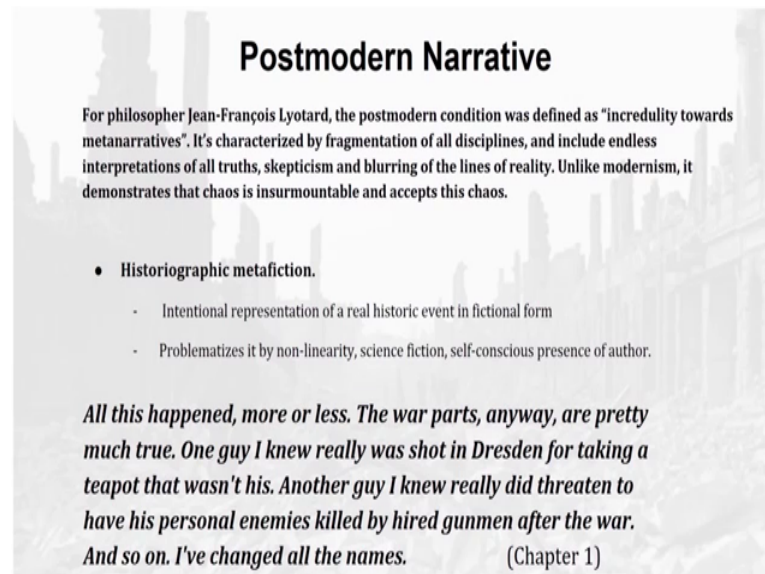
So, we ask well may go with it next a poo-tee-weet this is a rhetorical question which says what can be done about a war nothing can be changed about it the author also highlights us and we can see it from this excerpt. So, this is author asking Harrison Starr about what he thinks about writing about an anti war why do not you write an anti glacier book instead what he meant of course, was that there would always be wars that they were as easy to stop glaciers as it would be easy to stop war.

So, basically he is saying that glaciers are inevitable natural catastrophes are inevitable and they will they are bound happen and similar similarly wars are bound to happen too there is a recurring presence of author in the narrator in the novel. So, this is because he has an intimate connection with the bombing of Dresden and he keeps coming in the

novel quite a bit and positions himself in various situations and though he does not actively participate and affect the novel he is seen quite a bit in the novel.

Student: So, now, will be talking about the postmodern narrative Jean-François Lyotard for them.

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Postmodern Narrative

For philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, the postmodern condition was defined as "incredulity towards metanarratives". It's characterized by fragmentation of all disciplines, and include endless interpretations of all truths, skepticism and blurring of the lines of reality. Unlike modernism, it demonstrates that chaos is insurmountable and accepts this chaos.

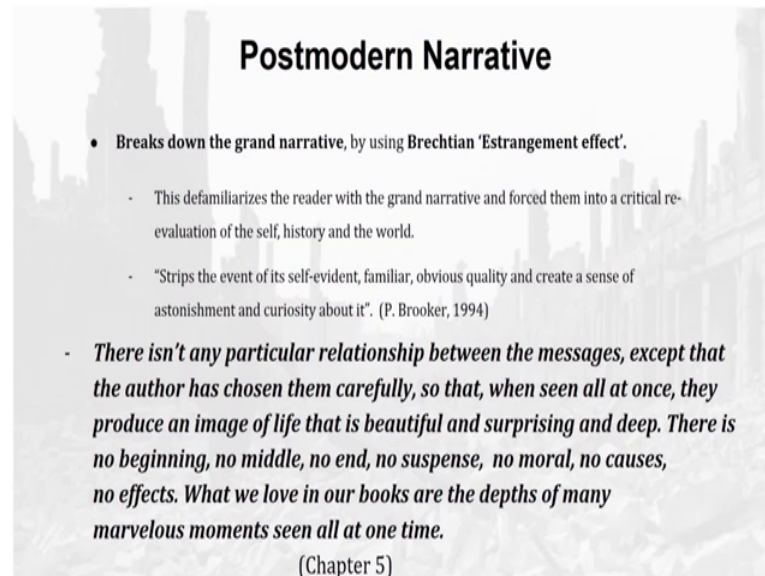
- **Historiographic metafiction.**
 - Intentional representation of a real historic event in fictional form
 - Problematizes it by non-linearity, science fiction, self-conscious presence of author.

All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true. One guy I knew really was shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his. Another guy I knew really did threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. And so on. I've changed all the names. (Chapter 1)

Philosopher he said about postmodern condition as an incredulity towards meta narratives it is basically a Fragmentation of all modernist disciplines and it includes endless interpretations of all truths and blurring of the lines of reality it looks at all perspectives that are involved. So, as to give the complete picture unlike modernism it demonstrates that chaos cannot be defeated and it accepts this chaos the first postmodern aspect that we will be talking about is historiographic metafiction.

This is basically a intentional representation of a real historic event which in this case was the bombing of Dresden and the narrators that is Vonnegut's presence during that in a fictional form there are it is problematized by non-linearity the science fiction the aliens and the author himself being there. So, it creates sort of diverging narrative. For example, this text this is the very beginning of the book all this happened more or less the war parts anyways are pretty much true one guy I know really was shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that was not his another guy I know, and I knew really did threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war and so on I have changed all the names it breaks down the grand narrative.

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Postmodern Narrative

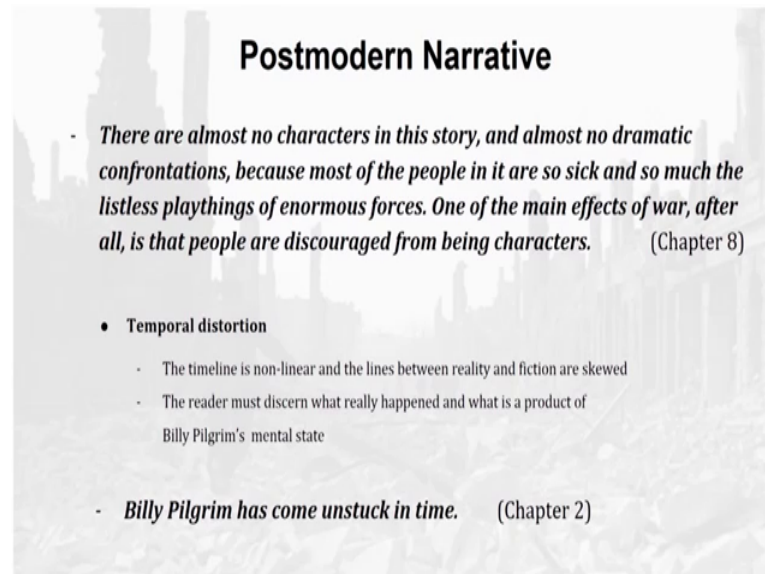
- **Breaks down the grand narrative, by using Brechtian 'Estrangement effect'.**
 - This defamiliarizes the reader with the grand narrative and forced them into a critical re-evaluation of the self, history and the world.
 - "Strips the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and create a sense of astonishment and curiosity about it". (P. Brooker, 1994)
- ***There isn't any particular relationship between the messages, except that the author has 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.***

(Chapter 5)

That is the meta narrative by using Brechtian estrangement effect this was introduced by Bertolt Brecht the famous play write a Baal and many other place basically this defamiliarizes, the reader with a grand narrative and forces them into crucial reinterpretation of the self the it is a critical study of the self the history and the world. So, that we are separated from the text we can examine things without getting too personally involved as P Brooker in 1994 in their journal said, this breaking down the estrangement effect or isolating effect of Brecht Bertolt Brecht strips, the event of his self evident familiar obvious quality and creates a sense of astonishment and curiosity about it this deck says there is not any particular relationship between the messages except that the author has 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 offence what we love in our books are the depths of many marvellous moments seen all at one time this is basically what the Tralfamadorians tell Billy pilgrim about their novels which is basically the model on what Kurt Vonnegut try to write his.

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Postmodern Narrative

- *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.* (Chapter 8)
- **Temporal distortion**
 - The timeline is non-linear and the lines between reality and fiction are skewed
 - The reader must discern what really happened and what is a product of Billy Pilgrim's mental state
- *Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time.* (Chapter 2)

Novel about another very crucial text which signifies which emphasizes this estrangement effect is there are almost no characters in the 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 the novel does not try to read like a thriller or even in war novel it basically shows us the horror and it asks the reader to study it to look at it and to understand ourselves and the world another postmodern aspect is the temporal distortion of time and such.

Its non-linear and the reality and fiction the lines between them are very skewed it is fragmented the reader must discern must excise along with the writer to discern what really happened and what is a product of Billy pilgrims mental state as the chapter two begins Billy pilgrim has come unstuck in time.

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Postmodern Narrative

- Absence of textual autonomy
 - A postmodern text reflects upon itself and it's 'process of production'
 - By the author placing himself in the narrative, his **textual authority** is lost
 - The reader's given space to analyze and dissect the world in order to recreate it.

An American near Billy wailed that he had excreted everything but his brains. Moments later he said, 'There they go, there they go.' He meant his brains.

That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book.

(Chapter 5)

The absence of textual autonomy a postmodern text reflects upon itself and it is the process of production it is when the author places himself in the narrative his textual autonomy is textual authority is lost. However, unlike the usual death of the author that is emphasized by Lyotard and such in post modernism by inserting himself as a character he and it being a real experience of his it a heightens the horrors and the dangers of the war even more and the reader by this whole by getting some authority some shared authority over the text himself is given space to analyze and dissect the text critically in order to recreate it the text is an American near Billy wailed that he had excreted everything, but his brains.

Moments later he said there they go there they go he meant his brains that was I that was me that was the author of the book this way Kurt Vonnegut is talking about himself in chapter 5 near Billy who is the protagonist the next point is.

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Postmodern Narrative

- **Poioumena**
 - Subpart of previous point, Ancient Greek for 'product'
 - Specifically talks about the **process of creation** of text
 - Chapter 1 is about poioumenon.

So I held up my right hand and I made her a promise: "Mary," I said, "I don't think this book of mine is ever going to be finished. I must have written five thousand pages by now, and thrown them all away. If I ever do finish it, though, I give you my word of honor: there won't be a part for Frank Sinatra or John Wayne.

*"I tell you what," I said, "I'll call it *The Children's Crusade*."*
(Chapter 1)

Poioumena which is the ancient Greek for product it is in this book a subpart of the previous point it specifically talks about the process of creation of text which is basically the entire chapter one very crucial text which emphasizes this is. So, I held up my right hand and I made her a promise Mary I said I do not think this book of mine is ever going to be finished I must have written 5000 pages by now and thrown them all away if I ever to finish it though I give you my word of honor there would not be a part for Frank Sinatra or John Wayne I tell you what I said I will call it the children's crusade.

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Postmodern Narrative

- **Death of the Modern Hero**
 - As per Foucault, the postmodern man is no longer the transcendental subject that can induce a change depending on the power of the intellect, but rather a **powerless 'self'** that is constantly open to transformation by other forces.

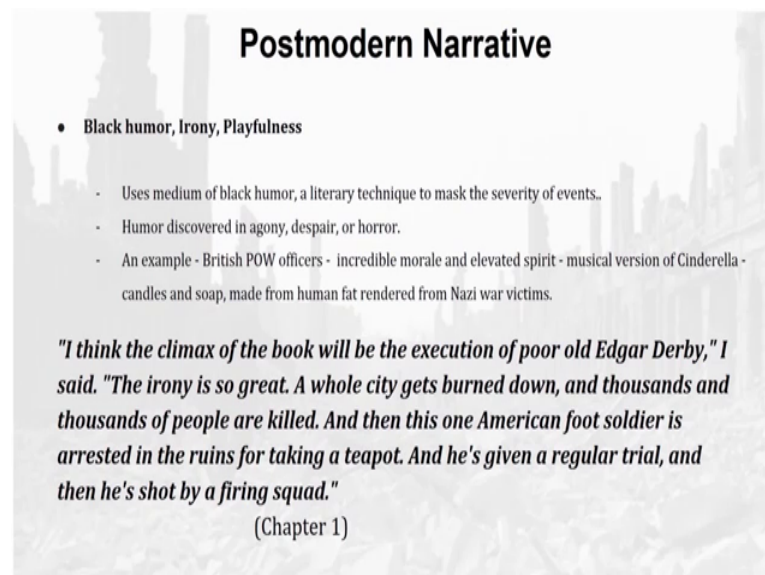
He is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next.
(Chapter 2)

"If I hadn't spent so much time studying Earthlings," said the Tralfamadorian, "I wouldn't have any idea what was meant by 'free will.' I've visited thirty-one inhabited planets in the universe, and I have studied reports on one hundred more. Only on Earth is there any talk of free will."
(Chapter 4)

A very crucial part of postmodern narrative is death of the modern hero modernism especially emphasizes on Odysseus or a Greek sort of hero who know of all things right and wrong.

So, as for Foucault the postmodern man is no longer the transcendental subject that can induce a change depending on the power of the intellect, but rather a powerless self that is constantly open to transformation by other forces as this text says he is in a constant state or stage fright talking with Billy he says because he never knows what part of life he is going to have in to act and next chapter two this is as same as since the hero of the postmodern text is basically controlled by forces beyond his control there is no notion of free will the Tralfamadorian concept of know the absence of free will comes into play here again.

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Postmodern Narrative

- **Black humor, Irony, Playfulness**
 - Uses medium of black humor, a literary technique to mask the severity of events.
 - Humor discovered in agony, despair, or horror.
 - An example - British POW officers - incredible morale and elevated spirit - musical version of Cinderella - candles and soap, made from human fat rendered from Nazi war victims.

"I think the climax of the book will be the execution of poor old Edgar Derby," I said. "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."

(Chapter 1)

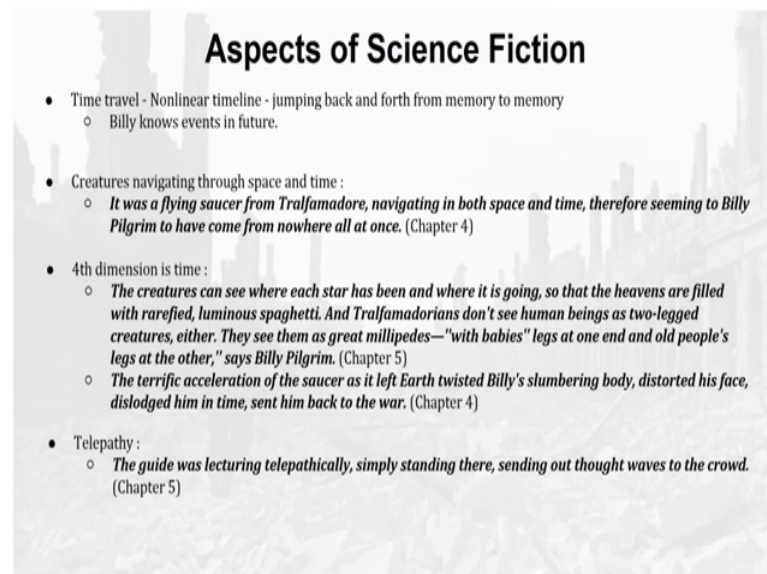
Postmodern narrative one of it is most highlighted and most famous part is the black Humor Irony playfulness which is also there in Joseph Hellers catch 22 and Thomas Pynchons the crying of lot forty nine it is basically black Humor is basically a literary technique to mass severity of events it is the Humor that is discovered in agony despair or horror and the playfulness that everything is not that a playfulness to accept the chaos of the world and the characters in the world. For example, the British prisoners of war officers who were charged along with the American ones they had incredible moral an

elevated spirit they even did a musical version of Cinderella and gave the American P O
Ws candles and souls.

However, these candles and soaps; so generously given were made from human fat
renders from the Nazi war victims it is ironical another text which portrays this quite
well is "I think the climax of the book will be the execution of poor old Edward Derby,"
I said the irony is. So, great a whole city gets burnt down and thousands and thousands of
people are killed. And then these one American foot soldiers arrested in the ruins for
taking a teapot. And he is given a regular trial, and then he is shot by firing squad.

Student: let us move on to the aspects of science fiction which can be seen in the novel.
So, first of all that we see is time travel which is also imbibed in the fact that it is a
postmodern novel where we have fragmentation and here we see non-linear time line
where the narrator jumps back and forth in time.

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Aspects of Science Fiction

- Time travel - Nonlinear timeline - jumping back and forth from memory to memory
 - Billy knows events in future.
- Creatures navigating through space and time :
 - *It was a flying saucer from Tralfamadore, navigating in both space and time, therefore seeming to Billy Pilgrim to have come from nowhere all at once.* (Chapter 4)
- 4th dimension is time :
 - *The creatures can see where each star has been and where it is going, so that the heavens are filled with rarefied, luminous spaghetti. And Tralfamadorians don't see human beings as two-legged creatures, either. They see them as great millipedes—"with babies" legs at one end and old people's legs at the other," says Billy Pilgrim.* (Chapter 5)
 - *The terrific acceleration of the saucer as it left Earth twisted Billy's slumbering body, distorted his face, dislodged him in time, sent him back to the war.* (Chapter 4)
- Telepathy :
 - *The guide was lecturing telepathically, simply standing there, sending out thought waves to the crowd.* (Chapter 5)

To give the sense of belief immigrant not having any freewill about; where he is going to
be in the next moment.

So, this is a very important aspect then we have creatures navigating through space and
time. So, this is also as a part of the time travel the Tralfamadorians abduct both Billy
pilgrim and Montana Wildhack and it is this that shows that they are able to move and
exercise a being anywhere in space and time as they wish, but Billy pilgrim is not able to

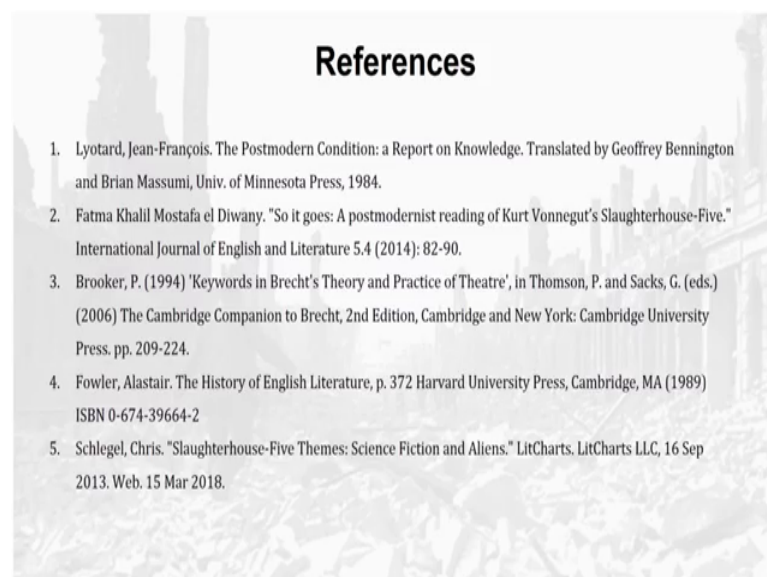
do that for dimension is time again this brings the idea from special relativity where we actually see that the four dimension which is being controlled by these Tralfamadorians the creatures can see where each star has been and where it is going.

So, that the heavens are filled with rarefied the creatures can see where each star has been and where is going.

So, that the heavens are filled with rarefied luminous spaghetti and Tralfamadorians do not see human beings as two like creatures either they see them as great millipedes with babies legs at one and an old peoples legs at the other. So, basically these people these aliens are able to see the entire lifetime of a human being which happens to look like a millipede since you see a baby in the one end and the ha old person in the other we also have the concept of telepathy here the aliens do not actually converse they telepathically communicate with each other.

These aspects of science fiction are actually brought into the novel not directly, but from an aspect of Kilgore Trouts science fiction novels. So, he is a fictional character who writes novels with so many of these aspects of science fiction imbibed in them and Billy pilgrim is highly influenced by these and as also seeing them in his real life as well as reading them in these novels of Kilgore Trout.

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References

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So, these are the references that have helped us to analyze this novel.

Thank you.