

**Trauma and Literature**  
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**Lecture - 53**  
**Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five - Part 4**

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Crusade," invoking a Romantic notion of the child as innocent in order to appeal emotionally to the readership to have sympathy for the soldiers. The implications for the current conflict in Vietnam are obvious, particularly in the novel's concluding chapter, where the writer reflects on the recent assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, both of whom were advocating an American withdrawal from Vietnam by 1967.

The Children's Crusade—the thirteenth century campaign that manipulated youth to fight on behalf of Christianity, tragically ending in shipwreck or slavery—is a fitting metaphor for both World War II and Vietnam War as thousands of young men were compelled to fight for a cause that ultimately left them alienated and adrift. Vonnegut quotes from Charles Mackay's 1841 history of the event: "They were no doubt idle and deserted children who generally swarm in great cities, nurtured on vice and

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This NPTEL course entitled "Trauma and Literature" on Kurt Vonnegut's novel "Slaughterhouse-Five". We are reading it from the lenses of Trauma Studies, and the relationship between "Trauma and Literature", the intersection between trauma and fiction. Despite playing with time, space, despite having this sort of magic realist elements, this is also a profoundly political novel.

It does allude, does refer to several political moments in history, American histories. For instance, this should be on your screen at the moment. The final bit with which we ended the last session, where there is a clear reference of how the novel refers to the assassination of Martin Luther King, JF. Kennedy and these are people who are championing the cause to stop the Vietnam War.

This is a profoundly political novel as an anti-war novel. We are also using some very experimental techniques of magic realism, fantasy, play with space and time. We are also looking at the relationship between masculinity, trauma and fiction in this novel, and how the whole idea of war masculinity is deconstructed.

Vietnam War, and almost all the other wars in history of humanity who always send young, immature, unprepared boys to fight in the battlefields, which has caused severe psychological damage, deaths untold, deaths of men, young men who died brutally, were killed brutally.

People who just came back also continue to live in a much damaged psychological condition. And it is exactly this damaged condition that has been referred to in this novel over and over again. It connects to the question of unreliable memory, that connects to the question of inauthentic memory and the relationship between memoir and fiction and how that is a problematic borderline that gets played up in several situations.

We are looking at a very complex relationship between masculinity, memory, trauma and identity, right. This particular novel, it really underlines that entanglement that underlines the convergence of all these different categories, very complex categories.

The child metaphor is very important in the novel and this constant reference of this boy, child and children's crusade, something which is there in the very subtitle itself. And where also the fact that it is also a duty dance with death. There was a dance macabre quality about the novel. And the irony and the dark irony, the dark humor in the story is how these are men/boys who are duty bound to dance with death.

The he war kills everyone, there is no winner in a war. And even if one is not physically killed, or one is psychologically damaged to the extent of being killed. When one comes back from the war as a changed person, as a more damaged person, as a more nervous person, as a more hysteric person.

The experience of unreliability, that experience of incomplete control is something which haunts one forever, as long as one lives. The trauma that is the real trauma of the war. It is to look at trauma as a big event model. Something big happens to one, something huge happens to one. An event which changes one permanently, from which trauma emerges, from which trauma starts, the inception point of trauma. But what is also more complex and perhaps more useful for us and more productive for us

today, academically speaking, is to look at the dailiness of trauma, the lingering quality of trauma.

How even after the big event happens and goes away, even after one survives the big event and one continues living, how the traumatic moments, the traumatic recursions and the recursive quality of trauma, it begins to affect the dailiness of living, the everydayness of living.

It is exactly the everyday criterion quality about trauma which makes a novel like "Slaughterhouse-Five" so compelling because it is not just about the big Dresden bombing which happened, which is, of course, there as very much some kind of a, it is almost like a character novel that entire event of Dresden bombing.

We know from research, we know through biographical accounts, how Vonnegut himself was part of that event. And when he was a prisoner in war he was talking about the Germans and which, ironically, saved him. The experience also awakened in his mind is a fact that the difference between friend and foe in war time just disappears completely.

Because the people who come in to bomb where he was, were his own army, the allied soldiers, the American soldiers. Whereas people who protected him ironically, inevitably were the Germans who put him in a cellar, and it is exactly in a cellar which saved him from being bombed.

It produces is a very cynical understanding of war and that cynicism stays on forever, that the longevity of the cynicism is exactly what informs the criterion quality of trauma, the everyday consumption of trauma.

We come back to the child metaphor in this novel, how the child figure becomes the sort of the formative figure who encounters trauma, and he grows and becomes the more matured man but never quite mature. Because a part of the child, a part of that boy/child, boy/man, it remains damaged forever due to this particular encounter.

It is exactly the damaged condition that the novel is trying to depict with a sort of fractured sense of time, the sense of being unhinged in space and time. And the character of Billy Pilgrim for instance, is a classic case of being unhinged, something of a freak in space and time. We were talking about in the session, in the previous session how time travel in this novel is not really an empowering act.

It is not really an agentic activity. Rather, it is more of an emasculating activity. It is more of a disempowering activity. It takes away your agency, it takes away one's power. It takes away one's control, one's cognitive control of space and time. That is exactly what happens.

The 13th century concept of quest this boy knights going out and quest as Christian soldiers, bringing glory and triumph to the Christian concept, the Christian kingdom. So that same concept of quest is replicated here in a different setting.

The Children's Crusade, the 13th century campaign that manipulated youth to fight on behalf of Christianity, tragically ending in shipwreck or slavery is a fitting metaphor for both World War II and Vietnam War, as thousands of young men were compelled to fight for a cause that ultimately left them eliminated and adrift. So what the war cause also was a sense of alienation.

The dissolution with the ideology, the disappointment with the ideology, this ideology of nobility, the ideology of noble masculinity, which is caused during the war is exactly what has been referred to. Now one must refer to the Vietnam War specifically over here because it is a war, which was a very inglorious war. It was not really a glorious war to protect anything.

It was a war of invasion. It was a war, which was deemed illegal even during that war, even at the moment it was been fought. And even within the United States there was always resentment against the war. It is never really an uncritical glorification of the war even at that time. There is that cynical ambivalent, dark quality, the sort of guilty quality about the war, even during that time.

It got consolidated with more political protests, with more international critique subsequently. These young men were compelled to fight a war for a cause, which ultimately left them disillusioned and alienated and that sense of alienation informs the trauma, it informs the quality of being shocked, the quality of being left out, quality of being abandoned.

Vonnegut quotes from Charles Mackay's 1841 history of the event. There were no doubt idle and deserted children who generally swamp in great cities. So this is the reference to the 13th century crusade which use children as soldiers, this glorious soldiers who were sent out to fight. It is interesting how that concept, that experience, that structure is reconnected and decontextualized in a context of Vietnam War, and interesting parallels that emerge out of those two events.

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daring, and ready for anything" (20). Mackay alludes to both the bravery and naïveté of the children, and this account will resonate later in the novel with the hubristic machismo of Roland Weary, staid courage of Edgar Derby, and bemused indifference of Billy Pilgrim. Mackay draws a line between "history" and "literature" (especially romance): the former reveals that the Crusaders, specifically the adults, were "ignorant and savage men," while the latter "portrays . . . their virtue and magnanimity, the imperishable honor they acquired for themselves, and the great services they rendered to Christianity" (20). History records, Mackay affirms, while literature embellishes; as Mary suggests, these embellishments have dangerous social implications for those who read and live by these romances' virtues. Vonnegut returns to this claim later in the text, when Roland Weary proclaims himself one of the "Three Musketeers," an allusion to Alexandre Dumas's historical novel celebrating honor and valor. By adopting this moniker, Weary and friends embrace and superimpose the ideals of these fictions onto their current situation, and in Vonnegut's eyes, dangerously delude themselves. Vonnegut, word for word, repeats Mackay's analysis of how romance handles Crusaders as the narrator tells of Roland Weary speaking

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They were no doubt idle and deserted children who generally swarm in great cities nurtured on vice and daring and ready for anything. Mackay alludes to both the bravery and naïveté of the children and this account will resonate later in the novel with the hubristic machismo of Roland Weary, the staid courage of Edgar Derby and bemused indifference of Billy Pilgrim.

Now this bit is the most interesting bit, the bemused indifference and that is what produces the dark comedy. That is what produces sort of nihilistic comedy, which we also see in the character of Yossarian in "Catch-22". The idea of empty comedy, the

idea of exhausted comedy, the comedy of exhaustion, which equates laughter with cynicism with darkness, with violence, rather than with happiness.

It makes these novels more compelling and more complex depictions of trauma and the dramatic subject, where who laughs not because they are happy, but because they are exhausted, and that is the only sensory reaction left. That is only sensory response available to these people.

Mackay draws a line between history and literature, especially romance. The former reveals that the Crusaders specifically the adults were ignorant and savage men, while the later portrays the virtue and magnanimity, the imperishable honor they acquired for themselves and the great services they rendered to Christianity. These are very much the Christian soldiers, the 13th century Crusaders.

And the difference in the history and literature is exactly this and the history produces them or represents them as something different as naive people who were savages where literature written around that time about that even embellishes them as glorious, glamorous men. So history records, Mackay affirms while literature embellishes, and this embellishment is something that exactly Vonnegut moves away from.

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embellishes; as Mary suggests, these embellishments have dangerous social implications for those who read and live by these romances' virtues. Vonnegut returns to this claim later in the text, when Roland Weary proclaims himself one of the "Three Musketeers," an allusion to Alexandre Dumas's historical novel celebrating honor and valor. By adopting this moniker, Weary and friends embrace and superimpose the ideals of these fictions onto their current situation, and in Vonnegut's eyes, dangerously delude themselves. Vonnegut, word for word, repeats Mackay's analysis of how romance handles Crusaders as the narrator tells of Roland Weary speaking "unintelligibly of the sacrifices he had made on Billy's behalf" (64). This re-appropriation simultaneously aligns Crusaders with soldiers in both World War II and the Vietnam War, suggesting that all three were sent off on quixotic ideological quests and are unfortunately ill-fated. But Vonnegut does not condemn Weary for his invocation of the Three Musketeers; rather, it shows the extremes soldiers went to in their efforts to appropriate fictions of noble masculinity that would both help to explain their predicament and provide guidance for how to navigate themselves through and out of it. Although Weary is one of the more unlikeable "listless playthings" in the text, he is sympathetic; his status as a self-appointed Musketeer is a coping mechanism. After all, he is only eighteen years old when he is shipped halfway around the world to battle for his country, his values, and his life.

In the self-reflexive first chapter, the narrative representation of Kurt Vonnegut discusses the difficulty he had writing the book, which was over

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Now Vonnegut word for word repeats Mackay's analysis of how romances handle, romance handles Crusaders, as the narrator tells of Roland Weary speaking unintelligibly of the sacrifices he had made on Billy's behalf.

This re-appropriation simultaneously aligns Crusaders with soldiers in both World War II and Vietnam war suggestion that all three were sent off on quixotic or quixotic ideological quest and unfortunately ill-fated. This reference to Don Quixote is interesting, and very compelling and telling, because people who read Don Quixote would know that it is just a parody of romance, the parody of the Christian Crusader.

Don Quixote is someone who is wants to appropriate or sell fashion, himself into that model of the Christian knight and instead what Cervantes shows us is a parody of hollow mimicry of that knightly quest, which also in a way undercuts that uncritical consumption of knightly masculinity, military masculinity. There is a Don Quixote quality about "Slaughterhouse-Five" as with "Catch-22".

Both novels rely on parody, both novels rely on pastiche. Both novels rely on mimicry, hollow mimicry, in order to sort of compel or carry the point home in terms of how these soldiers although there is a sense of self fashioning and trying to become the Christian Knights, the end of actually being slaughters, they being fodders for slaughter.

It is a metaphor in the novel and is titled "Slaughterhouse-Five". They are actually sent to be slaughtered, they are sent to be consumed, they are sent to be, and this is just cannibalistic quality about the war. It just eats up all these young men, either physically or mentally, and they sort of end up being consumed, damaged in the heads, even if they are lucky to survive the war.

But Vonnegut does not condemn Weary for his invocation of "The Three Musketeers". Rather it shows the extremes soldiers went to in the efforts to appropriate fictions of noble masculinity that were both helped to explain their predicament and provide guidance for how to navigate themselves through and out of it.

The reference to this Alexander Dumas novel, “The Three Musketeers” and that itself is it is a story about this mighty masculinity, chivalrous masculinity. That is an attempt in Vonnegut’s novel by one of the characters, the character of Roland Weary for instance, who wants to become like that, who wants to sell fashion himself into that noble masculinity category, noble masculinity model.

Vonnegut does not, does not really critique it in a very monolithic way, in a very steadfast way. In fact, there is a lot of sympathy for characters like Weary because they are trying to navigate, they are trying to make sense of where they are, how they are, who they are, by connecting themselves, to some of the fictions about noble masculinity.

It is actually seen as very tragic in the novel. There are people who know that they are fighting a war, which is very ambiguous morally speaking. But they just have to carry out the rules, just have to execute the rules. And one way of doing that is to connect themselves conceptually and experientially and philosophically to the idea of noble masculinity that helps them sustain themselves in a war.

But also give them gives them a model, some kind of a pattern to stick to, to follow in terms of navigating themselves in the war. Although Weary is one of the more unlikable, listless playthings in the text, he is sympathetic. His status as a self-appointed musketeer is a coping mechanism. After all, he is only 18 years old when he is shipped halfway around the world to battle for his country, his values, and his life.

It is actually quite tragic that these are boys barely in their eighteens, barely out of the teens who are trying to make sense where they are and what they are doing. They can sustain themselves is by connecting themselves to the fictions about noble heroic masculinity. There is something like a rule and Weary is not really laughed at in the novel.

He is actually sympathized with. We also meant to sympathize with him as readers, because he is just trying to make sense of what he is doing. He just wants a template



before and this sort of template of noble masculinity which the Alexander Dumas novel offers to him.

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World War II and the Vietnam War, suggesting that all three were sent off on quixotic ideological quests and are unfortunately ill-fated. But Vonnegut does not condemn Weary for his invocation of the Three Musketeers; rather, it shows the extremes soldiers went to in their efforts to appropriate fictions of noble masculinity that would both help to explain their predicament and provide guidance for how to navigate themselves through and out of it. Although Weary is one of the more unlikeable "listless playthings" in the text, he is sympathetic; his status as a self-appointed Musketeer is a coping mechanism. After all, he is only eighteen years old when he is shipped halfway around the world to battle for his country, his values, and his life.

In the self-reflexive first chapter, the narrative representation of Kurt Vonnegut discusses the difficulty he had writing the book, which was over twenty years in the making, because of the solemnity and extremity of the Dresden firebombing as well as the unreliability of his own memory. He tells his editor, Seymour Lawrence, "It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre" (24). Indeed, the novel's terse sentences, fragmentations, and experiments in temporality have been hailed as hallmarks of its artistic accomplishment. His style—marked by concision and "plain English"—evokes Ernest Hemingway's efforts to write "one true sentence" (12), paring away an excess of adjectives,

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There is a reference to the first chapter where Kurt Vonnegut appears as a writer and is very metafictional, because he draws attention to itself as a process of writing. It starts sounding like a memoir, sound like something of an autobiography. It begins to become fiction from chapter two.

There is that interesting play of genres as well, which makes it even more compelling and more complex as a text. But there is a great deal of self-reflexivity in the opening chapter of "Slaughterhouse-Five", because it keeps drawing attention to itself, it keeps drawing attention to this own artificiality. There is an artificial work, it is an artificial story.

He is just trying to tell you a story, which is unreliable. It is based on a very unreliable memory and there is almost nothing that you can salvage out of it. And it is just a weak, failed attempt, and he keeps flagging up his own status as a failed attempt to tell what happened in that Dresden situation.

The reference to the otherworldly planet, the fantasy planet, pure work of fiction and how that connects with Dresden were also actually being a critique of the Vietnam War. There is a sense of history, there is a sense of the present live reality that is the Vietnam War.

There is a sense of the other worldly reality, an alternate model of reality, which is represented by the other planet where this magic realist engagements happen. All that self-reflexivity in the first chapter is part of the narrative design. In other way, the novel is sort of designed as something of a story to be told. There is a degree of staggered storytelling.

The narrator is unsure, uncertain, and of course, very aware of his unreliability as a narrator, which does not give him the confidence or the competence to tell what happened. Therein lies the position of self-reflexibility that therein lies the ontology of self-reflexibility, which is what is represented and discussed here.

In the self-reflexive first chapter the narrative representation of Kurt Vonnegut discusses the difficulty that he had right in the book, which was over 20 years in the making, because of the solemnity and extremity of the Dresden firebombing as well as the unreliability of his own memory. On one hand, this is an event of gruesome, grotesque tragedy. One of the most barbaric events in human history.

It is a challenge to tell a story it, to write that into something of a memoire or even a novel. And what makes it even more complicated and more challenging is his own unreliable memory, because he is not quite sure if he remembers it correctly. He goes on interviewing some of his comrades, some of his war buddies in the first chapter.

Almost none of them seem to remember the little details of the event. They seem to have forgotten. The idea of remembering unremembering and storytelling that gets connected. And that adds the complexity to this entire novel, the entire work of fiction with the “Slaughterhouse-Five”, which is something just set out by the very opening chapter.

He tells his editor Seymour Lawrence it is so short and jumbled and jangled Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. It is the intelligent thing can say about massacre. This is a point about a traumatic memory and narrative memory that touched upon earlier. It is too traumatic as a memory to be reliable, is too traumatic a memory to be put into a narrative shape.

To give a sense of a coherent plot which will progress, which will propel on its own, right. There is that difficulty of converting the traumatic memory into a narrative memory and traumatic memories of course more is more fluid in quality, is more cognitively complex in quality and it is more uncertain in quality because the whole point of being on trauma is that you experience uncertainty.

One's experience one's awareness, one's knowledge of space and time, one's sense of space and time begins to disappear, begins to become fragile, begins to break, begins to implode in a certain sense, and to create or generate a narrative out of that is always a near impossible task. There is that impossibility of converting narrative memory out of traumatic memory, which is what the novel keeps on referring to.

Therein lies the self-reflexivity at the beginning. So, indeed the novel's terse sentences, fragmentations and experiments in temporality have been hailed as hallmarks of his artistic accomplishment. His style marked by concision and plain English evokes Ernest Hemingway's efforts to write one true sentence. Hemingway is advocates the writers to write one true sentence is something which we find as a constant effort in this friction and Vonnegut's writing as well.

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sentiment, and verbosity in favor of an attempt to achieve an accurate representation of reality—in Vonnegut's case, a horrific reality that defies explanation.<sup>7</sup> One may in fact wonder why a novel that is so seemingly simple (at least, at the sentence-level) and an admitted "failure" could have taken so long. Of course, the latter claim by Vonnegut—that the novel fails and has to fail—is false modesty. Reviewer Christopher Lehmann-Haupt rebukes this claim in his 1969 review in *The New York Times*: "He's wrong and he knows it" (35); indeed Lehmann-Haupt was right, and in his 1981 "autobiographical collage" *Palm Sunday*, Vonnegut himself graded *Slaughterhouse-Five* an "A-plus" (284). Rather, the difficulty Vonnegut faced, in part, was depicting the narrative of the Dresden firebombing in a way that could reach a wide audience without "explaining away" or shamelessly exploiting it for financial gains and literary recognition. Furthermore, wary of his faulty memory, Vonnegut draws attention to his concern that he will distort or romanticize the events. By bringing these issues

Paring away an excess of adjectives, sentiment and a verbosity in favor of an attempt to achieve an accurate representation of reality, in Vonnegut's case, a horrific reality that defies explanation. The idea of bombing something that comes and creates a

massacre through a bomb, the dropping of a bomb just decimates everything and decimates architecture, building that takes real lives.

It also takes away meanings as we commonly consume them. It is to question how one represents a massacre, represents disappearance and represent absence that just becomes the most challenging aspect of this entire storytelling process. One may in fact wonder why a novel that is so seemingly simple, at least at a sentence level, and admitted failure could have taken so long. The latter claim of Vonnegut that a novel fails and has to fail is false modesty.

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sentiment, and verbosity in favor of an attempt to achieve an accurate representation of reality—in Vonnegut’s case, a horrific reality that defies explanation.<sup>2</sup> One may in fact wonder why a novel that is so seemingly simple (at least, at the sentence-level) and an admitted “failure” could have taken so long. Of course, the latter claim by Vonnegut—that the novel fails and has to fail—is false modesty. Reviewer Christopher Lehmann-Haupt rebukes this claim in his 1969 review in *The New York Times*: “He’s wrong and he knows it” (35); indeed Lehmann-Haupt was right, and in his 1981 “autobiographical collage” *Palm Sunday*, Vonnegut himself graded *Slaughterhouse-Five* an “A-plus” (284). Rather, the difficulty Vonnegut faced, in part, was depicting the narrative of the Dresden firebombing in a way that could reach a wide audience without “explaining away” or shamelessly exploiting it for financial gains and literary recognition. Furthermore, wary of his faulty memory, Vonnegut draws attention to his concern that he will distort or romanticize the events. By bringing these issues to the forefront, he anticipates derisive criticism and admits the inherent difficulties in rendering the story honestly and without ulterior motives.

The writer’s struggle with the inherent limitations of language is not the sole reason for Vonnegut’s accessible, straightforward prose style. As in his next book, *Breakfast of Champions*, a didactic quality, similar almost to a primer, characterizes the narrative voice of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Vonnegut is aware that, as a survivor, he bears the burden of memory: a responsibility to the perished to tell what happened and “set the record straight.” Looking

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Rather, the difficulty Vonnegut faced in part was depicting the narrative of the Dresden firebombing in a way that could reach a wide audience without explaining away or shamelessly exploiting for financial gains or literary recognition. Furthermore wary of his faulty memory, Vonnegut draws attention to his concern that he will distort and romanticize the events.

By bringing these issues to the forefront he anticipates derisive criticism and admits the inherent difficulties in rendering the story honestly and without ulterior motives.

This is a very complicated scenario, because on one hand, he is talking about a traumatic event, he is talking about a very horrific moment in human history. He is also writing a novel about it.

There is a sense of failure, the sense of knowing that whatever he writes will just end up being insufficient, and at best an approximation of what really took place. There is that quality very much there. What complicates it further is to find that he knows that this will this might bring him critical acclaim, this might bring him financial gain, and there is always this guilt about converting a trauma into something which will produce financial gain.

One wonders why Vonnegut takes such great pains to talk about how this novel is a failure, how unreliable his memory is, and how whatever he writes might just be an approximation of the reality that transpired.

Now by foregrounding all this, by highlighting all this he is looking at the constructed quality of novel writing, the constructed quality of narrative design, which can never really approximate, which can never really authentically represent an actual event, right. Therein lies the failure of the novel and therein lies the admission of failure, the admission of incompleteness so that this is the important bit.

The fact that Vonnegut is, just foregrounding the failure, is foregrounding the constructed qualities, foregrounding the unreliability, he is foregrounding the contrived quality of the whole representational process. That act of foregrounding is also an act of sincerity, an act of authorial sincerity or artistic sincerity.

He is admitting and acknowledging and announcing the fact that, this novel is a novel about a, a traumatic moment in human history in the past as well as in the present, the Vietnam War as well as the Dresden bombing, both acts of barbaric violence. But then he tried to write a novel out of it, one must be honest about the fact that this can only be an approximation, this can only be of an act of construction or reconstruction.

The lack of seamlessness in “Slaughterhouse-Five”, the lack of smooth running, fluid running in “Slaughterhouse-Five” is actually an artistic acknowledgment of the

difficulty to write a traumatic novel, difficulty in writing a novel about trauma, about the real experience of trauma, right. Therein lies the artist's decision to foreground the self-reflexive quality of constructedness and failure, etc. Just skip a little bit.

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We will just come to the bit about heroic masculinity and the historical renditions of heroic masculinity, military masculinity and how it is just such a false notion, is such a mythical notion, which is sort of fed and pumped as almost part of a propaganda politics during the war just to seduce young men in to fight a war, which is sometimes illegal in quality.

Vonnegut's examination of the Dresden firebombing is not the novel's only critique of the American military actions in World War II. Another subtle yet key critique in the novel is a case of Private Eddie D. Slovik, the first soldier to be executed for desertion since the American Civil War. Now this is a very complex situation where we have a soldier Private Eddie D. Slovik who was one of the historically one soldier who quit the war.

He was actually court martialed under the instructions of President Eisenhower. He was shot to death for being a deserter. It brings to the fore some very key ethical concerns about a war. What if he choose not to fight a war? What if he chose not to participate in bloodbath, not to participate or be complicit to violence in a way that makes me uneasy?

If he soldier decides out of that guilt out of that conscience to deserve the war. That act of desertion, that act of assertion of agency that is choose not to fight a war that is very quickly criminalized in this case of this particular soldier, this historical soldier, Eddie Slovik. Vonnegut refers to that in the novel in a fictional form.

The history of the event, the fact that the American president actually ordered execution of the soldier simply because he stopped fighting, he chose not to fight becomes it really opens up a can of worms about the ethics of a war, about the ethical responsibility of and the whole idea of the morality of violence or the immorality of violence.

That all these very immediate moral, philosophical, existential, ethical questions come to the forefront. That is something which “Slaughterhouse-Five” also does in a very subtle way.

He was the first soldier we are told to be executed for desertion since the American Civil War. Slovik’s death by a firing squad in 1945 have been ordered by Supreme Commander of the Allied forces, Dwight D. Eisenhower, President Eisenhower, as a warning to potential deserters about the consequences.

The case was uncovered in William Bradford’s Huie’s 1954 book, the execution of Private Slovik, which Billy reads in the novel. The beautiful intertextuality that Vonnegut is playing here. Billy pilgrim, who was a reluctant soldier in the novel, “Slaughterhouse-Five” is reading the story of another reluctant soldier, the private soldier Slovik who was historically executed on the President’s command, shot to death for deserting the war.

The intertextual rendition is a work of fiction, “Slaughterhouse-Five” and inside the work of fiction, Billy Pilgrim was a fictional character. He is reading another book about a real soldier who was killed in 1945. The intertextual connection becomes interesting because in a way, it also connects Eddie, Eddie Slovik and Billy Pilgrim in a very intersubjective way.

They almost become, in a way alter egos of each other. It almost becomes extensions of each other in a very interesting, complex and symbolic and also experiential way. Billy reads that novel inside the book, “Slaughterhouse-Five”. There is a direct, immediate intertextual element about the reluctant military masculinity. To execute Slovik from Vonnegut’s perspective seems more a matter of protocol than justice.

As he writes, his purpose was to maintain the discipline upon which alone an army can succeed. Slovik’s personhood is stripped off him in the name of the cause. But mentioning Slovik in passing conversely highlight his case. A case President Eisenhower tried to suppress when Huie’s book was published and humanizes the

war. The act of humanization, the fact that someone can actually have an ethical dilemma about fighting the war.

That is something that Vonnegut wants to foreground, want to get ones to highlight. And he is also saying that in a war time, in a war situation protocol takes precedence over morality. The protocol takes precedence over ethics. It is the reason why, the soldier was ordered to be executed by the president of the allied forces,

The humanization of war is something which you find throughout Slaughterhouse-Five. Slovik's crime was not subverting American military action by revealing strategies or sabotaging their efforts. It was not wanting to serve and not wanting to fight, not wanting to die. It is not as if Slovik was giving away a vital intelligence or strategic intelligence to the other forces, to the enemy forces.

He was not doing that. He was not compromising the American military plan in any way. It was just an ethical dilemma. It was just an act of agency in not wanting to fight, not wanting to enact violence, not wanting to kill people. That was a decision that was the psychological condition which informed his decision to step out of the war.

There was a human moment of hesitation and ambivalence which is quickly criminalized as by military protocol. So not wanting to die, he did not want to die in the war, he did not want to kill in the war and that is the reason why he wanted to step out. But ironically, he was shot to death as a matter of protocol. The sadness of the situation was such a tragedy.

The sadness of the situation, the sadness of a young man wanting to live his life in his own terms humbles Vonnegut. But Slovik like Billy Pilgrim is a listless plaything. They are just a pawn, a pawn of a government's plan and an inevitable war. They just become a listless plaything. The thingness in the character. There is no subjectivity, there is no subjecthood given to Slovik.

It is just, he is just a pawn, he is just an instrument, who is played upon, who is just played with and just gets bandied around during the war. Vonnegut's opposition is not



against war. That he realizes is futile. But against the treatment of men it incurs and the consequences for the young generation who was sent off unaware and scared to wage the battles manipulated by their elders.

It is how the whole idea of trauma is connected to guilt, to inability to act or to one's own will is connected to an absence of agency. It just becomes a complex experience of trauma, especially in a wartime situation like this. Vonnegut is sort of foregrounding that the moment of hesitation, moment of ambivalence that is soldier's experience.

This young men, barely out of the teens who were just sent to fight a war by older men who are manipulating them from a political level. And that is the sadness. That is the real tragedy of the war situation. But soldiers from either side of the war, from both sides, they get killed. These are like young, inexperienced, immature men who can just get brainwashed in fighting a war that they know almost next to nothing about. So that is the ignorance of the war.

That is the tragedy of the war. That is also in a way a travesty of what is considered to be military masculinity, noble military masculinity, which is something which is constantly critiqued in Vonnegut's novel at a very human level, at a very human ethical level.