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LOOKING BACK AT WASTELAND(S): A HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTIONAL READING OF KURT VONNEGUT'S *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE*

ABSTRACT

Some moments can never become memories; on the contrary, every breath taken, every word uttered, and every gesture performed are reminiscent of them. Much as the past is said to be past, it never dies. Memories of war belong to this group of the past never past, as in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). The novel centres on a traumatized survivor of the Dresden bombing of World War II with an untraditional, fragmented, surreal, and impressive narrative style and generic hybridity of science fiction and historiographic metafiction. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an example of historiographic metafiction in that it presents the bombing as a historical fact combined with fictional characters and the author's self-references, experiences, and interpretation of the event. The novel is also a significant work with regard to trauma studies inasmuch as it portrays the effects of wars on human psychology, the traumatized protagonist of the novel, along with other characters, including the author himself. Vonnegut employs metafictional elements to display that people experiencing war trauma create figurative wastelands, their minds become confused and disorganized, and the line between reality and fiction blurs, and thereby, he challenges the conventional boundaries between fiction and history. In that regard, what follows is an attempt to demonstrate how wars turn landscapes and human beings into wastelands both literally and figuratively through not only the author's but also the protagonist Billy Pilgrim's experiences and, finally, how postmodernism could be a tool to demonstrate those traumas.

Keywords: Dresden Bombing, Trauma, Historiographic Metafiction, Wasteland.

GEÇMİŞİN ÇORAK TOPRAKLARINA BAKIŞ: KURT VONNEGUT'UN *MEZBAHA BEŞ* ROMANINA TARİHYAZIMSAL ÜSTKURMACA BİR YAKLAŞIM

ÖZET

Bazı anlar asla anı olmazlar; aksine alınan her nefes, söylenen her söz, yapılan her hareket o anları anımsatır. Her ne kadar geçmişin geçmiş olduğu söylense de etkisi asla sona ermez. Kurt Vonnegut'un *Mezbaha Beş* (1969) adlı romanı gibi savaş anıları da bu "asla geçmeyen" geçmiş grubuna aittir. İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Dresden'in bombalanmasından sağ kurtulan travmatize olmuş bir kişiyi merkeze alan roman, alışılmadık, parçalı, gerçeküstü ve etkileyici bir anlatım tarzına ve bilimkurgu ile tarihyazımsal üstkurmacanın oluşturduğu melez bir yapıya sahiptir. *Mezbaha-Beş*, Dresden Bombardmanı'nı tarihsel bir olgu olarak kurgusal karakterlerle ve yazarın özimlemeleri, deneyimleri ve olaya ilişkin yorumlarıyla birlikte sunması bakımından tarihyazımsal bir üstkurmaca örneğidir. Roman, savaşların insan psikolojisi üzerindeki etkilerini romanın travmatize olmuş kahramanı ve yazarın kendisi de dahil olmak üzere diğer karakterlerle birlikte anlatması bakımından travma çalışmaları açısından da önemli bir eserdir. Vonnegut, savaş travması yaşayan bireylerin figüratif çorak zihinlerinin karıştığını ve düzensizleştiğini, gerçeklik ve kurgu arasındaki çizgilerin bulanıklaştığını göstermek için üstkurmaca unsurlarını kullanır ve böylece kurgu ve tarih arasındaki geleneksel sınırlara meydan okur. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma savaşların mekânları ve insanları hem gerçek hem de mecazi anlamda nasıl çorak topraklara dönüştürdüğünü hem yazarın hem de romanın kahramanı Billy Pilgrim'in deneyimleri üzerinden gösterme çabası olarak görülmelidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Dresden Bombardmanı, Travma, Tarihyazımsal Üstkurmaca, Çorak Toprak.

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Introduction

From the perspective of its scale, death toll, unfairness, impact, and, in particular, terror, World War II was arguably the most tragic war of the 20th century. Although the representations of this devastating tragedy are abundant, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969)[1], written by Kurt Vonnegut after his service in World War II as an American soldier and prisoner of war, should be separated from the rest. *SH5* has long been evaluated as significant representative and example of postmodernism. In his depiction of postmodernism, Fredric Jameson makes an analogy between schizophrenia and the downfall of traditional socio-economic constructions and writing styles and argues that it is not a coincidence that mental illnesses, the problems of capitalism, and linguistic experiments in modern writing all appear to overlap. Jameson adds that "Temporal disorder, involuntary impersonation of other voices (or pastiche), fragmentation, looseness of association, paranoia, and the creation of vicious circles" are all characteristics of schizophrenia's language issues, as well as postmodernist literature (1991, p.133). *SH5*, similarly, centres on a traumatized survivor of the Dresden bombing of World War II with an untraditional, fragmented, surreal, and impressionist narrative style and generic hybridity of science fiction and historiographic metafiction.

Similarly, Linda Hutcheon asserts that postmodernism is a "contradictory enterprise: its art forms ... use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention ... [in] their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past" (1988, p.199). In his portrayal of the Dresden Bombing, Vonnegut uses different tenses; among the levels of narration, one can see "Vonnegut's present tense" in the first and last chapters (Edelstein, 1974, p.129). These chapters reveal Vonnegut as the author of the novel. Though not an introduction or a conclusion per se, chapters one and ten can be viewed as such because they provide information about the writing process, the novel's significance, and its publicity. It is especially in these two chapters that the metafictional quality of Vonnegut's novel most clearly surfaces. Furthermore, because the novel is about one of the most traumatic events of recent history, it also has a unique historical quality. Historiographic metafiction blends fictional elements with historical events, potentially uniting the real world and literature. Hutcheon, who also coined the term, states, "Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction. And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that affects both aims: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel (though not equal) status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the 'world' and literature" (1989, p.4). *SH5* is an example of historiographic metafiction in that it presents the Dresden Bombing as a historical fact combined with fictional characters and the author's self-references, experiences, and interpretation of the event.

Vonnegut pushes and defies the traditional lines separating history from fiction by using metafictional elements to illustrate how victims of war trauma construct figurative wastelands, get disoriented and bewildered, and lose the ability to distinguish between fact and fiction. Considering that, in this paper, the aim is to address the traumatizing aspects of wars through not only the author's but also the protagonist Billy Pilgrim's experiences as literary representations of wasteland both literally and figuratively and thereby to show that using historiographic metafiction is a useful tool to unearth the pain and misery war victims experience.

[1] The novel will be referred to as *SH5* hereafter in the text.

Aftermath of the Bombing: Dresden as a Wasteland

During World War II, the Allied Forces bombed Dresden in Germany. Before the war, the city was regarded as one of the world's most attractive cities due to its architecture and cultural treasures; it was even called The Florence of the Elbe, referring to, in particular, the architectural structure of the city. On the night of February 13, the British Air Forces dropped tons of high explosives and incendiaries. The bombing continued by the U.S. Air Forces and lasted for another two days, which caused fierce firestorms, destroying most of the city. It is often estimated that 25,000–35,000 people were killed in the air raids in Dresden; however, other estimates by various sources range as high as 250,000 with the refugees fleeing the Eastern Front. The majority of those killed were women, children, and the elderly. The bombing took most of the world, including German troops, by surprise, seeing as Dresden was believed to be a safe place, considering its less significant contribution to the war. As a result, it sparked a controversy among intellectuals, artists, journalists, along with politicians from different parts of the world. Some claimed that it was a war crime and an immoral act, while others referred to the event as tragic but justifiable. Not surprisingly, the Allied Forces justified the bombing, pointing out several factors. In a report, the US. Air Forces justify the bombing by referring to Dresden as "the main center for communications for the Defense of Germany," "a large center of war industry," and thus "a target of the highest importance" (Tustin,1954, p.8). One understands that, although the bombing of Dresden was strategic and vitally important from the perspective of the Allied Forces, there was also controversy as to its necessity.

Much as Vonnegut uses several settings in *SH5,* Dresden is of greater significance than the rest since it is the key to understanding the protagonist's trauma as well as the setting where most of the action takes place. Throughout *SH5,* Dresden is portrayed as a literal wasteland by means of several analogies. Yet, it is vital to understand how Vonnegut sets the scene until the bombing of the city. The readers are introduced to the protagonist Billy Pilgrim at the end of the introductory chapter one with a simple sentence: "Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.18). With this sentence, the readers are warned against the fragmented mind of Billy and the structure of the novel. Throughout the novel, Pilgrim does not have a clear mind to voice what he has gone through in order. The only linearity in the novel is seen in the portrayal of his experience as a soldier, his struggle before he is captured by German soldiers, and, finally, the bombing and its aftermath. In this way, through historiographic metafiction Vonnegut demonstrates how war causes traumas in individuals and how it destroys their homes by drawing a parallel between the destruction of Dresden and the fragmentation of Billy's mind and the narrative.

As already mentioned, the first and the last chapters of the novel are written in the first-person narration, the narrator being the author himself, so the readers can easily differentiate the perspective of the author and the protagonist. These two perspectives could sometimes diverge or overlap one another. We see one of the overlapping instances when both Vonnegut and Pilgrim use the word "massacre" while referring to the bombing of the city. The event is referred to as "the greatest massacre in European history" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.82). Additionally, in the novel, there are various portrayals of Dresden in the aftermath of the bombing, such as an open space, a desert, a big flame, a moon, and the corpse mine, all of which are equally important representations of a city in which life cannot sprout. These portrayals, which are used by two different narrators, are significant in that they emphasize a literal wasteland which causes both the protagonist and the

author himself experience trauma. In the first chapter, for instance, when the account of Vonnegut describes his own experience, he explains how he struggled with the idea of documenting this experience in the form of a novel, how he gathered information and recalled the heart-rending details with one of his wartime friends by visiting the city (in 1967) and how he finally achieved his aim. The author reflects on what the city looked like after so many years. He writes: "It looked a lot like Dayton, Ohio, more open spaces than Dayton has. There must be tons of human bone meal in the ground" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.1). This analogy shows that after so many years, the city has not yet been recovered or reconstructed.

It is essential to note that Vonnegut provides clear representations of both Dresden as a literal wasteland and the protagonist as a figurative wasteland, and in so doing, he tries to be neutral while recounting the destructions caused by both sides, the Nazis and the Allied Forces.

> I myself have seen the bodies of schoolgirls who were boiled alive in a water tower by my own countrymen, who were proud of fighting pure evil at the time. (…) And I have lit my way in a prison at night with candles from the fat of human beings who were butchered by the brothers and fathers of those school girls who were boiled. (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 95)

Even though Vonnegut's position of a figurative wasteland will be discussed later, it is vital that Vonnegut's background be mentioned at this point in analyzing this quote since his German heritage and being an American soldier might have affected his feelings and his stance, which could be significant while retelling a historical event. As revealed in the epigraph of the novel, he was a fourth-generation German-American who fought against his ancestors and witnessed the death of thousands of people "by [his] own countryman." Equally important is his stress on America's and Americans' pride concerning the war. Vonnegut's criticism towards his "own countryman" could also be understood in direct relation to the Vietnam War because, in the period in which *SH5* was written, there were protests all over America about it. As a result, we should not forget that Vonnegut was a pacifist, and thus, he was critical of any war. Violence, in Vonnegut's opinion, cannot be tolerated, not even when it comes from his own people or faction, as it fundamentally undermines humanity and leaves behind only fragmented pieces that can never come back together. *SH5* and Vonnegut's position demonstrate the disruptive and catastrophic effects of war on people, culture, and all that is essential to us as humans.

The phrase "by my own countryman" also conveys the message that Vonnegut is critical of both sides and does not aim to present Germans as innocent. The reference to "candles," which implies the production of candles with the victims' body fat, for instance, states more than a full article about the horror and the terror of the era. Soon after displaying that the innocent people ("schoolgirls") were killed by the allied forces, Vonnegut reminds the readers that "the brothers and the fathers of" those innocent people are responsible for one of the most horrifying crimes in the history of humankind. It is a documented fact that the Nazis conducted unnamable experiments defined as "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity" in their prisons and concentration camps (Nelson, 2012, p.101). In his article related to the facts and legends of the production of soap by human fat, Joachim Neander argues that people told: "the Germans boiled the victims of the extermination camps to soap stamped with the letters 'RTF,' supposedly meaning Reines Judenfett (pure Jewish fat)" (2006. p. 63). Through an extensive examination, he concludes that the allegations cannot be confirmed. In *SH5,* Kurt Vonnegut uses these allegations and rumors to intensify the emotions as any other fiction writer would.

Vonnegut's depiction of the atrocities and tragedies of war rely heavily on his own experiences and the reality that he lived through as a soldier and prisoner of war. He achieves this sense of reality by several analogies that he uses. For instance, he writes, "they were on the edge of a desert now" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.149). The quote shows how not only the Germans but also the prisoners of war are shaken by the city's condition. The POWs' task simply becomes to clear out the mass and to find the bodies that were buried under the ruins of the city. The desert analogy, thus, indicates how barren the city looked after the destruction caused by the bombs and incendiaries having caused fire. The analogy also serves to emphasize that the possibility of life is, if not absent, quite rare.

A similar yet more potent portrayal of the city is provided later in the novel: "It looked like Dresden after it was fire-bombed—like the surface of the moon" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 49). The moon analogy is repeated not only to display the traumatic mind of the protagonist but also as another important characteristic of postmodern fiction, namely otherworldly and surreal settings: "Dresden was like the moon now nothing but minerals" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.146). On the following page, a more detailed representation of Dresden is given.

> 'It was like the moon,' said Billy Pilgrim.
>
> …
>
> Nobody talked much as the expedition crossed the moon. There was nothing appropriate to say. One thing was clear: Absolutely everybody in the city was supposed to be dead, regardless of what they were, and that anybody that moved into it represented a flaw in the design. There were to be no moon men at all. (Vonnegut, 2000, p.147)

In the quote above, the author likens the soldiers' experience after the bombing to an expedition on the moon. The analogy not only adds a surreal setting but also suggests the city was barren, uninhabitable, and lifeless. The quote, correspondingly, exposes that the aim was to exterminate all life, as revealed by "that anybody that moved into it represented a flaw in the design." Finally, it is worth mentioning that the novel was written before people genuinely set foot on the moon; thus, the analogy works better to contemporary readers.

Not the last but probably the most effective of these analogies is the "mine" analogy. As the novel reveals, after the bombing, the dead bodies were all over the place, and these had to be taken out to be carried. This duty was given to prisoners of war, as mentioned earlier. One of the most tragic terms to describe the tragedy is used at this point: "A German soldier with a flashlight went down into the darkness, was gone a long time. When he finally came back, he told a superior on the rim of the hole that there were dozens of bodies down there. They were sitting on benches. They were unmarked. […] Thus began the first corpse mine in Dresden" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.176). Considering that a mine is a place where people take out minerals such as coal and cold, this analogy is a powerful portrayal of the results of the bombing since the soldiers had to dig out the land to take out the dead bodies as if they were minerals, and unfortunately, they were now in part ashes and bones. The author's emphasis on "the unmarked" bodies is yet another proof of his effort to be neutral regarding the effects of World War II, for the Jews were marked to be executed by German soldiers, and after the bombing, not only the people in the slaughterhouse but also the German inhabitants of the city ("the unmarked"), were lying under the same land. The city was a corpse mine for the victims from both sides.

In short, in *SH5*, Vonnegut sheds light on the destruction caused by the bombing through various portrayals of the city using repetitive analogies. The words "flame," "desert," "moon," and "mine" are repeated in different chapters. These analogies are remarkably significant, as through them, Vonnegut portrays an image of a barren wasteland, which emphasizes the meaning of lifelessness.

Kurt Vonnegut as a Figurative Wasteland

Kurt Vonnegut was not only one of the victims but also a significant witness of the Dresden Bombing. Felman, who emphasizes the importance of witnessing a traumatic event and testimony of the event, writes, "The historical apprenticeship takes place only through a *crisis in*, and a consequent *transformation of*, the witness. And only through the medium of that crisis the event can speak, and that the narrative can lend its voice to history" (1992, p.110). Being an author, Vonnegut was able to convert this witnessing into an art form and thus, he was able to "lend its voice to history."

The following section will discuss how Kurt Vonnegut represents a figurative wasteland by addressing how he plays with notions of authorship by inserting his experience as an author through self-reflectivity and metafiction. The way Vonnegut incorporates his personal experiences into his fiction highlights the depth of his narrative technique, which, as Malcolm Jack argues, is deeply influenced by his undiagnosed PTSD. In his article, Malcolm Jack claims that *SH5* is a product of undiagnosed PTSD and he supports his claim with several accounts and presents the author's daughter, Nanette, as a witness (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2019). According to the article, Nanette suggests that the author experienced dissociative episodes, insomnia, flashbacks, and sudden, unexplained emotional outbursts, and she is positive that he suffered from PTSD, for which Pilgrim was a vivid example (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2019). Likewise, in his book *The Writer's Crusade* (2021), Tom Roston explores the relationship between Vonnegut's life and *SH5*, attempting to unveil whether he was suffering from PTSD or not. Roston's work is part of the history of *SH5*'s creation, half biography of Vonnegut, and it includes an in-depth analysis of the novel's influence on America's post-World War II combat veterans. Along with Roston's claims and the novel's presentation of the traumatic experience of the author, it could be claimed Vonnegut might be viewed as a figurative wasteland who was able to write one of the greatest novels of modern times out of such a disaster.

The aforementioned historiographic metafictional qualities of the novel emerge especially in this section. Vonnegut chooses to intermingle the bombing as a historical background and a universe that has been created by the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim. Hutcheon refers to Billy as "the (metafictionally marked) Billy Pilgrim" and claims that his alternative universe is a "fantasy life" that "acts as an allegory of the author's own displacements and postponements (i.e., his other novels) that prevented him from writing about Dresden before this" (1989, p. 9). As such, one should be cautious about relying on the authors' portrayal of historical events since the unreliability of the author is also a common characteristic of postmodern novels. Vonnegut also plays with the readers' perceptions through words like "really" as in this example: "I really *did* go back to Dresden with Guggenheim money (God love it) in 1967" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.1). Inserting the word "really" and italicizing "did" cause the readers to suspect the information given for the rest of the novel. However, such details as the identities of his war buddy, his wife, and the name of a taxi driver, Gerhard Müller, who drove them to the slaughterhouse, ensure the factuality of

the given chapter once more.

Given the novel's autobiographical nature, one can find details about how the author thought it would not take him too much time to finish the book as he thought the task to be easy. It is also true that he hoped it would be successful and "make [him] a lot of money" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.2). It took him twenty-three years to finish the novel, and it was finally published during the havoc of the Vietnam War, which was another significant period for pacifists and anti-war activists.

As a prisoner of war himself, Vonnegut thinks his memories related to Dresden were "useless," but the idea of writing about Dresden was also "tempting" (2000, p. 2). Vonnegut attempts to assemble his fragmented memories. He questions those who experienced the battle as well in order to draw links between these parts. Despite his desire to write a story, many people, including Mary O'Hare, object to bringing up those terrible memories because they hurt. He was a probable victim of PTSD, which was not a thing then, trying to deal with the harsh memories of World War II and specifically his time spent in Slaughterhouse 5. It was not as easy as he supposed, and he could not rely on only his memories. As a result, he phoned and visited "Bernard V. O'Hare," whom "[he] really *did* go to see" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 10). This visit could be a milestone in his writing process because of the author's interaction with O'Hare's wife, Mary. According to the account, Mary O'Hare was critical of the novel and how it would capture the realities of war. During the visit, she joined the two war buddies, and in a not very friendly tone, she reminded Vonnegut that they [Vonnegut and her husband along with all the other soldiers] "were just babies in the war—like the ones upstairs!" (2000, p.12). Vonnegut reflects on the dialogue later.

> So then I understood. It was war that made her so angry. (…)
>
> So I held up my right hand and I made her a promise 'Mary,' I said, (…) If 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.' (2000, pp.11-12)

As a result, the subtitle is *Or the Children's Crusade, a Duty Dance with Death,* which emphasizes the destruction of the war and the innocence of the many involved without grasping the actual meaning of war.

As one of the victims of war trauma, Vonnegut recounts the destructions incoherently. Selden et al. (2005) claim that the brief idea of postmodernism is "the theme of the absent center"; they further state that human shock over unfathomable events causes people to lose their fixed frames of reference. Unity, coherence, and meaning are no longer present in either the universe or the self: "They are radically 'decentred'" (2005, p.199). In this decentralized language, one can straightforwardly find traumas of the modern world. In this regard, Vonnegut's depiction of the production his novel seems to perfectly fits a figurative wasteland. In his dialogue with his publisher Seymour Lawrence, Vonnegut explains: "It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre" (2000, p.16). As the quote reveals, Vonnegut believes it is impossible to say anything logically after such a dreadful event. In the first chapter, as an intertextual element, he also mentions the Biblical story of Lot's wife, how she was told not to look back, yet she looked back, which was "so human," as a result of which "She was turned to a pillar of salt" (2000, p.18). Vonnegut, here, makes an analogy between Lot's Wife and his own experience and clarifies that looking back does not always yield positive results. He writes, "This one is a failure, and had to be since it was written by a pillar of salt" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.18).

By referring to himself as "a pillar of salt," the author not only implies the punishment of looking back, which, figuratively, means trying to remember the tragedy and voicing its effects, but also refers to the numbness that the war caused, how they were ineffective individuals, only the pawns of the board game. In that regard, it could be argued that when Vonnegut introduces Billy Pilgrim with the sentence "Billy has been unstuck in time" (2000, p.18), he also refers to his condition and troubled mind.

Billy Pilgrim as a Figurative Wasteland

Among the core issues that make up the field of trauma studies are psychological trauma, how it is represented in language, and the role of memory in defining individuals and collectives. One of the forerunners of trauma studies, Sigmund Freud, found out that some people who deal with a shocking experience may continue their life as if nothing has happened up until they start to show symptoms. In Freud's words, trauma is "an accretion of excitation in the nervous system, which the latter has been unable to dispose of adequately by motor reaction" (qtd. in Kurtz, 2018, p.3). Similarly, J. Roger Kurtz defines trauma as a pathological emotional and mental state, psychological harm brought on by traumatic experiences or the fear of them, which is beyond a person's typical reaction mechanisms (2018, p.2). More eloquently, William James compares it with "a thorn in the spirit" (Kurtz, 2018, p.3), and Dominick LaCapra writes that it "creates holes in existence" (2001, p.41).

Kurtz states that most unforgettable characters in literature are "traumatized individuals whose personal pain may also be taken to represent the broader wounds of history" (2018, p.8). The protagonist of *SH5*, Billy Pilgrim, as an innocent victim of great suffering and witness of the destruction of a whole city, is an example of these traumatized individuals. Therefore, he constructs a great example of a figurative wasteland. After his traumatic experiences, Pilgrim returns to his normal life in Ilium, New York; nonetheless, in a short period, he suffers from a nervous collapse. It is revealed that Pilgrim often started to cry without any obvious reason, and he did not let others know about it. "Only the doctor knew. It was an extremely quiet thing Billy did, and not very moist" (Vonnegut, 2000, p.50). These sudden bursts could be the signs of the "holes in [Billy's] existence" in LaCapra's words. What Pilgrim experiences is a textbook *psychological trauma,* which is, in Judith Herman's phrases, "a lasting and inevitable legacy of war" (1992, p.27). Still, people, except for the doctors, thought that he was fine at the beginning, only to understand the problem after he was hospitalized: "The doctors agreed: He *was* going crazy" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 82). Even so, neither the doctors nor his family members link this collapse to the war. In reality, it had everything to do with war; however, Billy was in so much trouble that he did not even know that he was experiencing the detrimental effects of the war as a victim of post-traumatic stress disorder.

It should be noted that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a very common diagnosis among veterans and survivors of catastrophic events. Even though it is commonly believed that one has to go through a direct traumatic experience, the American Psychiatric Association makes a more critical explanation of the reasons for the disorder. According to them, one does not have to experience the traumatic events directly, witnessing them or hearing about close friends' or family members' traumatic experiences; even repeated exposure to traumatic events might cause PTSD. **(**DSM-V, 2013, p. 271). Interestingly, it is relatively new in the field of psychology. Even when Vonnegut published *SH5*, it had not been named. The fact that it was not until 1980 when Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as a medical disorder attaches more significance to the novel by linking war and trauma explicitly and, more importantly, popular in the field of literature.

John W. Aldridge writes that in postmodernism, almost "everything and everyone exists in such a radical state of distortion and aberration," and thus, it is almost impossible to determine the causes and the origins of the given condition (1983, p.140). In line with Aldridge's statement, *SH5* is a portrayal of the traumatized mind of the protagonist. Thus, the novel is written in a non-linear order, including so many ambiguities. Also, it is almost impossible to determine whether some of the details given are facts or fiction. Vonnegut refers to this issue by stating: "All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true" (2000, p.1). Similarly, Billy's state of mind could be an example of what Aldridge calls "a radical state of distortion and aberration." Although Pilgrim is portrayed as a time traveller and an abductee of aliens, it is up to the readers' interpretation to decide whether his words are trustable or they are the symptoms of his mental breakdown. This nervous collapse becomes the first of many proofs of his trauma, and Pilgrim tries to recover from his war memories by creating an alternative world in which he would not have to feel the burden. This is also evident during the period of his hospitalization. When he is hospitalized, he meets Eliot Rosewater, who also suffers from his war memories. As can be seen in the following quote, Vonnegut implies that Pilgrim's condition could be an effort to ease his pain. In their attempt to assign meaning to the things around them, "they were trying to re-invent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help" (2000, p. 82). Billy Pilgrim's alternative world is a planet called Tralfamadore, in which there are four dimensions, and time is not linear. Accordingly, the novel is not in a linear order because Pilgrim also comes unstuck in time; he goes back and forth in his lifetime, and so does the storyline. Only Pilgrim's war experience is described in a linear order yet as fragments. As well as being prevalent techniques of postmodern fiction, the non-linear plotline and fragmented style of Vonnegut in *SH5* could be intentional so that the style could reflect how war traumatized Billy and his life is not as simple as to be told in a traditional plotline.

In Billy's case, not only witnessing the trauma but also not having a chance to alter the outcome is a reason for the trauma. His inability to change the outcome causes him to become stuck in time, imprisoned in his conscience and guilt. The following quote is an indication of his despair about having no authority over what happens. When he is in Tralfamadore, he talks to Tralfamadorians about free will. These aliens experience and explain time in a very different way. One of them explains the great difference between appreciation of time and free will: "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. (…) Only on Earth is there any talk of free will" (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 70). As is clear, in Tralfamadore, free will does not exist; in reality, as claimed by the Tralfamadorians, it does not exist anywhere but the Earth, which is a relief for Pilgrim. To put it simply, by creating a world in which free will does not exist, he tries to recover himself from the guilt. Upon coming back to America, he starts experiencing symptoms that he cannot understand and explain, yet some things do not require clarification or justification. Furthermore, as free will does not exist, there was no way that the things that happened could be avoided.

For a better assessment of Pilgrim's condition, it is crucial to focus on a different aspect of

trauma: "survival guilt". Cathy Caruth considers trauma "not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (1996, p. 58). She suggests that there is a link between the death and the life and asks whether "the trauma [is] the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?*"* The question leads us to understand the enigma of survival in her theory. "At the core of these stories" she claims that there is "a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth, 1996, p.7). Considering how many times Pilgrim faces death and how he survives in each, we might argue that a deeper aspect of his trauma could be his guilt over being alive in a constant state of struggle over the issue of fate.

As discussed, Billy Pilgrim survives the war and the bombing. In another case, several optometrists rent an aircraft for an international optometrist congress. On top of a mountain, the aircraft crashes and Billy becomes the sole survivor of the accident. What's more, while he is still at hospital, his wife Barbara dies "accidentally of carbon-monoxide poisoning" on her way to the hospital to see him. (Vonnegut, 2000, p. 20). Billy is a survivor in all cases and he has to deal with the guilt of a survivor, too. As a result of his trauma and more importantly his survival guilt, he finds a way to escape from the real world and there he finds the solace he desperately seeks in the real world. As revealed in the novel, he kept a framed prayer on the wall of his workplace, which articulated his strategy for surviving despite his lack of enthusiasm for life. Many of Billy's patients told him that the prayer on his wall gave them the strength to persevere. With the prayer on the wall, Kurt Vonnegut reminds the readers once more that Billy could not cope with the remnants of the war in his fragile mind, which made him construct a planet in which time is not linear and free will does not exist, for "Among the things Billy Pilgrim could not change were the past, the present and the Future" (2000, p.50). Thus, Vonnegut's emphasis on this prayer is elucidatory.

Conclusion

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five, Or the Children's Crusade, a Duty Dance with Death* is difficult, if not impossible, to categorize and fully comprehend because it is both tough and futile to make sense of the destructions, deaths, and losses, personal and collective traumas that the world puts us into. Vonnegut uses postmodernist techniques to tell the meaninglessness and absurdity of all these. Yet, we need to understand; that we need to look back to ease the pain and suffering to be able to live even if we know that looking back would turn us into *a pillar of salt*. Literature is the way for some of us to guide us through our struggle to comprehend. Thanks to it, we dare to look back, see and know what we, human beings, put us through, and perhaps try to explore the possibilities of another life, a life in which we do not have to kill each other as the tenants of the earth. Through historiographic metafiction, Kurt Vonnegut, obviously, looks *back* just like Billy Pilgrim does. When they do that, what they see is a great city transforming into a wasteland with thousands of people buried underground. This wasteland traumatizes him and "creates a hole in [Billy's] existence," and he experiences a nervous breakdown that finally leads him to a "re-invent universe" in which he feels free from the guilt of survival. The author, himself, becomes a figurative wasteland until he finally writes the novel about his traumas.

It has been argued in this article that Vonnegut challenges the traditional boundaries between fiction and history by using metafictional elements to illustrate how individuals suffering from war trauma construct figurative wastelands, become confused and disorganized and lose the ability to

distinguish between fact and fiction. As evident from the examples given above, he achieves that by employing several tools: first, through several analogies between Dresden and several barren places like desserts, the moon, and mines, second with a non-linear plot and a hybridity of historiographic metafiction and science fiction, and finally, putting the protagonist's trauma at the center of attention. Hence, one can conclude that he puts forward several representations of literal and figurative wastelands via the experiences of both the author and the main character, Billy Pilgrim, and by so doing, Vonnegut draws a parallel between trauma, wars, and literature, showing how war itself and war-related traumas convert landscapes and people into wastelands.

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Ethical Statement / Etik Beyan: Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur. / It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.

Declaration of Conflict / Çatışma Beyanı: Çalışmada kişi ya da kurumlar arası çıkar çatışmasının olmadığı beyan olunur. / It is declared that there is no conflict of interest between individuals or institutions in the study.