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**An Existential Examination of the Postmodern
Individual in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*
(1969)**

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English Literature and civilization.

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Dedication

I would like most of all, to thank my parents and family members for their everlasting support and prayers. From where I stand, I could not possibly forget my treasured friends, and *People* who made learning a delightful journey. Moreover, I would like express my deepest gratitude to the great Mr. Allali Yousef and the elegant Mr.Choul Omar who were always there for me. Last but not least, I owe Mrs. Touhami Adi for being a source of inspiration to passionately learn all about Literature.

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Dedication

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Abstract

This dissertation undertakes an analytical approach to examine Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-five* and its depiction of the postmodern individual in an existential condition. Since most research has primarily focused on reading the novel through a thematically-based approach that has been primarily aimed at reading themes of war and existence, our dissertation seeks to situate the novel within a larger critical context that tackles different philosophical views engendered mainly from existentialism. The latter helps us understand how Vonnegut conceives of a postmodern individual's struggle within an existential condition. The complexity of Vonnegut's fictional vision drives us to focus on the experience of the protagonist Billy Pilgrim, and trace his ceaseless endeavors to liberate himself from the confinements of existential bummers. In order to demonstrate Vonnegut's intricate perception of a postmodern condition, tropes like purpose, freewill, time and predestination are to be discussed, in relation with Nietzsche's and Fankl's concepts of 'amor fati' and 'logotherapy', in order to highlight their significance in understanding the protagonist's experience.

Keywords: Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-five*, Existentialism, Postmodern individual, Amor fati, Logotherapy, Freewill, Time, Predestination.

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General introduction

The quest for meaning and finding the purpose of existence is one of the most puzzling tasks for human beings. As time goes by, the puzzle becomes even more complicated as the human civilization evolution means development in one sense but at the same time the big philosophical inquiries become more difficult to be answered. The answer cannot be attained easily for humans find it hard to accept certain realities. The human nature is one which is layered with curiosity and the inability to accept the fact that life is preordained. In this context, postmodern individual, witnessing all the evolutionary phenomena around him, becomes eager to question the reasons behind everything. The rationality of reasoning gives the individual a conviction in his ability to change anything as long as they possess freewill, but what if freewill does not exist. If so it would make perfect sense in a society that suspects every aspect and promotes for the deniability of absolute truths. Therefore, the concept of freewill had been, still and will always be a confusing enigma. The recurring problem of freewill consists of how the individual's perceptive attitude would give his life meaning, to decide whether we have the choice in shaping the course of our lives, or perhaps we are in a mere process that follows a predestined track.

Throughout history, numerous thinkers and philosophers and John Lock , Rene Descartes and others, have attempted to find answers to the dilemma of our existence. Many of their discussions were focused on discovering whether we live a purposeful life, or we dive in a sea of meaninglessness. This dialectic concern was a source of agony because of its hinged nature and the modern times with all its characteristics marked an even more obscure side of the truth. The most prominent problem lies in humans' fear of decay, and what are they in pursuit of through their life journey. The human curiosity, in this sense, may lead to unrequited questions especially

in a postmodern context that impose a larger challenge because of the complexity of the era. The quest for meaning in a detached society full of uncertainty and moral convictions even create a larger debate about existential meaninglessness. This makes us wonder what attitude is more suitable to approach our lives. It is a matter of choice where either we take acceptance as a satisfying answer to all what happens to us and surrender to the flow of the stream trying to change nothing, or we are supposed to take the initiative and lead a more of an exploratory quest to find the greater cause of being alive.

What is the paradox of freewill? This question withholds a fundamental component towards coming closer to an answer to the human attempt for finding meaning in life. There are several actions, even emotions and feelings, that a person can be in control of, and it is that what makes him believe in his ability of being in charge while other aspects in his life are already determined. Some of these aspects exist even before his birth such as biological features and some are inflicted on him with no way out like the wrath of wars. The idea of how we act is an essential feature of our thinking, and it even gives our lives its value. Having a belief in taking control of our lives gives us the impression that we can draw a perfect pathway of our meant journey. But what if the human beings are helpless creatures with no say in the decision making and action control? Finding a reasonable answer to this problem still baffles philosophers and thinkers whose different opinions swing between the two possibilities as they fail to reach an agreed answer to how human beings perceive the concept of freewill. Yet the common objective is to come up with a conclusive answer that can show whether we possess the ability of decision making and controlling how we act or not and how involved we should be controlling the actions we chose to take in a postmodern environment.

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-five* (1969) tends to reveal how the human mind questions the linearity of time in accordance to free willing a predestined conditions to reach a cogent answer to the purpose of existence. The creation of certain conditions in the novel suggests that postmodern individual can choose the way of viewing life along with challenges and hardships from one side and those moments of plain happiness from the other side. The protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, happens to become unstuck in time which makes him able to be in any moment of his life. This idea of time-loose mechanism paves the way for a discussion of free will, and how being aware of the whole course of our life would shape our reaction, and whether we are capable of reaching the ultimate answer of one's existential significance.

The paradox of freewill has long been one of the most enigmatic secrets to philosophers and scholars in the past. The postmodern version of philosophical quests makes the test of human indulgence more complicated. The attempt has been always directed to uncover the answer about the human control over actions to ultimately know whether there is a choice or is life already predestined? To answer that we need to know the most decisive quality that give the human kind its distinctiveness, and that is freewill which constructs the fundamental criteria to evaluate the worth one one's life. For some thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes¹, the idea of doing the 'otherwise' is contradicted and regarded as a pure nonsense. Yet, Hobbes didn't refuse the idea of compatibilism² as he is one of its modern inventors. For David Hume³, freewill is all about compatibilism where freewill is compatible with strict determinism, in other words, determinism

¹Thomas Hobbes is an English materialist and political philosopher best known for advocating determinism and his discussion of political and social order problem to avoid civil conflict.

²Compatibilism, or soft determinism, is philosophical doctrine suggests that determinism is compatible with human freewill i.e. freewill involves determinism to be recognized in order to achieve a connection between will and actions.

³ David Hume: the Scottish philosopher and historian best known for his influential system of philosophical empiricism, skepticism and naturalism.

is necessary for freewill to become conceivable. John Lock⁴ believed that freewill does exist but there should be some randomness involved along with unpredictable chance to achieve freewill and avoid determinism.

In this vein, *Slaughterhouse Five* seems to provide a bountiful ground to investigate the extent to which postmodern individuals value their lives in relation to time and freewill. There have been a number of works that have tackled the issue of existential significance and the quest for meaning in the novel. The thesis entitled, “An Existential Theoretical Approach to Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*” gives some interesting insights into the realm of existential comprehension of the novel as it explores the angles of the absurd, death and time. Another research that deals with a thematic analysis of the novel is “The True War Story: Ontological Reconfiguration in the War Fiction of Kurt Vonnegut and Tim O’Brien”. In this research paper, the author focuses mainly on how Vonnegut’s uses the theme of war to draw upon human condition. A different approach to read Vonnegut’s works in general is Leonard Mustazza’s 2011 book, *Critical Insights Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut. In this book, Mustazza offers multiple insights into which critical contexts and readings of the work are provided. In addition to these thematically-based analyses, reading Vonnegut’s novel as an existential text has been the focus of many scholars like Marybeth Baggett’s 2003 “Re-examining Vonnegut: Existential and Naturalistic Influences on the Author’s Work”.

However, what seems to escape these research papers is the act of contextualizing Vonnegut’s novel as a postmodern text that deals with depicting the struggle of a postmodern individual within an existential condition as his struggle is mostly accentuated by a search for

⁴John Locke: mainly known for his political philosophy, the British philosopher dealt with concepts of state of nature, political obligation and the ends of government, also discussed problems of freewill and moral responsibility.

meaning. The latter has been excessively explored in the writings of Victor Frankl⁵ who is credited by the introduction of ‘Logotherapy⁶’ to the realm of existentialism. Therefore, the significance of our research lies in reading the novel through the lens of Frankl’s existential concept as it provides a perfect theoretical lens to understand the protagonist’s experience.

Moreover, the analysis of time theme along with death inevitability seems also to skip the interest of the aforementioned researches. According to Vonnegut’s fictional vision, *human beings’* interest in finding the purpose of their existence can be understood as a challenging task to satisfy curiosity, and all what they have to do according to the German philosopher Schopenhauer⁷, is to be aware of events that have double quality. The first quality is the inner moral necessity, and the second is purely external caused by accidental factors. As long as these events are frequently perceived in a rational version there would be a better conclusion of fact facing.

Moreover, there is a consensus among philosophers that says time is one way trip, and it's also known to be continuous because of its unpredictable course. Yet no one knows for sure whether it is endless or finite, and that what gives time the luxury of being a deterrent factor in having a certain mindset and how much we can rely on the past or expect the future. All this can help us better understand the value of human experiences in relevance to a postmodern time. The latter seems to constitute an essential element in Vonnegut’s novel as time and its relation with freewill help readers understand postmodern individuals embodied in the character of Billy Pilgrim. So, our research problem focuses on how reading Vonnegut’s protagonist Billy Pilgrim,

⁵ Viktor Frankl: Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, the founder of Logotherapy.

⁶Logotherapy: an existential concept which holds that the primary motivational force of an individual is to find a meaning in life.

as a postmodern individual, through an existentialist lens help us understand Vonnegut's vision and depiction of an existential postmodern condition.

Hence, the current dissertation seeks to read and understand Vonnegut's fictional depiction of a postmodern individual in an existential condition. To fulfill this objective a number of research questions are set forward:

- In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, how does Kurt Vonnegut depict the postmodern individual in an existential condition?
- Why is Existentialism regarded as the best philosophical context to read Vonnegut's work?
- How does the novel provide an examination of a postmodern individual in an existential condition, through the main character Billy Pilgrim?

This dissertation assumes a number of hypotheses in an attempt to provide different answers related to the scope of the research questions. So, our research aims at highlighting that:

- Through Kurt Vonnegut's use of concepts like time, freewill and preordained, a new vision of the postmodern existential condition is suggested.
- Exploring a variety of existential philosophical insights belonging to different philosophers like, Hobbes, Locke, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche offers our study a rich context to relate the significance of many philosophical concepts with Vonnegut's novel.
- The experience of the novel's protagonist, Billy Pilgrim appears to represent a strong embodiment and reflection of a postmodern individual in an existential condition.

Therefore, our dissertation undertakes an analytical approach to reading Kurt Vonnegut's novel this approach allows us explore the significance of different philosophical insights, related

to existentialism, in reading Vonnegut's text. Furthermore, the work will be divided into three main chapters and each chapter corresponds to a research question. The first chapter presents the theoretical chapter in which some relevant concepts of existential philosophy will be introduced and explained. The second chapter shows an analytical inquiry of the main themes of the novel to investigate a critical version of existential significance in a postmodern context. The third chapter, however, will include the analyses and findings of this research in relation to Billy Pilgrim's life and experience and comparing it to human condition in a postmodern sense.

Chapter 1: Existentialism as a Theoretical Context

Introduction

From the beginning of time, Philosophers presented a helpful and fundamental rule in peoples' lives. They were considered as the doctors who had cures to all soul's illnesses. One of the troubles that sickened the human since their birth is finding a meaning to their lives and the purpose of existence. The individual was and still is looking for answers to why he exists, and what is the purpose of being alive. These questions baffled ancient philosophers as well as modern ones. Philosophers like Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Husserl tackled the issue from different perspectives and tried to come up with an answer to the dilemma of existence especially in a postmodern setting.

I.1. The Philosophy of Existentialism

Existential sphere came to light to discuss the lost identity of western societies. The search was aimed at finding a liberating alternative that can cover the flaws of Enlightenment values and the fall of belief in religious system. The quest for meaning became more important with the emergence of the postmodern era. People wanted to escape their fake reality and find a hope worth living for.

I.1.1. Postmodern Individual and the Predicament of Truth

Postmodernism as a philosophy denies the existence of any objective truths. An idea of skepticism marked the different forms of postmodern are in general and especially literature as the wave of questioning everything invaded the literary field. This was a reaction to the values of modernism that only brought the misfortunes of war and loss of identity and faith. Postmodernism aim was to investigate and treat the injured western individual or what was left of him, because after the war there was a huge gap in the cultural and the social heritage. The

major concern of postmodernism was reassuring individuals to pursue the subjective quest for truth and since there were no absolute truths anymore, it was even more complex. Finding a meaning in this huge mess and confusion was slightly motivating factor that kept the quest moving, and it was meaning that could get the truth realized and life is re-newed. Between doubting everything and the urge to find the subjective truth, Postmodernism is a free choice of conducting an isolated exploration that begins with one's self and ends up with uncovering the truth.

I.1.2. What is Existentialism?

Existentialism is a philosophical movement which tackles the dilemma of existence and its value and meaning for humans. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre defines it as, " A doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human subjectivity. "(Sartre 32).

It is the study that questions what is to be alive. Existentialism rejects traditional answers concerning the meaning and value of human life. It opposes religious systems that provide partial answers to the question of being. Existentialists argue that the way of living your life is independent from any anticipated answers. Another definition of existentialism states,

A more technical definition of existentialism reveals the reason for its name. Existentialism is the study of *existence*. If you take existence to be everything that exist— such as chairs and tables, people and llamas — all philosophy, science, and religion would seem to have the same subject. But existentialism isn't the study of everything *that* exists; it's the study of *existence* itself — the study of what it means for something to exist at all as opposed to not existing. It's also the study of what it means for *something*, as opposed to *nothing*, to exist at all. Of

course, the primary focus of existentialism is a particular kind of existence, the kind of existence that includes existing things like you, because you're aware of your existence and capable of questioning it. (Panza& Gale 13)

I.1.3. The Factors that Gave Rise to Existentialism

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, many changes occurred in European societies effecting living conditions, economy, working conditions, and social class systems. These effects of the Industrial Revolution altered tremendously the psychological states of individuals. People encountered new living style which changed their way of perceiving life. They were used to a simple way of living, living in a simple house, having a simple job, and owning a simple and small farm. All of the sudden, their simple lifestyle was turned into more complex one. The rise of cities was one of the most permanent features of Industrial Revolution. The shift from countryside life to urban one contributed deeply in changing the perceptions of one's life. This era was labeled by unusual phenomena such as Child Labor, bad working conditions, poor public health and low life expectancy. These drawbacks of Industrial Revolution constructed the individual's way of thinking, as the complexity of the new life gave a pessimistic anticipation of life. People started questioning why they exist in this harsh world and how to cope with the hardships of their existence in order to satisfy their curiosity.

I.1.4. Irrationality of Existentialism

Ancient philosophers of the enlightenment period claim that they have found a solution to every problem. The reflection of this was expressed in what is called the Metanarratives in Literature, a Metanarrative is defined as, "is a narrative *about* narratives of historical meaning, experience, or knowledge, which offers a society legitimation through the anticipated completion of a (as yet unrealized) master idea." (Lyotard 29)

Modern philosophers like Nietzsche and Sartre beg to differ that each individual is a unique case with unique conditions and circumstances. Therefore, each case should be tackled depending on the given situation. They argue that the human experience is unique and there is no practical book or story that can guarantee a common solution to all individuals. In addition, they tend to mistrust and doubt those grand-narratives which claim having covered most of dilemmas of individuals.

I.2. Conceptualizing Existentialism Through Different Philosophical Insights

A number of philosophical insights are to be considered in order to provide a suitable context to read Vonnegut's novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Since our primary aim is to read the text as an existentialist depiction of a postmodern world, we seek to demonstrate a range of germane philosophies that are thought to be of high significance in conceptualizing the work as existentialist.

I.2.1. Fredrick Nietzsche and the Death of God

It is hard to tackle existential issues or postmodern works without mentioning Nietzsche. His influence is spread worldwide, and many writers and thinkers were, and still are influenced by his ideas. He is the father of Nihilism; there is no full and ultimate meaning to all existence.

"While few philosophers would claim to be nihilists, nihilism is most often associated with Friedrich Nietzsche who argued that its corrosive effects would eventually destroy all moral, religious, and metaphysical convictions and precipitate the greatest crisis in human history."(Pratt 2019).

One of his main ideas is portrayed in the next words, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What

was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"(Nietzsche 94). This means that God is irrelevant to the society. He insists that what gives life its meaninglessness is the absence of god, in the sense of Western societies lacking values and moral codes. Also, he sees that humans live only once and they should strive to make the best of it.

I.2.2. Jean-Paul Sartre

Jean-Paul Sartre was a French philosopher who wrote immensely about existentialism and attempted to provide some answers to many existential questions.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) took the traditional existential themes and injected a renewed emphasis upon the meaning and importance of human freedom. Although *Being and Nothingness* is a landmark book...What Sartre did better than any previous writer was make existentialism accessible to all people to whom it was supposedly relevant. One of the ways he did this was through the continual dialogue he engaged in with other important movements, including Christianity and Marxism. Sartre was very much a public figure involved not only in philosophy, but also in politics, the arts, and literature"(Panza& Gale 19)

Sartre believes that Existence precedes essence. He sees that we are first born and then life will determine our essence. He also shares Kierkegaard's view of that the human experience is unique and should not be generalized. Moreover, he believes that human beings are forced to create themselves.

I.2.3. Albert Camus

A French-Algerian Philosopher, Albert Camus's writings presents a solid ground for existential views and philosophies.

The French gave existentialism street credit with their novelizations and dramatizations, which conveyed existential themes through vivid and concrete characters in memorable and emotionally charged stories. The greatest of these, which is still read widely today, is easily Camus's *The Stranger*. It's required reading in countless high school and college lit courses, as well as just a darned good book. Perhaps no single work by any existentialist has reached more people directly. A tale of absurdity, death, and coming to grips with the meaning of one's existence, it packs much of the philosopher's beliefs about life into a tight, easily digestible package.(Panza& Gale 20)

Camus believes that the human life is meaningless for human beings are just suffering and struggling without any hope or achievement. He also argues that life is absurd unless we link it to a goal or value and be committed to it. Camus rejected religion entirely and considered it as the source of all soul's illnesses.

I.2.4. Viktor Emil Frankl: Introducing Logotherapy

Viktor Frankl, Austrian psychiatrist and psychotherapist (born March 26, 1905, Vienna, Austria—died Sept. 2, 1997, Vienna), developed the psychological approach known as logotherapy, widely recognized as the "third school" of Viennese psychotherapy after the "first school" of Sigmund Freud and the "second school" of Alfred Adler. The basis of Frankl's theory was that the primary motivation of an individual is the search for meaning in life and that

the primary purpose of psychotherapy should be to help the individual find that meaning. As a teenager he entered into a correspondence with Freud, who asked permission to publish one of his papers. After graduating from the University of Vienna Medical School in 1930, Frankl joined the staff of the Am Steinh of psychiatric hospital in Vienna. By 1938 he had become chief of neurology at Vienna's Rothschild Hospital. Anti-Semitism was on the rise, however, and in 1942 Frankl and his family were sent to the concentration camps, where his mother, father, and wife perished. As he observed the brutality and degradation around him, Frankl theorized that those inmates who had some meaning in their lives were more likely to survive. Following liberation, Frankl returned to Vienna, where he became head of the neurological department at the Polyclinic Hospital. He also produced the classic book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), which he dictated to a team of assistants in nine days and which went on to sell some nine million copies in 26 languages. Frankl also taught at the University of Vienna until 1990 and held chairs at a number of American universities. A few months before his death, he published *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning and Recollections: An Autobiography*. (Sparks 2019).

Frankl's work was mainly based on his survival from the haulaucost, an incident that completely changed his life and formed the grounds on which his existential study of tragedy came to the surface. He learnt to extract the meaning from the suffering, a concept that relies on an existential analysis of the human condition.

I.3. Exploring Miscellaneous Concepts of Existentialism

I.3.1. Amor Fati

Amor fati—the love of fate—is one of many Nietzschean terms which seem to point towards a positive ethics, but which appear infrequently and are seldom defined. On a traditional understanding, Nietzsche is asking us to love whatever it is that happens to have happened to us—including (and perhaps especially) all sorts of horrible things.(Stern 145)

One of Nietzsche's intriguing ideas is Amor Fati, translated from Latin as a love of one's fate. In other words, it is an enthusiastic acceptance of everything that happens in life. According to Nietzsche, one must not regret the past but rather have gratitude towards the good and the bad and especially the moments of suffering. In his book, *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes,

I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer. (Nietzsche276)

In this quote, it is clear that " it is hard to ignore Nietzsche's enthusiasm, or perhaps more precisely, his sense of resolve. His words are aspirational—affirmative – indicative of a new lease of life" (Hulbert Smith 77). Nietzsche shows that by loving fate and accepting it, people would not suffer nor they would have to be sad as they make peace with whatever is coming to them.

I.3.2. Absurdity

"If one could say just once: 'this is clear,' all would be saved"(Camus27)

Absurdity in its basic sense means the extremely unreasonable, yet, for Albert Camus absurdity as a philosophical quest is searching for meaning in a meaningless world." The world itself is not unreasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart."(Camus). For Camus, absurdity consists of two elements: an irrational world (the confrontation of the irrational), and the individual who is trying hard to make it rational (the wild longing for clarity). This results in a quest for meaning in a meaningless life. This contradiction may show his belief that life has no significant meaning whatsoever; he wonders, what is the point of living a life that could never have meaning? For instance he claims that if god exists how come there are so many pain and suffering in the world, this notion, Camus believes, makes the existence of god even more absurd. Like Nietzsche, Camus saw that intrinsic meaning is missing in this world, and he found the solution in embracing the absurd to its fullest rather than hiding in the illusion of religion and romantic fantasies.

I.3.3. Sartre's Existentialism

Jean-Paul Sartre is considered to be one of the most influential philosophers of all time. As an existentialist, Sartre wrote about freedom, he says "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. It is up to you to give life a meaning."(Sartre29) or what he calls "The Anguish of Freedom". He believes that all humans are free once they become self-aware of their states, where they were born and how is beyond their control. He argues that existence precedes essence, that is to say that it is only when we exist and make choices in our lives it is then we can

find the essence of them. Like the other existentialists, he believes that there is no rule to be followed in order to live a better life; he strongly opposes the rational thinking of the enlightenment era. This, he argues, what give our freedom a tormenting taste. We are free but we do not know what the right thing to do is or how to react correctly. So humans are in constant anguish as long as they are free.

I.3.4. Logotherapy

Logotherapy is a doctrine coined by the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl. It is based on the basis that the primarily driving force of an individual is finding meaning in life. This concept relies on existential analysis of being. It mainly relies on Kierkegaard's will to meaning which opposes both Nietzschean will to power and Freudian will to pleasure. "A sense of personal life-meaning is critical to Logotherapy, and Man's Search for Meaning is a prime example of how people may reduce despair in severe circumstances by incorporating personal meaning through attitudes, experiences, and behaviors."(Schulenburg, Hutzell, et al 477) The secret of existence for Frankl is within the human urge to find meaning and in order to achieve that goal three essential principles have to be made. First life always has a meaning under any circumstances even in the most miserable ones which implies that life must go on whatever the cost is because life withholds a greater meaning in all its forms. Second principle is that humans' real motivational fuel in life is finding a meaning; this shows how Frankl's most vital purpose is to look for a meaning that gives our lives a purpose. The third and final principle is that a person possesses a certain freedom to find meaning through his actions and experiences even if those experiences held a lot circumstantial hardships, and it is that attitude towards the unchangeable suffering that determine one's free choice of finding meaning even in the bitter moments of life. In his book Man's Search for Meaning, he writes, "Everything

can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."(Frankl 69). In other words we can find a meaning for life either by creating a work or doing a deed or by experiencing a thing or encountering a person or by the attitude we hold when we face unavoidable suffering. Thus, Frankl insists that finding a meaning is a subjective matter that relies mainly on each person's unique experience, and if one is under harsh circumstances beyond his will, the least he could do is choose his attitude towards those moments of suffering and no force could dictate what attitude he should take.

Conclusion

The existential perspective of measuring the value of life and uncovering the truth of reality is related to the individual's meaningful understanding of all physical, mental and spiritual facets of being. Existentialists tend to focus on acquiring knowledge by studying the postmodern individual as an isolated case to fulfill the subjectivity, for a single case has unique characteristics with unique circumstances. Finding a meaning that can be a primary motivation that drives the human being gives him an ability to realize a degree of self-satisfaction through the journey of life, a life full of complex concepts such as: free will, fate, essence and the absurd. Having the freedom to seek meaning is a right for every person longing for salvation in a miserable life condemned with fixed tragedies beyond human reach. The attitude we choose to perceive life package determines our purpose which makes us understand the sake of our existence.

Chapter Two: Existential Reading to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Introduction

Kurt Vonnegut is the kind of a writer who makes his readers astonished with his way of writing style, unexpected events and characters, plotless stories, and shapes of stories. *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or *The Children's Crusade*, is no exception as it is abundant with crucial themes and characters. Themes like free will, absurdity, warfare, time and eternal recurrence, morality and ethics, and death. Tralfamadorians, the inhabitant of Tralfamadore, abducted Billy Pilgrim and taught him about their philosophy, literature, and their perception of some notions like free will, death, and time.

II.1. Themes of Existentialism in the novel

Reading the novel through the lens of existentialist philosophy proves pertinent to explore different notions like, fate, freewill, absurdity, inevitability of death among many others and their significance in the novel. So, analyzing how Vonnegut's fictional work absorb all these notions in an existential context, help us better understand his fictional project's main aim that is directed at rendering a true picture of postmodern individual's reaction to an existential condition.

II.1.1 Fate and Freewill

Kurt Vonnegut uses the themes of fate and freewill to develop his story. When Billy Pilgrim, the novel's protagonist, was in the flying saucer heading to Tralfamadore, he has a perspicuous conversation with a Tralfamadorian. Billy wondered if the Tralfamadorians believe in free will,

"You sound to me as though you don't believe in freewill." said Billy pilgrim.

"If I haven't spent so much time studying Earthlings," said the Tralfamadorian, "I wouldn't have any idea what was meant by freewill. I've visited thirty-one inhabited planets in the universe, I have studied reports on one hundred more; only on Earth is there any talk of freewill." (Vonnegut 105)

In this context, Vonnegut's argument against the concept of freewill is portrayed in the Tralfamadorians' understanding of it. His strong implication of the preordained is reflected by the aliens' view of freewill. Tralfamadorians have the ability to experience reality in four dimensions, which means that they have access to the past, present, and future at the same time. They know exactly how future events are going to occur including the destruction of Earth, yet they deliberately chose not to prevent it. They strongly believe in Fatalism which is a doctrine that implies that destiny dominates all of the human choices and actions. Billy Pilgrim adopted their philosophy when he came back to Earth. This philosophy contradicts Sartre's perception of free will as he argues, "man is condemned to be free." (Sartre 29). Nicole Diroff explains this quote as follows,

One of the key ideas of existentialism is that everything is a choice. There is no "he made me do it" or "it wasn't my fault because I had no other option." Every action you make is a result of you consciously choosing to do so, which to some is a daunting thought. Because you are a completely free human being, you must accept the fact that your choices define you as a person. Sartre argued that it is only human nature to shy away from this huge responsibility, however if you do so, you are behaving in bad faith. You must accept the responsibility that you are free to make any choice you desire. Therefore, once you have made that choice

you are now condemned by the consequences of that choice. This is the horror of true freedom. (Diroff2015)

It is obviously clear that Sartre's interpretation opposes what Tralfamadorians had taught Billy about freewill. they believe that fates are sealed and there is nothing much to do to alter the course of life but rather accept the structure of destiny as it is, while Sartre believes firmly that a human being is always in a free choice of making decisions and actions, thus he would always possess freedom to face the anguish of being free.

Yet another incident took place and elaborated the notion of free will in the novel, showing how growing up contributed in structuring Billy's belief system,

Little Billy was terrified, because his father had said Billy was going to learn to swim by the method of sink-or-swim. His father was going to throw Billy into the deep end, and Billy was going to damn well swim.

It was like an execution. Billy was numb as his father carried him from the shower room to the pool. His eyes were closed, he was on the bottom of the pool, and there was beautiful music everywhere. He lost consciousness but the music went on. He dimly sensed that somebody was rescuing him. Billy resented that. (Vonnegut 53)

Going back to Billy's childhood, he was accustomed to have no saying on what he would love to do. His father made the choice to teach him swimming against his will, and it is that kind of experiences that would make the difference and build Billy's belief about the idea of choice and free will. He came to see that he has no chance to choose what he wants, and everything one way or another is out of his willpower. Even his participation in war was completely out of the

blue since he was neither a war enthusiast nor did he possess the qualities of a soldier, moreover he got the exact opposite of what he really wanted, a simple life with a good job and satisfactory career as an optometrist. The idea of following passage from the novel could closely show how free will notion seemed to Billy,

"Saved your life again, you dumb bastard," Weary said to Billy in the ditch.

He had been saving Billy's life for days, cursing him, kicking him, slapping him, making him move. It was absolutely necessary that cruelty be used, because Billy wouldn't do anything to save himself. Billy wanted to quit. He was cold, hungry, embarrassed, incompetent. He could scarcely distinguish between sleep and wakefulness now, on the third day, found no important differences, either, between walking and standing still. He wished everybody would leave him alone."

You guys go on without me." He said again and again.(Vonnegut 41)

II.1.2 Absurdity

Since *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a novel that tackles mainly the firebombing of Dresden, and generally World War II, it is normal to see the author using the theme of absurdity as people really felt and realized the absurdity of life because of the horrors they suffered from in the World Wars. In the fourth chapter, and while being transported to Tralfamadore, this conversation occurred between Billy Pilgrim and a speaker:

"Welcome aboard Mr. Pilgrim" said the loudspeaker. "Any questions?"

Billy licked his lips, thought a while, inquired a last: " why me?"

"That is a very *Earthling* question to ask, Mr. Pilgrim. Why *you*? Why *us* for that matter? Why *anything*? Because this moment simply *is*. Have you ever seen bugs trapped in amber?"

"Yes"

"Well, here we are, Mr. Pilgrim, trapped in the amber of this moment. There is no *why*"(Vonnegut 93)

In this conversation, there is a strong indication of the absurd where it is suggested that humans should accept life as it is for there is no meaning to it. According to the Tralfamadorians' perception of existence, humans should live the moment without asking questions because there is no benefit in questioning the preordained, and that how absurd the idea of possessing freewill is in the novel.

The theme of absurdity is present yet another time in the novel where Billy had a baffling conversation with Tralfamadorians,

"Would - would you mind telling me -" he said to the guide, much deflated, "what was so stupid about that?"

"We know how the Universe ends-" said the guide, "and Earth has nothing to do with it, except that it gets wiped out, too."

"How - how does the Universe end?" said Billy.

"We blow it up, experimenting with new fuels for our flying saucers. A Tralfamadorian test pilot presses a starter button, and the whole Universe disappears." So it goes."

"If you know this," said Billy, "isn't there some way you can prevent it? Can't you keep the pilot from pressing the button?"

"He has always pressed it, and he always will. We always let him, and we always will let him. The moment is structured that way."

"So," said Billy gropingly, » I suppose that the idea of, preventing war on Earth is stupid, too."(Vonnegut143)

Billy encounters the absurd as he learned how the earth is going to be wiped out by the Tralfamadorians, and he learnt how to cope and accept it. The Tralfamadorians convinced him that preventing war on earth is inescapable. Billy's recognition of determinism forces him into an absurd state where he fails to perceive meaning in a world in which he has no control." (Johnson 106)

II.1.3 Warfare

The novel is often considered as an anti-war novel since it is merely discussing the destructive power of war, and to what extent it can influence lives and opinions. Billy was no exception; the firebombing of Dresden played quite the role in shifting his perspective of life as a whole. Kurt Vonnegut's attempt to show the immense catastrophes of war is clear in the first chapter when he addresses Sam, the publisher of his book, talking about war,

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?*" (Vonnegut 23).

For Vonnegut, war only brought death and sorrow, and his own real experience in World War Two made him even more sensitive to war and its horrors. He claimed the novel to be poorly structured in the sense of chronological order, but in the same time this detail served the purpose of saying that the war was so terrible that a witness wouldn't be able to tell the story in its original order which is irrelevant in this case. The author wanted to make sure that his reaction to warfare was known and well received. In the novel he expresses, through Billy Pilgrim, his feelings about the horrors he lived and that was nothing more terrifying or worse than the dark memories buried in his mind. He also believes that wars are ridiculous, and it is all about fake pride and delusional possession of power. The narrator even taught his children to be anti-war, and to neither support nor participate in any future wars.

When Vonnegut was visiting his war buddy, O'Hare, he was so confused by the manners of O'Hare's wife, Mary. She seemed too angry and did not let them sit and have a peaceful conversation.

Then she turned to me, let me see how angry she was, and that the anger was for me. She had been talking to herself, so what she said was a fragment of a much larger conversation. «you were just *babies* then!” she said

“what” I said

“You were just babies in the war—like the ones upstairs!”

“...I--- I don't know,” I said.

“Well, *I* know.” she said. “You'll pretend you were men instead of babies, and you'll be played in movies by Frank Sinatra and John Wayne or some of those other glamorous, war-loving, dirty old men. And war will look just wonderful...

So then I understood. It was war that made her so angry. She didn't want her babies or anybody else's babies killed in wars. And she thought wars were partly encouraged by books and movies." (Vonnegut 18)

And then Vonnegut clearly states that his book will not be used to encourage wars at all, Moreover, the passage shows the terrors of war which families suffered from because of wars. Mary and Vonnegut would become friends after this fruitful and intense conversation,

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 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.'"(Vonnegut 18)

II.1.4. The Inevitability of Death

The theme of death is strongly present throughout the whole novel. The protagonist came to face death several times. The repetition of the phrase "so it goes" which is the Tralfamadorian version of commenting after any mentioning of death suggests the inevitability of death.

Not only does "so it goes" communicate his awareness of the equality of all deaths, whether 135,000 at one time or just one, it also expresses the futility he suffers when he tries to convey his feelings about any death. The Dresden experience forced home to Vonnegut the truth that appropriate responses to death do not exist. His use of the silly phrase "so it goes" make us realize not only that death is everywhere and final but also that we can do nothing about it. (Mustazza 122)

Likewise Billy agrees with the alien perspective of death, and since he came so close to death especially during the war he made such a great candidate to grasp that death is unavoidable in such circumstances. Billy Pilgrim knew exactly how and when he is going to die "I, Billy Pilgrim, the tape begins, will die, have died, and always will die on February thirteenth, 1976."(Vonnegut 173) as he can travel backwards and forwards in time, yet he was not scared. He did not even do anything thing to prevent it from happening. He faced it happily because he believes that death is inevitable.

II.1.5 Time and Non-Linearity

Kurt Vonnegut uses the theme of time enormously in his novel as it is an essential part in shaping his story. He uses the notion of time unusually as he adopts the Tralfamadorian perception of time.

The time would not pass. Somebody was playing with the clocks, and not only the electronic clocks but the wind-up kind too. The second hand on my watch would twitch once, and a year would pass, and then it would twitch again. There was nothing I could do about it. As an Earthling I had to believe whatever clocks said -and calendars. (Vonnegut 25)

Billy used to pay attention and care about time. Yet, since the time he was abducted by the Tralfamadorians, he has come to disregard the importance of time as he can now be in any moment he pleases. Sooner or later I go to bed, and my wife asks me what time it is. She always has to know what the time. Sometimes I don't know, and I say "Search me." (Vonnegut9)

The protagonist is unstuck in time, which means he can be in any moment he chooses. The non-linearity of time helps Billy Pilgrim understanding and experiencing many things. Billy saw a movie about World War II backwards,

A movie about American fliers in World War II is on TV and it rewinds in his head as he waits. The formation flew backwards over a German city that was inflames. The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires, gathered them into cylindrical steel containers, and lifted the containers into the bellies of the planes. The containers were stored neatly in racks. The Germans below had miraculous devices of their own, which were long steel tubes. They used them to suck more fragments from the crewmen and planes. But there were still a few wounded Americans, though, and some of the bombers were in bad repair. Over France, though, German fighters came up again, made everything and everybody as good as new. The bombs were returned to the United States, transformed into minerals and buried, “so they would never hurt anybody ever again. «The pilots handed in their uniforms and went back to high school. Soon everyone in this veteran’s impossible dream of wholeness—even Hitler—was a baby again. (Sumner 142)

Kurt Vonnegut tries to convey a very significant message to all of us about wars using the technique of non-linearity of time. He draws a clear picture about the world without wars. By describing the scene backwards, he makes his readers feel the value of the human life and raises awareness of the importance of peace.

II.2. Tralfamadorian Philosophy

The following subtitles seek to demonstrate how Vonnegut uses Tralfamadorian philosophy as a medium to convey his own critique of postmodern condition through a philosophical lens. Through his depiction of certain elements like literature and time, Vonnegut provides readers with characteristics of Tralfamadorian philosophy that happens to say much about his vision of a postmodern world.

II.2.1. Tralfamadorian Literature

Kurt Vonnegut represents Tralfamadorian literature in his novel and show how different and exact it is compared to ours. When Billy was in the Flying saucer, he asked if he can have a book to read. The speaker told him that there were only Tralfamadorian novels which Billy could not even begin to understand. Billy wondered what are they and about the way they are constructed. The speaker answered,

Billy couldn't read Tralfamadorian, of course, but he could at least see how books were laid out--- in brief clumps of symbols separated by stars. Billy commented that the clumps might be telegrams.

“Exactly,” said the voice.

“They are telegrams?”

“They are no telegrams on Tralfamadore, But you're right: each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message-describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn't any particular relationship between all 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.”(Vonnegut 107)

It is in this sense that his novel is different from those of the Tralfamadorians described above. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is not made of 'many marvelous moments seen at one time' like Tralfamadorian books, and it is essential that it is not read as such because the order in which the reader perceives the events of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is significant.(Cordle175)

Kurt Vonnegut shows that literature should be direct and purposeful as the Tralfamadorians. He criticizes our literature to be boring sometimes, and other times aimless. He sees that the main purpose of a story is to leave an permanent impression on its readers, and the focus of human literature should be more on making all events of the story with the same degree of importance.

II.2.2 Tralfamadorian Time

The non-chronological time along with the Tralfamadorians gave the novel its science fiction nature. The main character Billy Pilgrim becomes unstuck in time after his encounter with the alien creatures. He has the ability to travel in time, where he can reach several moments of his life either in the past, present, or the future,

The essence of being *unstuck in time*, after all, is the idea of fragmentation, doubleness, multiplicity—the sense of floating from one moment to another and back again, regardless of circumstances and without much control. Billy is the child soldier, a frightened neophyte, as young Vonnegut was in 1944 and 1945.

(Sumner 135)

This kind of time perception is what Tralfamadorians call the fourth dimension of experiencing reality and humans are unable to reach such perspectives for they only see life in a three-dimension feed.

The most important thing I learned in Tralfamadore was that when a person dies he only appears to die. He is still very much alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral. All moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever.(Vonnegut 32)

The new belief Billy acquired is acceptance of one's fate. He has seen his death several times, the aliens told him about the end of universe, how and when exactly it is going to happen, yet they also convince him that they cannot do anything to prevent it and for them that was the best possible option. Moreover, the discussion of free will seems alienated or human, to that sense, to Tralfamadorians as the only species believe in the concepts are human beings. The struggle for people like Billy is to have a say concerning his choices, throughout the main events of the novel Billy seems to have no free will at all starting from childhood experiences with his father's technique to teach him swimming passing by his unwanted involvement in the war and reaching the point of alien abduction. Both the author and Billy came to consider free will as illusionary idea, and that one is always trapped within the concise limits of fate or the preordained.

Conclusion

Kurt Vonnegut's style and the adoption of Tralfamadorian literary convictions contributed in a smooth transition of the main themes and ideas. All what matters to Vonnegut is to come up with a new shape of a story to tell it uniquely, a story that confused the author himself with such ambiguity should certainly hold a lot of thematic insinuations. Unlike the conventional writing styles, Vonnegut sought unusual plot development through his non-chronological order of events with all the flashbacks and flash-forwards and fragmentation of Billy's life. The ideas of Vonnegut about war, time, the absurd, death and free will brought the novel to the use of science fiction as the discussion of such concepts need a completely different approach to be delivered. In addition, Vonnegut shows clearly that wars are the primary source of humans' sadness and sorrows, he, intentionally, demonstrates his disapproval of warfare of any kind. *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or *The Children's Crusade* remains one of the novels which are rich with themes, and it is considered as a perfect novel for performing an existential thematic analyses on.

Chapter3: Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*: A Depiction of the Postmodern Individual in an Existential Condition.

Introduction

The current chapter offers a new critical reading to Kurt Vonnegut's novel, *Slaughterhouse-five*, as it seeks to examine the novel's main character, Billy Pilgrim, who represents a powerful materialization of postmodern individual under existential conditions. The adventures of Billy throughout the development of events insinuate a lifetime journey that would provoke the individual's desire to find meaning. The wandering and wondering of the protagonist makes him in a pilgrimage towards salvation. His war experience along with being unstuck in time suggest the author's symbolization of Billy Pilgrim as an anti-war argument, as well as an example of individuals' postmodern conditioning towards understanding the core of their existence in accordance with the choices they make. Therefore, the author assured to create an unusual protagonist exploring his essence and existence to discuss his views of war, death, time, freewill and finding meaning.

III.1. The Life Journey of Billy Pilgrim: The Postmodern Individual as a Subject of Existential Examination

The postmodern era is known as one of the most controversial periods in western culture in particular for it witnessed a lot of wars and loss of identity. The novel in general can be tackled as a good case study to trace and identify the different factors that can shape the identity of a postmodern individual. World Wars are vital components to better explore the psyche of the confused individuals." Because of World War II, people are physically and mentally injured or dead. Law is reversed. The cosmic system is compared with the bird's voice indicating

nothingness" (Arefin 20). Kurt Vonnegut seems to employ his personal experience in the novel since he shares the exact same war experience with the novel's protagonist Billy Pilgrim. The firebombing of Dresden is a major incident that Vonnegut depended on to explain the complexity of individual's personality, because it affected his personality due to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) he suffered from after the war. For instance, the author wrote about a similar case that depicted the war experience he witnessed. He wrote about Céline, a brave French soldier in World War I,

... Until his skull was cracked. After that he couldn't sleep, and there were noises in his head. He became a doctor, and he treated poor people in the daytime, and he wrote Grotesque novels all night. No art is possible without a dance with death. (Vonnegut 25).

Here Vonnegut shows that the horrors of war can last long after they end causing significant mental health issues, which in the case of Billy resulted in PTSD.

An anti-war book might lay the primary understanding of western societies' most influential factors that shape their identities. In addition, the peripheral factor can be embodied in the fictional part of the novel, where the author attempted to trigger more of a philosophical measurement of some profound aspects of the human character that can be seen beyond the reach of normal human beings. Postmodern individual is often seen as lost and misled, Vonnegut for instance demonstrates his opposition to the enlightenment values which inflicted knowledge to all problems, he says,

I think about my education sometimes. I went to the University of Chicago for a while after the Second World War. I was a student in the Department of

Anthropology. At that time, they were teaching that there was absolutely no difference between anybody. They may be teaching that still.(Vonnegut 9)

Vonnegut tried to reflect his own confusion to come to terms with the reasons behind the formation of a lost identity. A great example is Billy Pilgrim, a very simple man who found himself at first fighting a war he is not willing to participate in and secondly being abducted by alien creatures and having super normal ability of time traveling. The issue for Billy is that he always setting his mind on what way best to lead this new baffling life, he knew the exact details of his future and revisited his past. And because of his human instinct, he had to wonder at first if there is any chance to modify the course of events, but later on he found that his destiny is unalterable. Again Vonnegut tries to put some fictitious elements to reconcile himself as well as Billy and accept that his experience at war was necessary.

The dilemma that kept exhausting both the author and his protagonist started to fade away as soon as they started to believe that life is constructed on having the benefit of the good moments, and that bad experiences are more than necessary to find a profound understanding of one's soul for it is all a spiritual journey after all. According to Vonnegut's fictional vision, postmodern individual would definitely encounter a lot of psychological pressure either because of war or societal complications, yet the prescription of happiness and finding meaning is closer than people might think it would be. The answer always can be deduced from the overcoming hardships and trying to find serenity in the preordained.

III.2. Billy as a Pilgrim

The main character of the novel was intentionally employed as a symbolizing model of a pilgrim, a pilgrim that seeks understanding and salvation. The adventures throughout the development of the story imply an alternation in the protagonist's personality whenever a new experience occurs, thus a new feature is added to his personality that would change his perception of ideas and concepts of life."...*The Pilgrim's Progress* is a dream allegory where Christian takes a book in his hand and the Book, the Bible, guides him in the search of the truth. Dream vision is a medieval literary genre, defining journeys to heaven and hell." (Arefin 22). Like the Christians, Billy travelled back and forth in time in order to search for the truth and he certainly faced some heavenly and hellish decisive moments. Billy's expedition to find the truth is the story of a simple usual man going through unusual events gradually gives the outcome of a unique man with certain unique views of reality.

III.2.1. Symbolism of Depicting the Protagonist as an Optometrist

Billy Pilgrim works as an optometrist, a person who helps others see better and clearer. He started comparing his patients with Tralfamadorians in order to help them better see the truth,

He was doing nothing less now, he thought, then prescribing corrective lenses for Earthling souls. So many of those souls were lost and wretched, Billy believed, because they could not see as well as his little green friends on Tralfamadore. (Vonnegut 36)

Accordingly, Kurt Vonnegut's aim is to depict Billy as a symbol of guidance; his role in the novel is helping others figure out their purpose in life, how to make choices and more

importantly how to accept those choices with full conviction. Kamareddine commented on that by saying,

The fact that Billy Pilgrim is an optometrist and as such is in charge of fixing people's "vision" is symbolic of the fact that this character, through his war experiences and his time travel, his having become "unstuck in time", can give others a glimpse into what life is really about. As an optometrist, Pilgrim is able to literally enhance other's vision and make them see more clearly. (Kamareddine2011)

Billy was not so enthusiastic about the fact of living in general, for he knew the future and what was going to happen exactly, but he attempted to comfort the others and give them hope of or for surviving and carrying on. The fake prayer on his wall might not mean a lot to him, but it helped many of his patients get a dose of encouragement and consolidation, and it goes like this,

GOD GRANT ME
 THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT
 THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE
 COURAGE
 TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN
 AND WISDOM ALWAYS
 TO TELL THE
 DIFFERENCE.(Vonnegut 74)

As Alex Kamareddine explains it in his article, Going in depth with *Slaughterhouse-Five*,

The prayer on the wall of Billy Pilgrim's optometry office which is the same as the prayer written on Montana Wildhack's locket symbolizes the human condition and how humans must conform and accept this condition in the face of life's uncertainties. (Kamareddine 2011)

This quote echoes the whole idea of symbolizing Billy as a single case study that can apply to all other individuals. Vonnegut tries to make a point by presenting evidence of one's reconciliation with fate.

III.2.2. Billy's Pilgrimage to The Past and The Future

Billy becomes unstuck in time; he has the ability to travel back and forth in time. Visiting the past and the future triggers confusion within Billy's mind, knowing what would happen with the exact details cause him exhaustion as does going back to experience the previous events. For Billy, time has no order anymore, not the one before his abduction anyway, everything seems to be disturbing and mixed up. Time lost its chronology as Billy sees it from the Tralfamadorian perspective, and he learnt that time is one entity as he explains how things work in Tralfamadore, "All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist." (Vonnegut 32) The pilgrimage to space and back to earth not only made Billy unstuck in time, it made him realize hidden clues to lead a better life. One clue Billy learned from the Tralfamadorians was focusing more on the bright side of life, and it's those moments of joy would definitely be enough to carry on living optimistically as Vonnegut's words were,

If Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadorians is true, that we will all live forever, no matter how dead we may sometimes seem to be, I am not overjoyed.

Still if I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I'm grateful that so many of those moments are nice. (Vonnegut 255).

Acceptance of fate was another clue. The Tralfamadorian philosophy denies the existence of free will. The following conversation took place as Billy met the Tralfamadorians for the first time,

"Welcome aboard Mr. Pilgrim" said the loudspeaker. "Any questions?"

Billy licked his lips, thought a while, inquired a last: " why me?"

"That is a very *Earthling* question to ask, Mr. Pilgrim. Why *you*? Why *us* for that matter? Why *anything*? Because this moment simply *is*. Have you ever seen bugs trapped in amber?"

"Yes"

"Well, here we are, Mr. Pilgrim, trapped in the amber of this moment. There is no *why*" (Vonnegut 93)

This conversation implies that unlike humans there is no such thing as free choice for the Tralfamadorians as everything should follow a predetermined course and although they are fully aware of future events they choose not to do anything to change it, and even more ironically they don't even want to ask the question why as everything happens is accepted peacefully and unconditionally. Furthermore, Nicole Diroff gave an extra interpretation to the quote above,

Kurt Vonnegut was truly a master of the absurd. He pointed out the absurd nature of life and threw it in our faces. The result: beautiful humor. This quote is from one of his most famous pieces of literature, *Slaughter-five Five*. In this novel, the protagonist Billy Pilgrim gets taken to the planet of Tralfamadore and gets placed into a zoo by the Tralfamadorians. Billy asks why he is the one who is chosen but

does not receive an answer. As the Tralfamadorians state, there is no reason why Billy is the chosen human; he just is. Humans as a whole like to believe that there is a greater meaning to everything but that is not necessarily always the case. If this is true, that means that there is no such thing as fate and that the maps of our lives do not exist yet. They may simply just be written as we live." (Diroff2015)

The paradox of free will to Billy became more relevant as he adopted the Tralfamadorian version of perceiving freewill as a less important, all what matters is living the moment even if he lived for eternity.

III.3. The Protagonist's Perception of an Existential Reality

Serenity can be considered as Billy's main finding and the most appropriate and effective way to see the bigger picture of reality. The importance of making peace with one's fate and deliberately choosing to adapt with circumstances rather than challenge them guide Billy to shape a conclusive attitude towards leading a better life. The approach of the protagonist after gaining his supernatural time travel ability arrives to its most natural condition which is acceptance .Ironically, he was simply in need for the human serenity within to overcome tragedies of his life, and naturally reach a certain degree of salvation.

III.3.1. Nietzsche's Amor Fati as mirrored in Billy Pilgrim

My formula for greatness in a human being is *Amor Fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendacity in the face of what is necessary—but *love* it. (Nietzsche 94)

Amor Fati, a love for one's fate in Latin, is a concept coined by Fredrick Nietzsche which means the acceptance of the good and the bad, and the gratitude one must have towards his destiny. The idea of Nietzsche here is to contemplate the course of events, and surrender to fate in order to reach peaceful standpoint with oneself and move on rather than wishing things could have happened differently. Billy, through his adventures after being unstuck in time and witnessing war horrors, came to reflect the same attitude especially when he finished writing his war book; he made a truce with himself not to look back anymore. The quest for purposefulness can be tricky and confusing, so the common enthusiastic point between Nietzsche's philosophy and the protagonist is to surrender to plans of fate and embrace good and bad moments focusing more on the good moments of one's life in order to move on and liberate the soul. Furthermore, one must not only accept but love all moments as necessary instead of trying to avoid them because they are outside of our control.

III.3.2 Frankl's Logotherapy Principles Reflected in Billy's Approach of Living

There are three main principles have to be met in Logotherapy for Frankl. The character of Billy Pilgrim is a mere representation of what the principles of Logotherapy stand for. The first principle highlighted by Frankl is that life has a meaning under all circumstances, for Billy he came to strongly believe that the events of his life, either the good ones or the unpleasant ones, held a significant meaning because of the Tralfamadorian's preaching about how all moments exist at once and how one must acknowledge the meaning of those events for life to move on. Frankl's second principle is that our main motivation for living is our will to find meaning in life which is clearly shown in the novel where Billy's is off to initiate a quest looking for answers of why he was chosen to be abducted by the alien creatures in the first place, and what outcome he could get after having the ability to wonder all moments of his life. He came to

realize that his life was a conquest towards finding the purpose of living with such challenges and circumstances. Frankl's third principle, most importantly, is that one has the freedom to find meaning in what we do, and what we experience, and the least we could do is choosing what attitude should we take when we face the moments of unchangeable suffering. The reflection of this principle is portrayed in Billy's attitude towards the upcoming events of his life, though he knows all what is going to happen beforehand, he simply chooses to accept those events, especially the unpleasant ones, with an open chest. The core of this principle is that man could lose every will to be free yet he would never lose the way he reacts to suffering, it is always his choice. That is exactly the notion both Frankl and Vonnegut wanted to deliver as they both survived a horrifying incidents during World War II, that life has a meaning even in its lower forms of freedom and suffering.

III.3.3 The Protagonist's Sartrean Quest for the Authenticity of Being

The intriguing factor that kept Billy going is his crave of an authentic way of living. He wanted to discover the consequences of choice making and whether free will is a grace or a curse. Realizing that a meaningless life could surprisingly hold any authentic concepts is a hard task for Billy to grasp, he goes through a preordained journey that mixes his entire feelings and consequently made him lose hope to find purpose of living at all. However, the author emphasized this point by making his protagonist able to detect the most important moments and appreciate them, and to make him realize that the real truth of perceiving life lies within him as the following words of Vonnegut suggest, "How nice—to feel nothing, and still get full credit for being alive." (Vonnegut 129). This idea could be related to Sartre's views of freedom, he describes being free as being awfully misfortune as he states, "man is condemned to be free" (Sartre 29). Yet, Sartre insists that any given meaning to life is profoundly extracted from

the individual himself. That is how Kurt Vonnegut tries to portray his protagonist's longing for understanding and knowledge, a quest for discovering authenticity of existence that begins with own self exploration and solid inner awareness of essence.

III.3.4.The Inevitability and Evitability of Events: An Exploration of Freewill and Free-won't

The protagonist of the novel struggles to make his mind between the inevitability of fate and the probability of Evitability to change the course of events. For instance, the phrase "so it goes" appears around 100 times in the novel, a big number expressing the accepting attitude towards each and every death occurrence to emphasize its inevitability as shown in the following passage,

Humans do not have the capability to see al moments and are restricted to the cruelty of chronology; thus the phrase "so it goes" implies the idea that life moves regardless of death. Vonnegut's repetition of the words, told in the unsympathetic tone of the narrator, suggests the insignificance of death. (Johnson 108)

From one side, the Tralfamadorian's view taught him that his fate is sealed and he must follow the natural arrangement of fate with a certain belief that everything is ought to happen in that way and that order. From the other side his human nature urges him to question the course of events and whether he is able to change them since he could already know the exact outcome after being unstuck in time. This dilemma in fact reflects the philosophical concept of freewill paradox portrayed in the character of Billy, he struggles to understand the characteristics of free will since he came to see things more differently. Billy seems at first extremely confused, people start calling him insane because of his alien abduction story here cites. He wanders why *he* and the reply of aliens was that he must ask no questions and take what comes in his way as it is.

Knowing the whole events of his life constitute the biggest existential confusion, he has to travel back and forth in time and experience everything all over again. The author himself mirrors his personal experience through Billy and how confused the war had made him. When looking to the whole thing Billy comes inevitably to represent the quest of western individual to find the essence of his existence and how puzzling the dependability of freewill could be. The protagonist comes at the end of the novel to make peace with himself and his preordained fate for he comes to believe in compatibilism which means that determinism is crucial and necessary for freewill to exist. Moreover, the factor of acceptance could construct the basic ground of living life enthusiastically and commemorating only the good sides of life in order to move on and find purpose.

III.3.5. The Significance of Science Fiction in Slaughterhouse Five

Science fiction is a very significant tool that labeled Vonnegut's work. Slaughterhouse Five was no exception as it was constructed on a fictional incident as the author managed to use aliens and time-travelling to better express his beliefs and ideas about time, war, freewill, and death. The new thing about this novel was that Vonnegut's work came to be recognized as serious one, and discussing complex realities such as wars and their effects on the human mind and personality.

When Billy Pilgrim was in the hospital, he met Eliot Rosewater who introduced him to science fiction; particularly Kilgore Trout's novels. Trout became Billy's favorite author. Billy and Rosewater read only science fiction books as they both found life meaningless mainly because of war. So "They were trying to re-invent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help."(Vonnegut 123) Rosewater was a heavy drinker and he resorted to science fiction to help him forget and create his own reality. Trout's novels were Billy's tools with which he

could construct his new postwar reality. This reality could be a figment of Billy's imagination constructed on Trout's novels that might gave the whole idea of Tralfamadorians, who became an integral part of Billy's life for they taught him the best way to live and to deal with things in general. Moreover, The Englishmen who were prisoners of war used to entertain each other by performing a musical version of Cinderella. They did so because they wanted to escape their reality which was full of blood and screams of despair and live in a fictional world where they can laugh, have fun, and find satisfaction. Furthermore, Vonnegut uses Trout's fictional stories about Jesus. He mentioned Jesus many times in the novel inquiring about many things. Did Jesus die on the cross or he died after they took him off the cross. Was Jesus really an honest man? Or was he nobody. Was Jesus killed on the cross he and his father built? Vonnegut implied Trout's Jesus stories to insure religion in his readers' hearts and to strengthen their fates since he has noticed that God is no more relevant to the society. Vonnegut's aim was a kind of escaping plan from reality to picture a better version of life, he was self-involved in the quest for relief from all the horrors and disappointments of life. The use of fictional elements in the novel didn't only help Billy find a shelter to heal his wounds and to clear a memory full of suffering, but it was also a mean of salvation for the author himself to create a place where he could explore further possibilities and match them with the cruel reality. The author's confusion about war, meaning and even religion was being tested for he wanted to treat reality with fantasy, it was not that easy but at the end the fictional implementations of the novel brought a partial relief towards recognizing the real truth about the cruel reality.

III.3.6. Billy Pilgrim's Existential Experience between Reality and Illusion

The odds of looking into Billy's mental state as a delusional hallucination or as a traumatic postwar effect cannot be neglected. The whole alien abduction matter could simply be a delusional fantasy within Billy's mind only. The chance of that happening might slightly doubt the outcome of acceptance and peacemaking with the predestined, but it can't affect the whole concept delivered by the author himself because the idea of finding a purposeful life is nonetheless valid even if the setting of story is imaginary.

If what Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadorians is true, that we will all live forever, no matter how dead we may sometimes seem to be, I am not overjoyed. Still—if I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I'm grateful that so many of those moments are nice. (Vonnegut 255)

The 'if' suggests that Vonnegut was not precise on whether Billy actually met the Tralfamadorians or was it a pure illusion of his mind. He opted more to be optimistic since it gives him access to the best moments of his life.

Kurt Vonnegut tended to keep the mystery taking place about whether Billy's ability to travel back and forth in time was real or a matter of mental illusion. The latter possibility could definitely bring a theoretical change to the concept of purposefulness of individual's being. If Billy is insane and just made up the whole story of time traveling and his visit to Tralfamadore, this can give a sense of untrustworthiness to Billy's approach of his post-war life. His daughter

Barbara backed-up this possibility since she strongly suspected her father's state of mind throughout the whole novel as the following conversation shows,

Father, Father, Father— said Barbara, what are we going to *do* with you? Are you going to force us to put you where your mother is? Billy's mother was still alive. She was in an old people's home called Pine Knole on the edge of Ilium.

What is it about my letter that makes you so mad? Billy wanted to know.

It is all just crazy. None of its true!

It's all true, Billy's anger was not going to rise with hers. He never got mad at anything. He was wonderful that way.

There is no such planet as Tralfamadore.

It can't be detected from earth, if that's what you mean, said Billy, Earth can't be detected from Tralfamadore, as far as that goes. They're both very small. They're very far apart.

Where did you get a crazy name like Tralfamadore?

That's what the creatures who live ether *call* it.

Oh God, said Barbara, and she turned her back on him. She celebrated frustration by clapping her hands. May I ask you a simple question?

Of course.

Why is it you never mentioned any of this before the airplane crash?

I didn't think that time was *ripe*.(Vonnegut 36)

Barbara represented the element of reason as she doubted her father's story about Tralfamadore. She kept treating him like a child, and she was really confused about the way to deal with him.

The attempt behind keeping both possibilities standing is to eventually describe how confusing and messy thoughts are in Billy's head. His unrealistic imagination represents an ulterior motive trying to figure out how to live with his cruel past, and how to anticipate the future even if it was predictable.

Moreover, the author's perplexing use of imagination reflects his stylistic touch to attract more attention to the complexity of Billy's mindset as well as himself and which significantly reflects the author's depiction of a postmodern psyche. Consequently, the protagonist is either being delusional or he really encountered a supernatural experience, in both cases, the outcome would always serve the same goal, which is finding a purpose.

Conclusion

The protagonist's character analysis brings many conclusions to the light as he represents the core of the novel. Billy Pilgrim shows how the author brings out the fruitful results from an uncomplicated character in a complicated setting. Results like the Tralfamadorian speaker once said to Billy when they were aboard the flying saucer heading to Tralfamadore, "That's one thing Earthlings might learn to do. If they tried hard enough: Ignore the awful times, and concentrate on the good ones." (Vonnegut 144). Moreover, they strongly advised him to stare only at pretty things as eternity failed to go by. If he manages to do so, he will not be sad at all as he accepted his fate, loved it, and cherished it. The intention of Kurt Vonnegut goes around one main finding which is does life have a meaning? And what is the best possible way to deal with it?

The discussion of freedom whilst making decisions is portrayed in Billy's tolerant attitude towards his fate, which was picked up from the Tralfamadorians. He simply surrenders to the preordained and chooses not to intervene with fate's plans. This serenity shows how much Billy had learned from the crucial experiences of his life, and how mature one could get. Additionally, the protagonist signifies a model or a sample of human individual in a difficult postmodern environment, and how the awareness of that individual grows into more wise and rational fashion. The author also tends to demonstrate that free will is partial and even if the future is well known, there are some events that must take place and even essential to maintain a meaningful life, as Sartre put it that man is condemned to be free. By being totally free, Sartre argues, man is sad and must have some things in his life which he doesn't have any power to alter. He also wants to show that hardships are a part of the package if one is looking for salvation; it is simply a matter of associating bad moments with good ones focusing more on learning from the former ones and enjoying the latter.

General Conclusion

One of the humans' most extraordinary traits is the curiosity to fulfill their starvation for knowledge. We ask, interact, communicate, hypothesize, and resort to science and religion to acquire a deeper understanding view of universe and our place in it. But that does not guarantee an answer to all our questions. The pursuit of happiness is accompanied with a deeper quest, a search for a purpose.

What would bring meaning to our lives? We stumble facing the increasing complicated possibilities that often characterize by contradiction and confusion. This would bleed our brain's energy causing it an irritating itch to find the answer. Yet what matters for the most part, is not a conclusive answer but rather the state of awareness to find a meaning of life. One must be free from all comparisons and be who he really is in the best possible version. The problem that we are victims of our own ideas, and we should be certain that there is a power responsible for happiness faced by a power in charge of misery; no one knows which overcomes the other, so we ought to differentiate the two. Thus, we have to stay away from imaginative standpoint of life, and a wiser choice would be accepting what we see and reject what we think and not vice versa. Furthermore, we pray the answer outside ourselves thinking that would accomplish our striving physical, intellectual and moral needs but the problem is that we fail to notice that the gift within ourselves is what really counts. We should, hence, shift our expeditions of the external world into a more of internal quest of ourselves. What we need and want has always been within us, and the truth lies in our hands only if we could choose to see beyond our doubts and fears. The answers by then would seem so fulfilling and convincing, and it is that sort of inner peace that may make us disregard our yearning for answers at all. May be the purpose of life is simply a life free from concern.

Slaughterhouse-five offers an unusual attempt to evaluate postmodern individual from an existential perspective. The critical exploration of the protagonist character lay out the multiple manifestations of what Kurt Vonnegut intended to deliver. Billy Pilgrim, the unusual hero who leads an expedition to discover himself and reflects the author's ideas about universal truths and meaning. In a postmodern context, it would never be easy to distinguish the illusive routine of reality, and the truth is a subjective fulfillment for each individual's recovery and escape. The quest of meaning in a preordained life can be a real tough task to finish. Postmodern context demands a certain approach to tackle the particularity of individuals in relation to existential exploration.

The protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, presents the prototype of an unusual hero being in an adventurous journey that would ultimately turn him into a symbol of an existential significance. Serenity and acceptance were the pure rewarding outcomes of Billy's life experience as soon as he learnt how to play the game of destiny and get a chance to practice freewill in a severe turn of events. Being chosen randomly as it seems to be at first, came to be the first lesson Billy had acquired from his encounter with the Tralfamadorians. In this sense freewill throughout the events of the novel is dimly portrayed by Vonnegut as he tried to show the limitation of human freewill especially in a cruel postmodern world. The postmodern environment suggests the cruelty created by humans causing immense tragedies, in the case of *Slaughterhouse-five* war. The war was a major card played by Vonnegut to emphasize the preordained fate that awaits postmodern individuals, a fate governed by higher power that weakens human freewill. Furthermore, the notion of freewill in the novel totally contradicts with the innate human instincts which are naturally reflected in a push for curiosity to find a place in life and seek meaning. The arrogance of the human being makes

him refuse to pacifically acknowledge the preordained and chooses questioning everything until a satisfying answer is acquired. This is how Billy represents the innate long for knowledge before his abduction by the aliens, after that the notion of freewill started to lose its glamorous connotation and that fate claimed the leading role in giving life its essence.

The pilgrimage of the protagonist altered the perspective of life for Billy and comforted Vonnegut's confused feelings of war. Both of them escaped reality by resorting to science fiction. It gave them a refuge from reality and they used their imagination to figure out the solution to the problem of freewill. Moreover, the notion of time in the novel echoes the honest opinion of Vonnegut as he considers time a less serving factor in the pursuit of meaning. Even though when Billy had the chance to glimpse eternity, time is professed as one entity that lacks order and has less priority. The postmodern environment suggests the relativity of time according to the individual's gratification and suffering. Consequently, impermanence and entropy represent the transcript from which human beings extract their notion of time. It is the enthusiastic aptitude to deal with the notion of time that matters the most. As life happens for us and to us, the prescription of happiness can be summed up by trying to defy the ephemeral nature of the blissful moments of life as if extending them forever.

The ultimate result obtained by analyzing Billy's character is that freewill goes in hand with predestination and that is the core concept of compatibilism. The human freedom is not absolute as some randomness is strictly involved in the course of events, while time relevance swings between the two, having a greater appreciation when things go according to plan, and being resented and cursed when fate execute its plans. Vonnegut's portrayal of the protagonist throughout the story fabricate a genuine insight into individuals mindset, their

adaptation skills are remarkable as they learn how to accept the bitterness of life to carry on living. The postmodern individual arrives to adopt the Tralfamadorian perspective and starts to believe in a tolerant attitude to all moments of life, and identify that cost as a sacrifice rewarded by finding a purpose in life; it is those everlasting moments of joy in their memories which count the most.

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