



To Tell Trauma: Billy’s Time Travel in *Slaughterhouse-Five*

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Abstract

Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* depicts a story where its male protagonist Billy has come unstuck in time and therefore travels back and forth between the past, the present, and the future and even been hijacked to an alien planet called Tralfamadore. However, under the disguise of such a sci-fi fantasy, the author Vonnegut deliberately leaves readers many hints that Billy’s time-travel experience is less a scientific fantasy than a traumatic narrative. Therefore, this article aims to explore how Vonnegut manages to make use of this time-travel story to convey the messages about Billy’s post-traumatic stress disorder and the two major causes of his traumatic experiences, and then to figure out why this master take painstaking efforts to choose this scientific time-travel story instead of conveying the traumatic elements much more directly. After the detailed analysis, a more sympathetic understanding of how badly the crucial war as well as the alienation among people can impact one’s psychological condition can be reached.

Key words: Time travel; Traumatic narrative; Post-traumatic stress disorder; Causes; Kurt Vonnegut

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Kurt Vonnegut has always been considered as one of the most influential postmodern writers in the United States. And the publish of *Slaughterhouse-Five* has helped, to a great extent, Vonnegut consolidating his position in

literary world. On first reading, it is easy to regard this novel as a science fiction in regard to its time-travel plots. However, one observant reader might gradually get a feeling that the more one read, the more one would feel that this masterpiece is more than a science fiction adventure. There is something hidden deep inside under the disguise of the scientific elements. In fact, to borrow from David Wittenberg’s point of view in *Time Travel: The Popular Philosophy of Narrative*, “time travel stories are examples or depictions of narratological or philosophical issues”, they are in essence “narrative machines” (David, 2013). In other words, an artist might consciously use this kind of genre to extend to narrative or other aspects. Consequently, it is natural to wonder what Vonnegut intends to convey through Billy’s time-travel plots.

It is safe to say that the author’s personal life experience would always be one of the most important factors which could have a compound influence on the writer’s creative ideas. In his whole life, particular attention should be paid on Vonnegut’s war experience, and especially his experience during the fire-bombing of Dresden, one of history’s most notorious crime. During this crucial and inhumane “massacre”, nearly two thousand innocent civilians have been murdered under the bomb attacks, though precise number of dead is still not known. Since then, Kurt Vonnegut himself has been struggling to depict his wartime experience in his works. As a matter of fact, Billy’s personal experience during World War II has been described over and over again in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and his strange behaviors can be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). After completing this work, Vonnegut himself has even claimed that writing *Slaughterhouse-Five* “was a therapeutic thing. I’m a different person now” (Richard, 1971). In consequence, we might have reasons to assume that this novel might, partially, created by Vonnegut to depict trauma and to heal his wound.

In a word, this article aims to unveil the traumatic narrative and traumatic causes hidden behind the time-travel story as well as to figure out how well this scientific story could depict the traumatic world.

BILLY'S TIME TRAVEL: TO DEPICT TRAUMA

At the beginning of the second chapter, Billy is said to be "unstuck in time". He travels back and forth between the past, the present and the future through his time travel. These startling trips return Billy to many incredibly painful moments.

The first time Bill came "unstuck in time" was in 1944, when he was a chaplain's assistant in World War Two. And one day when Billy stopped in the forest, he somehow returned to a scary moment when he, a little boy, was thrown into a pool by his father and found himself on the bottom of the pool and lost conscious. Like Billy said, "it was like an execution" (*Slaughterhouse-five*, p.44). Later, he traveled back to 1965, when he happened to see "the body of an old man covered by a sheet" (45) while visiting his elderly mother at an old people's home. And then he returned to one night in 1961, when he was drunk and cheated on his wife Valencia for the first time. Then, through time travel, he went back to the exact day when he was kidnapped by aliens to Tralfamadore, a totally strange planet. And in chapter 9, Billy traveled back to his wife's funeral. And through his time travel, he continuously returned back to his wartime life, especially the Dresden bombing, which murdered more than 130000 people. Consequently, it is safe to say that the spot Billy traveled back to is where his heart got broken. It seems like that Billy's time travel experience is not something pleasant, but something hurtful. Just like the implied author claimed, "Billy is spastic in time, he has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren't necessarily fun" and Billy "is in a constant state of fright" (23). That is to say, Billy is somehow forced to repeatedly experience the painful moments of his past, and continued to suffer from his past.

It is safe to say that this masterpiece certainly contains stylistic elements characteristic of science fiction, given that the "time travel" and "aliens" are involved. However, if we read this novel more carefully, we might find it far too quickly to consider this work merely as a scientific fantasy since we could find out many deliberate clues left by the author himself. In order to lead readers to suspect the authenticity of time travel, Vonnegut employs many narrative techniques such as the metafiction, indirect speech and some other hints.

Metafiction refers to a new kind of novel in which the narrator goes beyond the shackles of the narrative text of the novel, often interrupting the continuity of the narrative structure and directly commenting on the narrative itself.

This leads to the fusion of narrative discourse and critical discourse. And one important technique of metafiction is the appearance of the author. In the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the implied author has just appeared on stage. "All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true. One guy I knew really was shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his." (1) And this implied author admits that this novel is "a failure". If the implied author can only acknowledge the truth of the war parts, then those parts such as Billy's magic time travel might just be a story made up by the implied author himself. And the author has joined in some plots of this novel he aims to narrate. In the third chapter, in the description of Billy's wartime period, the implied author suddenly shows up. He says "I was there. So was my old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare" (67). When readers are about to indulge themselves into Billy's wartime experience, he just comes out of nowhere and reminds readers that those fascinating stories might be inauthentic. Besides, the implied author once mentions that "the second hand on my watch would twitch once, and a year would pass, and then it would twitch again" (20). And we can observe a similar description of Billy's distorted personal time: "he could be on Tralfamadore for years, and still be away from Earth for only a microsecond" (26). In other words, the implied author also undergoes a weird experience where his personal time seems to be distorted, just as what happens in Billy. Readers might doubt whether Billy is the avatar of the implied author since they are very similar at this point. And since no one's personal time in real life can pass that way, the implied author might experience a psychological disorder, and so does Billy.

Secondly, it is worthy to notice that Vonnegut also uses indirect speech to deconstruct the credibility of Billy's time-travel story. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*(1988), Leo Spitzer says: "When we reproduce in our own speech a portion of our partner's utterance, then by virtue of the very change in speakers a change in tone inevitably occurs: the words of 'the other person' always sound on our lips like something alien to us, and often have an intonation of ridicule, exaggeration, or mockery" (72). In *Slaughterhouse-five*, in the description of Billy's fascinating time travel, the use of indirect speech often jumps into reader's eyes, reminding readers that the time-travel story might be the gossip, given that the story might be intentionally narrated with exaggeration or tempering. For example, "Billy says that he first came unstuck in time in 1944, long before his trip to Tralfamadore." (30) If the indirect speech "he said" is not employed in the narration of Billy's time-travel, readers will be more willing to believe that Billy's adventure is true. After all, although time travel is unlikely to happen in real life, readers will still believe in the rationality of its existence in the fictional world. However, in *Slaughterhouse-five*, Billy's time travel is indirectly spoken, which makes readers

doubt the authenticity of Billy's time travel: Is Billy really taking time travel?

Apart from what has been mentioned above, there are many other hints left by Vonnegut to imply that whatever Billy sees on Tralfamadore can be traced back to what Billy has already observed on the earth. In fact, Vonnegut leaves many hints to suggest that the Tralfamadoreans could not exist. For example, Billy's friend Rosewater once introduces to Billy a science fiction called *The Gospel from Outer Space*. This book tells a story about "a visitor from outer space", and the alien "shaped very much like a Tralfamadorean" (108). What's more, just before Billy goes on a radio talk show to spread the Tralfamadorean's time theory, Billy Pilgrim bumps into a scientific novel in a porno shop:

The name of the book was *The Big Board*. He got a few paragraphs into it, and then realized that he had read it before—years ago, in the veterans' hospital. It was about an Earthling man and woman who were kidnapped by extra-terrestrials. They were put on display on a planet called Zircon-212 (201).

The same story happens on Tralfamadore. It is also about an Earthling man and woman who were abducted by aliens and exhibited at the zoo. The scenario of Billy's adventure on an alien planet seemingly is something less than original. Billy's fantasy of a time-travel adventure might be derived from Kilgore Trout's science fictions.

In addition, those Tralfamadoreans have something in common with German guards who brutalize Billy during the Second World War. The Tralfamadoreans keep Billy in a small zoo where Billy's life is restricted and his every move is monitored by these aliens. And during World War II, Billy is also kidnapped and then monitored by some German soldiers. And there is no chance for a successful escape from Tralfamadore given the distance between the earth and the alien planet. Neither can Billy escape from those German guards. At the zoo on Tralfamadore, he is forced to be naked for the advantage of the Tralfamadoreans to study his body. Similarly, at a delousing station on the earth, one German guard commands Billy to take off all his clothes. Then, "Billy did as he was told, took off his clothes" (p.83) and becomes totally naked just as he is on Tralfamadore. He admits that "That was the first thing they told him to do on Tralfamadore" (83). When Billy Pilgrim asks one of his alien kidnapers, "Why me?", the Tralfamadoreans simply reply, "Why you? Why us for that matter? Why anything?" (76-77). Similarly, one of Billy's fellow prisoners is tortured by a German guard. The prisoner asks, "Why me?" And the soldier speaks the same words: "Vy you? Vy anybody?" (91).

Therefore, having found out all those deliberate evidences mentioned above, it is hard for readers to believe that Billy Pilgrim really has the ability to travel in time and space even in a fictional world. Then, the major question haunts us would be what Kurt Vonnegut really want to express under the disguise of the time-travel story.

In fact, if readers have mastered some basic knowledge about trauma theory, we could find that In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy shows many symptoms similar to the performance of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

First and for most, the most obvious symptom lies in how trauma impacts memory. As Leys (2000) claims, "it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As the result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness" (Leys 2). That is to say that trauma has great damages on people's minds and impairs one's ability to recall those hurtful traumatic events from their minds. In the opening pages of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the implied author expresses his difficulty in finding accurate words to report what he has seen in Dresden:

When I got home from the Second World War twenty-three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. ...But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then—not enough of them to make a book, anyway. (2)

Contrary to his initial anticipation, it is not that easy to report what he has witnessed in Dresden, given his exposure to trauma. We should notice that the implied author himself has joined in the second world war and survived from the Dresden bombing. Being a witness of these events, he, beyond all doubt, has gained a lot of unique experience, so the reason why a qualified author finds it hard to use words to describe the Dresden bombing might be the traumatic aftermath which impairs his memory.

Secondly, if one suffers from trauma, one major PTSD would be "flashback", which means that patients would flash back to the scenes of their traumatic events through frequent dreams, and would be compelled to relive the pain of the traumatic events. As Cathy Caruth mentions in *Unclaimed Experience*, those traumatic experience "returns to haunt the survivor later on". (Caruth, 4) In this novel, we can see that at his childhood, Billy almost died when he was forcibly thrown into the water by his father in order to learn how to swim. At the age of 12, while visiting the steep Grand Canyon, Billy's mother deliberately touched him and then Billy was scared to wet his pants. At the age of 22, Billy was captured by the German army and transported to the city of Dresden, where he survived after the bombing of Dresden. At the age of 26, he married an ugly woman called Valencia, which was one of the reasons for his later mental breakdown. Those traumatic events just flashback to his mind and leave Billy in the traumatic scenes where he has to reexperience those horrifying events over and over again.

What's more, there are many other kinds of symptoms of trauma which can be observed in the protagonist Billy. We can see that he has a hard time focusing since

he falls asleep in his office while examining a female patient. Billy often gets depressed. For example, seeing two cripples working a racket would bring about his depression. And, "every so often, for no apparent reason, Billy Pilgrim would find himself weeping" (53). His memory has apparently declined for he couldn't remember neither his age nor what year it is. He always counts on a vibrator called "Magic Fingers" to help him fall asleep. And not to mention that his relationship with his family is cold as if they were totally strangers. In summary, his attention disorder, depressing, selective amnesia, insomnia, as well as alienation are all consistent with having undergone trauma.

WAR AND ALIENATION: CAUSES OF BILLY'S TRAUMA

The second part of this paper draws the conclusion that under the disguise of the fascinating time-travel plots, what Vonnegut really wants to express is trauma. And after picking out the post-traumatic disorder happened in both Vonnegut and his protagonist Billy, this section aims to explore the causes of Billy's trauma.

In the first chapter, the implied author admits that this book *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a "war book" and tells us how he goes through much suffering to write down something about the city of Dresden. In a word, what happened in the second world war and especially in Dresden triggers Vonnegut's desire to create this masterpiece. In fact, the Dresden bombing is one of the most notorious massacres in the world. Vonnegut adds into his novel many texts unveiling the truth of this dark history. One text just confirms that "the bombing of Dresden was a great tragedy none can deny" (187). This bombing is brutal and inhumane, for at that time, "V-1's and V-2's were at the very time falling on England, killing civilian men, women, and children indiscriminately" (187).

What is the aftermath after the Dresden bombing? Sadly, "135000 people died as the result of an air attack with conventional weapons" (188). "the sky was black with smoke. The sun was an angry little pinhead. Dresden was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighborhood was dead." (178) We can see that after the Dresden bombing, thousands of innocent people have been murdered, and the civilized city has been ruined too. And Billy happens to be there and witness the horrifying scene.

On that night the city Dresden is ruined, Billy is in an underground storage cellar of the slaughterhouse five, and survive in the bombing. However, only several Americans and four guardians as well as Billy hide in the underground cellar. Other people just vanish after the bombing, including those people Billy uses to know in the city. After the bombing, Billy is sent to dig out those dead bodies in Dresden, and soon "there were hundreds of

corpse mines operating by and by" (214). And what Billy sees in the mine is absolutely disgusting, because "then the bodies rotted and liquefied" (214), and later one of his companions dies of the dry heaves. Though Billy's inner thoughts are described only by the sentence "so it goes", he, without all doubt, must be traumatized, otherwise Billy would not try so hard to persuade the Tralfamadorians to stop the war. In front of those Tralfamadorians, Billy accuses human beings of all those ruthless behaviors during wartime. In his words, he comes from "a planet that has been engaged in senseless slaughter since the beginning of time", and then he lists some cruel crimes he has witnessed during wartime, and he expresses that he wants to know the secret of the peace on Tralfamadore so he can take it back to Earth and save all the people (116).

Billy suffers from trauma not wholly because of what he has experienced during the war. In this novel, the doctors claim that "They didn't think it had anything to do with the war" (100), though this diagnose is not totally right, they still convey a message that there is something else which also leads to the protagonist's final mental collapse.

It is widely acknowledged that dreams sometimes can reveal our subconsciousness. Therefore, Billy's weird dream about giraffes surely deserves our attention. During his morphine dream in the hospital, Billy dreams of giraffes. Since Billy is a giraffe too, "the giraffes accepted Billy as one of their own, as a harmless creature as preposterously specialized as themselves. Two approached him from opposite sides, leaned against him. They had long, muscular upper lips which they could shape like the bells of bugles. They kissed him with these." (99) This scene shows Billy is eager to be loved and accepted as he is. Readers might guess that Billy might suffers from some loneliness in his life and that could be one of the reasons why he suffers the trauma.

Let's first take a glance at Billy's connections with his parents. "Little Billy was terrified, 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." (32) While this event could come from almost anyone's childhood, Vonnegut's comparison of it to an execution is worthy of our particular attention. In addition, when it comes to the Grand Canyon, no portrayal of the love between his mother and Billy could be read between the lines. Having found out Billy's fear of dropping from the cliff, his mother deliberately touches him and makes his frightened son wet his pants. When she visits Billy in the veterans' hospital, Billy feels uncomfortable. In fact, he "always covered his head when his mother came to see him in the mental ward - always got much sicker until she went away" (102). What upsets Billy? Is it because of her ugly appearance or rude behavior? Or is it because of her cold attitude or sarcastic tone? In fact, "It wasn't that she was ugly, or had bad breath or a bad personality... She upset Billy simply

by being his mother" (102). Apparently, Billy shares no emotional bonding with his mother. Having been alienated from his parents, he gains no spiritual backing or emotional support. He may feel like an unwanted or needless person, since the two people in the world who should care most about him actually care little about him, and it may lead to his lack of desire to survive. When Billy's father throws him in the pool, Vonnegut writes that Billy "lost consciousness," then "dimly sensed that somebody was rescuing him," and he "resented that." And during wartime, when someone aims at him, "Billy stood there politely, giving the marksman another chance" (33). On the dangerous battlefield, what he asks his companions for is simply to leave him alone. He cherishes little his own life because he has received no love, and this cold family relationship also leads to his inadequate marriage to Valencia.

Billy's marriage to his wife is also distorted, though, unlike his parents, Billy's wife Valencia really loves him and cares about him. This woman would visit Billy at the hospital; she would be moved into tears when Billy proposes; she would try to lose weight and become beautiful for him; she would burst into tears when she hears of Billy's airplane crash. She is madly in love with Billy. Sadly, Billy could not love her in return. It is possibly that Billy's lack of parental love results in his inability to love someone in return. In Billy's eyes, Valencia is quite ugly, and even when Valencia visits him in the hospital, Billy still describes her "as big as a house" (107). Then, does Billy still want to marry her despite her ugly looking? The answer is no. "Billy didn't want to marry ugly Valencia. She was one of the symptoms of his disease. He knew he was going crazy when he heard himself proposing marriage to her, when he begged her to take the diamond ring and be his companion for his life." (107) After returning from Tralfamadore, Billy only reconsiders his marriage to be "at least bearable all the way" (120).

Furthermore, Billy has no old friends. That is to say, Billy is completely alienated from all those people around him: "He had never had an old gang, way, as the quartet made slow, agonized experiments with chords." (39) This sentence only proves further Billy's isolated mental state. Billy can gain no emotional support from either his family or his friends. He is totally alienated.

After the detailed analysis, it is safe to say that it is the alienation and his wartime experience that lead to his traumatic experience. However, why Vonnegut uses the startling time-travel story to cover his real intention?

REASONS FOR USING TIME TRAVEL TO DEPICT TRAUMA

An important way to treat PTSD is to let patients talk about his or her trauma. However, the implied author is unable to vent his traumatic past. When the implied author

writes a letter to American Air Force, asking for some information about the Dresden bombing, his demand has been rejected, because "the information was top secret" (11). In chapter nine, by the mouth of one character, readers know that those Americans have never heard of anything about the bombing of Dresden until 23 years after the bombing. Thus, for those who have experienced the horrors of war, neither their war experiences or their trauma can be understood by others. It is conceivable that whoever in the ruthless American political atmosphere, his or her traumatic situation is not only unresolved, but has aggravated. Having joined in the second world war and survived in the Dresden bombing, Vonnegut, with no doubt, has totally familiarized the cruelty of war and also has undergone the traumatic experience. Under the situation where his trauma can't be healed or understood, Vonnegut just creates this novel. However, why this artist chooses to use the sci-fi time travel plots to cover his real intention? Why the author endeavors to use this genre, instead of speaking out his trauma directly?

Before turning to these questions, it is worth noting again that those suffering from PTSD have a disordered memory. According to what Ruth Leys illustrates, the victim is "haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories", and "the experience of the trauma...refuses to be resented as past, but is perpetually reexperienced in painful, dissociate, traumatic present" (Leys 2). That is to say, having no control over their traumatic memories, those victims just let these memories continuously intrude into their minds and are forced to reexperience their traumatic scenes painfully. Thus, their traumatic memories are always scattered and disordered. In order to make readers have better understanding of the disordered traumatic memories, Vonnegut should just narrate those traumatic experiences the way those experiences break into one's mind. As Anne Whitehead concludes, "Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection". (Whitehead 3) Furthermore, the "time travel" genre naturally fits well into this narrative, because, anyway, one is certainly able to travel randomly through past, present, and future in fictional world. Hence, the time travel genre really fits into the narrative of Billy's traumatic memories. Vonnegut employs "time travel" to tell traumatic story because it most closely reproduces the traumatized mind.

Consequently, it is clear that through time-travel plots, readers can have a better understanding of the characteristics of the traumatic memory. However, why the author deliberately adds the alien parts to his narrative?

Let's first focus on the scientific novels Billy read in *Slaughterhouse-five*. At the hospital, Billy and Rosewater resort to read science fiction, because they "had both

found life meaningless, partly because of what they had seen in the war” (101). During the second world war, Rosewater has mistaken a 14-year-old teenager for a German soldier and has shot him dead; Billy has witnessed all those terrible death in Dresden. As a result, “they were trying to reinvent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help” (101). Just as Amanda points out, “The horrific events Billy experienced and witnessed can’t be rationalized through anything other than science fiction” (Amanda, 335). By reading science fiction, Billy and Eliot can reinterpret their horrible past and get comfort. For example, When Billy is taken into prison by the Germans, he is asked to take off his clothes in a delousing station, and this experience suddenly brings to mind a similar experience on Tralfamadore:

Billy blacked out as he walked through gate after gate. He came to in what he thought might be a building on Tralfamadore. It was shrilly lit and lined with white tiles. It was on Earth though. It was a delousing station through which all new prisoners had to pass. Billy did as he was told, took off his clothes. That was the first thing they told him to do on Tralfamadore, too. (83)

By inventing a similar experience on Tralfamadore, he can get comfort from it, feeling that being naked is something he can’t be evaded.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, where the phrase “so it goes” appears around 106 times, following immediately after the report of any death, for example, the death of his father, his wife and others killed during wartime. The frequency of the appearance of this phrase indicates that Billy has accepted the philosophy on Tralfamadore: everything is predetermined, and individuals are unable to make any difference to death. In fact, at first, Billy tries to persuade the Tralfamadoreans to stop the war happened on the earth. However, what surprises Billy most is that the Tralfamadoreans act quite coldly after hearing his complaints towards the brutal war on the earth. Billy talks to them that “I myself have seen the bodies of schoolgirls who were boiled alive in a water tower by my own countrymen” and “I have lit my way in a prison at night with candles from the fat of human beings” (116). However, he soon finds out that he has acted stupidly in front of those Tralfamadoreans. Those creatures tell him that “preventing war on Earth is stupid” and one should simply “ignore the awful times and concentrate on the good ones” (117). This philosophy on Tralfamadore demonstrates that the war is inevitable. Having gone to the battlefield himself, Billy discovers the ugly side of the war and wants to prevent the war even though he knows that there is no way he could ever achieve this. Billy, therefore, is tortured by both the horrifying scenes in the war and the huge disappointment that there will always be wars. By accepting Tralfamadorean’s philosophy, Billy could more or less relieve himself from this torture. If Billy does concentrate only on the good times as Tralfamadoreans recommend, he would feel “Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt” (122).

Through the journey to Tralfamadore, Billy not only comes to ease the pain caused by seeing so many deaths, but also gains the acceptance and love which he has been longing for. From what has been mentioned above, Billy has been alienated from all those around him and therefore is quite lonely on the earth. However, on Tralfamadore, he is appreciated and accepted. Those aliens suppose that Billy is a handsome human and, at the same time, a qualified specimen for them to study human beings. Being considered as a handsome man for the first time, Billy begins to “enjoy his body for the first time”, and does exercises to keep fit (113).

Apart from being appreciated, Billy also gets love. His mate on Tralfamadore is a beautiful movie star by the name of Montana. This gorgeous woman shares little in common with Billy’s wife or with his daughter. Firstly, Valencia is an ugly and fat lady, while the naked body of this twenty-year-old beautiful star reminds Billy of the “fantastic architecture in Dresden, before it was bombed” (115). Their first lovemaking was “heavenly”. Further, Valencia, Billy’s wife on the earth, could not understand Billy’s inside world. She even tells Billy that she feels honored to become the wife of a soldier. Montana also exists as a sharp contrast to Barbara, Billy’s daughter. Barbara is described as someone who takes Billy’s “dignity away in the name of love” (132). Barbara always shouts at his father and considers him too old to remember things clearly. She insults his father’s dignity by saying that his father is a child and would freeze to death or starve to death once she leaves him alone. And in her mind, what his father talks about his time travel is just nonsense. And, Montana, by contrast, believes in Billy’s description of his time travel.

In short, Billy’s time travel fantasy provides him with a valuable escape from the horrors of death caused by the second world war and especially by the Dresden bombing and also a precious relief from his desperate alienation from all the people around him.

CONCLUSION

Under the cover of time-travel plots, Vonnegut narrates a story about the traumatic experience. The cruelty of the Second World War and the alienation among people have had a bad impact on the psychological health of western people. In order to find accurate words and proper way to demonstrate how trauma impairs one’s psychological state, Vonnegut deliberately employs this sci-fi genre to achieve this goal. The depiction of Billy’s time travel in *Slaughterhouse-Five* presents a unique way for readers to understand how scattered the traumatic memory could be and also how eager people are to escape from trauma. After digging into those plots of Billy’s time-travel experiences, readers could more or less comprehend the profound and lasting damages war has on servicemen and also feel how lonely people are at that time. It is

safe to say that the “time travel” plots really fit well into traumatic narrative and provides readers a precious insight into the trauma.

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